**Torn Between Alphas**

**Manuscript - Season 1**

**Episodes 1-54**

**Episode** **1**

“You don’t know how hard it’s been to keep my hands off you.” My body trembled as he closed the space between us, pulsing with need. Wrapping his arms around my waist, he pulled me in tight. “You’re all fucking mine, virgin.”

I nodded. *Yes, please.*

Then his lips were on mine, teasing them into a deep kiss. Shivers danced down my spine as his strong, firm hands traced their way down my body to cup my ass. I steadied myself on his strong biceps, intoxicated by the feel of them. A delicious jolt washed through me, and I ran my hands up to grasp his soft, dark hair. His full lips moved down my neck, hitting a sensitive spot that made me moan loudly.

“I want you so bad,” he said as he moved us toward the bed. He took a step back, and I couldn’t help myself, whimpering at the lost contact. A dark chuckle rumbled from deep within his chest. “Are you going to be patient? Or are you going to misbehave?”

My trembling hands found the hem of my shirt, and I peeled it off. I looked him directly in the eye as I lowered myself onto the bed, dropping the shirt in front of me. “Oops.”

His laugh was low and toe-curling. “I can’t believe you’re all mine.”

This certified sex god knew exactly how to torture me into a puddle of frustration.

And he was my boyfriend.

*Yum*.

My wonderful boyfriend...um…

*Wait*, *shit! How the hell did I forget my boyfriend’s name?*

“There’s something I want to try with you,” he breathed out.

“What’s that?” I asked, burning under his hungry gaze.

“This.” I blinked rapidly, not sure I was seeing things correctly. My sexy sex god boyfriend, who was definitely going to sleep with me, had a pink elephant standing behind him.

“Uh, what’s going on?”

“Did you see this pink elephant teacup set on Etsy? They’re so cute, right?”

“Huh?” The elephant behind him had vanished. My head was definitely getting a little too clouded with desire. As my eyes refocused, I noticed he was holding a blindfold.

“Do you know what happens to bad girls?”

I shook my head, trying to sexily bite my lip. “No?”

He smirked. “Well get ready to… WAKE UP, YOU LAZY B!”

My eyes snapped open to see not a hot guy but my best friend Lola, who was unpleasantly shaking me awake.

“NO!” I shouted. “Did you have to do that RIGHT NOW?!”

“Did you seriously fall asleep? Have I been talking to myself this whole time?”

I forced myself to get up off my bed. “I was having the most amazing dream.” And would have preferred not to have been woken up. Especially so rudely.

“You can’t sleep our break away!” Lola said. I narrowly dodged an incoming pillow she hurled at me as I sat in my computer chair.

"I want to get out of here—go on a holiday or something." I groaned, leaning back on the chair, still a little groggy. I swiveled around to my own amusement, kicking out my leg to hit Lola each time I passed.

I stopped when she slapped my leg. "Then stop whining and go!"

"Yeah? With what money?" I cracked my stiff knuckles. It felt so good to be free of college. It lasted ​*forever*​. The year droned on, and to be on break now was amazing. What wasn't amazing was having no money.

That was one of the biggest problems of being a college student, unless your parents were rich. Sadly, mine weren't.

"What's a quick way to make easy money?" I leaned forward. Lola's eyebrows raised, her mouth opening slightly while her eyes refused to leave the laptop screen.

"Funny you say that..." The shock disappeared off her face, and a grin appeared before she glanced up to me. "You're still a virgin, right?"

I blushed and couldn’t help but think back to my dream. If she hadn’t woken me…

“Hello? Am I talking to myself again?”

I snapped out of my little daydream. "I'm not becoming a sex worker, Lola."

"This isn't a sex work site, Caliana.” She rolled her eyes. "Did you know a girl almost sold her virginity for $500,000? Another did it for $250,000!"

"That's weird. Did they get murdered?"

She looked up at me in confusion. "What?"

"Have you not seen the movie *Taken*? They were probably sold into a sex trade or whatever it's called." I kicked up my legs and landed them onto the bed. “Or murdered.”

"Seriously, I want to slap you sometimes. No, they didn't die, but they sure as hell became wealthy bitches. Ugh. Why the hell did I have to lose my virginity to J— Um, Tommy?” She sighed. “I could have been rich!"

I couldn't help but laugh. "I don't think any random girl can auction off her virginity. She probably has to be important."

Her eyes snapped to mine. "If I auction yours off for a good price, will you give me some money?"

"I'M NOT AUCTIONING OFF MY VIRGINITY, LOLA!"

"Weren't you the one complaining 'I hate being a virgin at this age, why can't I find some gorgeous human to take it?'"

"Yes, that was me.” And it was on my mind so much lately, I was getting more and more…frustrated. Let’s just say it hadn’t been the first um, dream, I’d had the past few days. “But I don't think a gorgeous human would pay for sex…only those creepy-looking sugar daddies, and my answer to that is *no, thank you.*"

She frowned. "Okay—what if I find a cute guy? I mean, he probably doesn't even live close, so it can be counted as a holiday too. I'll even come with you!"

"Oh my god." I sighed. "You're actually serious about this, aren't you? I can't afford to travel."

"Does this face look like it's joking? *He'd* obviously pay for you." She offered me one of the most serious expressions ever.

I shook my head. "Not a chance. I'd rather not die or be seen as a slut."

"Don't slut shame. You told me yourself you might have to drop out of school because you don't have the money. This is a crisis, Cali!”

"Can we not bring that up?" I wasn't proud of it. My parents were having financial problems, and I lost my part-time job recently, so I was beyond screwed at the moment. And not in the fun way. "How about you be helpful and try to find me a job? Get off that site."

"This *is* your job. This is your destiny!" I snorted when she said that. She was such a creep, but I wanted no other creep in my life but her.

"Cali, come on. You won't even think about it?"

"Do you know how wrong that is?"

She scrunched up her face. "You planning to save your virginity until marriage?"

"First of all: there's nothing wrong with that," I said. "But, no, I don't plan on waiting that long."

It wasn’t that I was waiting, but every guy I was ever interested in, well, wasn’t.

"This is perfect, then."

I suppressed an eye roll. "Fine…find me someone cute—who pays a good price—and I will."

"SERIOUSLY?"

"Sure." Saying this would shut her up. I wasn't lying either because no way was there a good-looking guy who paid for sex. They could get it with the snap of a finger.

"Leave it to me, girl—I got your back."

"I really wish you didn't." I sighed. "You not going back to your family for break?"

"This is home. Renting this place with you is great." She winked. "You're just as lucky to have me."

I rolled my eyes, pushing myself up from the chair before Lola ripped one. I turned to her with a scowl plastered on my face. "Why is it that you always decide to fart on my bed?"

"I don't want to stink up mine, obviously."

"You disgust me." I groaned. "I'm going for a shower. No bothering me."

She said nothing in reply but stayed focused on her laptop screen. It was a one-bathroom apartment... The place was pretty small, but it was the only place we could afford between us. Sometimes Lola even paid more than half the rent, and that made me feel terrible.

I'd pay her back in the long run.

*Sell your virginity and pay her back.* I grinned at the dumb idea before shutting the bathroom door and stripping down. As the steam from the shower filled the room, I allowed myself to think back on my recent dream. I hopped in the water and let my mind drift.

I might have been a virgin, but some things I could take care of myself.

\*\*\*

With one towel wrapped around me tightly, and another towel securing my damp hair, I left the bathroom feeling better. The soft carpet hugged my toes—walking barefoot on this carpet was like walking on pillows. I rushed into my room where my phone was ringing. Lola was still there but now lying in a different position. She glanced to me only for a second, then returned her eyes to the screen.

"Hello?"

"Hey, honey." I smiled at my dad's voice. "You planning on coming home for break?"

"I’m staying here for a while, but I'll definitely make sure to visit. I don't want to leave Lola alone.” I cleared my throat. "How’s Mom?"

"She's getting a check-up right now." His tone changed when he spoke about her, pain in his voice. "I’ve got good news, though."

"Cheer me up, Pops."

"We’re getting a loan for the operation.”

"You can get loans?"

"Something like that."

"...Something like that?"

"All that matters is that she gets the operation. Aren't you happy, Caliana?”

"I'm delighted!" I made my voice chirpy. "Just worried about how you're going to pay it back…"

"We have *some* money. I don't want you to worry about it—I'll find some way to help pay for college, too."

"Dad, no. I...found a part-time job."

"Already? I'm so proud of you. The moment you fall off the horse, you get back on!"

"Yeah," I muttered, instantly feeling bad about lying, but he was already so stressed. "I gotta go, Dad. Tell Mom I love her, and I'll call her soon."

"Will do, darling." He suddenly sounded so happy, and I couldn't help but smile. I put down my phone, the lie still a sour taste in my mouth.

I leaned on the dresser and let out a groan, dragging my hand down my face.

"What’s your new job?"

"Can you not eavesdrop?"

"You were talking loudly…in the same room."

"I don't want to talk about it."

"I can loan you money if you want?" She sat up, placing her laptop beside her. She was loyal, no matter what. Lola offered me a small smile. "How's your mom?"

"She's getting the operation—my dad got a loan."

"OH MY GOD! THAT'S GREAT, CALI!” Her smile was genuine, and it definitely cheered me up a bit. Everyone needed a friend like Lola—someone who knew how to act in any situation.

"Yeah."

The worry in the back of my mind was about the loan. Dad couldn't afford it, and it made me sick to my stomach. I hated how he still worried about my college, too. Maybe it was time to hit Craigslist for odd jobs. Or…

"Lola.” I paused for a second, taking a breath. I couldn’t believe what I was about to ask her. “How much do you think I could sell my virginity for?"

**Episode** **2**

"Wake up!" Lola's voice woke me. I felt drool at the side of my mouth and wiped it away in disgust. Foiled yet again from seeing where things would go with my mystery dream man. So much easier than real life, but not if people kept interrupting. Lola poked me in the side.

"Hey! I'm up! How long was I out?"

"Twenty minutes, lazy ass." I ignored her comment, my eyes landing on her laptop, the webpage already open. So sue me if I wanted to go to sexy dreamland again.

Lola spoke honestly. "I still don't know if you're joking about this, Cali."

I didn't either.

But my parents were in trouble. They wouldn’t be able to pay the loan—at least not if there was a deadline. They'd be in trouble and seeing them go through that was worse than me going through it. What if their house was taken away? Or they went to jail? I didn't know how this stuff worked. Plus, I definitely wasn't going to be able to pay for college next year unless I quickly found a job that paid super well. Even then, I wouldn't be able to make a dent in that loan.

It was just my virginity… Right? Virginity was a huge deal for some girls, but not really for me. It wasn’t for lack of trying either, but no one being the right fit… This made me feel like a sex worker, selling my body for sex…which was a legit job and all, but maybe not the one for me right now. Also, it wasn't my ideal scenario to have my first time be with some ugly, creepy sugar daddy. Those *had* to be the clients on this site.

Maybe if no one knew about it…it would be okay. Lola wouldn't tell a soul—I trusted her with my life. I nibbled my lip, anxious about this whole situation.

I was seriously thinking about this. Had I lost it? Should I just download Tinder?

"Depends," I muttered, biting my bottom lip.

Lola arched an eyebrow, uncrossing her legs "On?"

"How much money…*if* someone would even pay for me." I didn't believe anyone would—no one had been mutually interested in me this far—which was why I was actually considering it. We were thinking of possibilities, that’s all. "What the person is like...and looks like. I'm not looking for Mr. Perfect, but I'm avoiding Mr. Blah."

"That's all?"

"And you can't tell a soul…or judge me.”

"Cal, this was my idea. I can't judge you.” She sighed. "I promise I won't let you go to any guy who would kidnap you, and I'll only let you go through with it if they pay well."

Was it bad I actually trusted her with this? I was half-serious, half-not about this whole situation. I mean what if the guy was hot? Or he paid me enough to pay for Mom’s treatment? It would be worth it then for one night, right?

"Go for it."

"Really?" Her eyes lit up. "If you're joking, I'm not going through all this trouble."

"I'm serious, Lola, do it. I'll give you some of the money. Deal?"

A huge smile appeared on her face. "You're the best, Cali!"

I pulled out my phone. "Oh *god*. Guess what I have? One missed call from Alex…"

"Seriously? That boy does not know how to take a 'no,'" Lola muttered, although she seemed like she wasn't focused on me at all. She was dead serious about this whole virginity thing, and it made me smile.

I was, too, but I knew no one would pay for me. We’d do this because it took our mind off the shitty reality. Go through the motions, the hypotheticals, and tomorrow would be exactly the same as today.

"I better call him back."

"You're an idiot," she mumbled.

I dialed Alex’s number, refusing to listen to her comment. He picked up on the first ring. "Caliana?" His voice was extremely eager. "The other night was great. Did you get my texts?"

Coooool. "I did. Sorry I couldn't reply, something big came up." I lied through my teeth and noticed the smirk on Lola's face. Damn, why did she always have to be right?

"No problem," he chirped. "I talked to your father yesterday."

"Wait, what? You did? Why?" My brow furrowed in confusion. Oh my god…if he told him we were a ‘thing’, I was going to crawl into a hole and never come out.

"I ran into him at the pharmacy." His voice went quiet. "He said your mother's doing…well."

I sighed. "I don't really want to talk about it."

"Sorry…I shouldn't have brought it up." *Nope, but you did.* I knew he was cringing about it, and I couldn't help but feel a little bad. He was just trying to be a good friend. "Are you free tonight?"

"Lola's staying over."

"Girls’ night, that's fine. I get—" He went silent for a moment. "Leroy, don't put the fork there! LEROY! Dammit, Cali, I have to go. I'll call you later. LERO—" The line went dead, and I couldn't help but laugh.

Leroy was Alex's younger brother…probably the cutest but most annoying brat in the world.

"I'm staying over? In *our* house?" Lola asked, catching my lie.

"Shut it," I responded.

"If you aren't interested, you need to tell him. Don't lead him on, or he'll think you're into him."

I frowned. "He's so sweet and everything, but it just always gets awkward. We’ve been friends for so long that I only see him in that way. That's the only reason I'm not agreeing to the dates."

To be honest, Alex was cute in a boyish type of way. He wouldn't be put into my hot guy group, but definitely the cute one. He had looks that a lot of girls loved—especially with nerdy glasses that suited him to perfection. He was around 5'9” and although I usually wasn't fond of really short hair, it suited him.

I had known him growing up because my parents knew his parents. When they divorced, I helped him through a tough time just like he was trying to help me now. That, and he was my first kiss. After that he kind of...took that as if I loved him.

It was a spur of the moment thing. Maybe not my finest desperate virgin move ever.

"No dating until *this* all happens." Lola pulled me from my thoughts.

"What?"

"You can't date until I sell your virginity—so hold off, K?"

I burst out laughing, and she grinned in response. I met her in high school, when she moved schools; I had expected her to be shy and nervous since she was new, but she was so loud-mouthed. We clicked the moment she shouted at a girl named Cynthia who called me a 'loner freak' for eating outside alone. It was nice out, so sue me. Lola blew up, and I was amazed because *nobody* stood up to Cynthia.

We had been best friends for years after that, and she brought me out of my shell. Sure, I still wasn't as brave and outgoing as her, but I wasn't the quiet mouse anymore.

"Are you sure you haven't done this before? You seem to know all the ins and outs.” I arched an eyebrow, and she stuck out her tongue like a child. I wouldn't be surprised if she had, but I knew how she lost her own virginity.

"Makeover time!" Lola pulled me from my comfy position, and I groaned. She reached for the brush on my bedside table and passed it to me.

"Brush," she ordered, getting off the bed and going to my vanity table. I did as I was told and brushed my hair.

I never dyed it—I was a natural brunette. Lola dyed her hair so many colors; she currently had platinum hair, which really suited her.

My hair fell just below my breasts. It was usually straight, but sometimes, a small wave would appear if it got wet…but disappear the moment I brushed it. Like right now.

Lola returned to the bed with makeup. She was basically a makeup artist what with all the YouTube videos she was always watching. I only wore mascara and eyeliner. Nothing else. It all looked too complicated and, most of all, expensive.

"Lola, don’t put too much on because if I actually meet a guy, I'm not gonna be pampered in makeup."

"You're right." She paused. "Well, you're naturally gorgeous. Contour a tiny bit, then put on mascara and maybe winged eyeliner?”

Whatever most of that meant.

It felt like years until she was finally done with my face.

“Am I free now?” I asked, earning a scowl from her.

She brought over a mirror and showed me. I looked natural but not. It was that weird, no-makeup makeup. And to be honest, I felt pretty like this. Maybe there was a method to all her videos… "Good job," I muttered, giving in.

“Okay, selfie time." She passed me her phone. "I'll upload it to my laptop later. Take lots of pics. Then we need to go outside and take a picture, so it's obvious you're real and have friends.”

“Huh? What are you talking about?”

“We’re taking photos for your profile.” She looked at me like I was the crazy one. “We’re auctioning off your virginity starting tonight.”

**Episode 3**

“Hey, Cali! I’m glad you were able to come." Alex stopped before giving me a hug. "Wow—are you okay?"

"Didn't get much sleep," I yawned.

All day yesterday was spent with pictures, poses, learning to accept the good things about me, and so much more. I finally got to sleep at four a.m. after Lola thought we should watch movies relating to this whole topic, as well as a sugar daddy documentary—promising me she'd watch out for the total weirdos. I couldn't believe this whole thing was happening.

Maybe. I couldn’t tell what was for fun and what was real anymore.

Alex had woken me up that morning on his way to work. He asked if I wanted to go out later, and of course I didn't know what was going on, so I said yes. Otherwise, I would’ve probably said no. I had wanted the call to end. I didn’t want to be an asshole and cancel the whole thing.

"If you want to go home—"

"I'm fine. Need a cup of coffee, that’s all.” We were chilling at the mall while he was waiting for his brother Leroy to finish a playdate at a friend's house.

 At least this wasn't like a date. Just two friends hanging out at the mall who happened to kiss one time.

Casual.

Although I objected, Alex paid for my coffee, and we took a seat near the corner. "How was work?" I asked, trying to make small talk.

He shrugged. "Boring as usual." Alex was going to be a college senior next year but had been working a part-time job all four years. I perked up. Maybe he could talk to his manager to see if they had any openings.

"What is it you do again?"

He grinned. "Are you excited for your next year of college?"

I made sure not to frown or show any concern that I may not be able to continue. "Smooth topic change—straight to education."

"My bad.” He held up his hands, laughing. "Let's see... Do you want children in the future?"

My eyes widened, and my jaw dropped. Why would he ask that?! Suddenly he burst out laughing, so loud we definitely received a few glances. "Cali, your face! You should have seen it—I love messing with you."

"That wasn't funny, I thought—" I cut off my sentence. *I thought you meant you wanted to make some with me.* A blush crept up my cheeks that I hoped Alex didn’t notice. I cleared my throat. “So any break plans?"

He shook his head. "Maybe. Depends. What about you?"

Confused at his answer and the flutter in my stomach, I moved on. "Yeah, I'm going on a beautiful cruise and paying for it with all my imaginary money."

"The joys of a college student. You need a loan?"

“No, but thanks. If I needed one, Lola would’ve showered me with money already." That was both a truth and a lie. Lola didn't have the money to “shower” me with, but if she did, she sure as hell would give it to me if I needed it.

"I'll try to get another job. Is your place hiring?"

"No," he said quickly. "Why don't you apply here...to Starbucks?"

I scrunched up my face. "No, thank you. I already have horrible penmanship.”

He laughed. “How's Lola been?"

"Lola's being Lola."

"Weird, outgoing, different, hyper, laptop geek?"

"You know it."

He leaned back in his chair and took a sip of his drink. I was almost finished with my coffee, and I was starting to feel a bit more awake. "What kept you up last night?" He suddenly frowned. "…Maybe I don't want to know."

My entire body flushed. I might be dense sometimes, but I knew what he was getting at. Sex. With someone last night. Hah, if he only knew. “I told you Lola was staying over."

“And then I remembered you live in the same house."

I swallowed. “Okay, fine. I lied. It was half the truth. She was staying in my room like a sleepover. The stuff we were doing was top secret and not something I could cancel."

“And did you have a slow-motion pillow fight until the late hours?" He winked.

I rolled my eyes and wished they’d go further into my head. Maybe I’d freak some people out and get out of this awkward conversation. This mall Starbucks would love it.

Alex pushed his glasses up his nose, his blue eyes windowed behind them. He stood and stretched, and I couldn't help but study his body. He didn't seem like the guy who worked out, so girls were always surprised with his fit body. His abs weren't defined, but they were there—I’d seen them at a pool day once.

"Eyes are up here," he said, grinning. I rolled my eyes and stood, following him to the trash where we recycled the empty cups.

"How long until Leroy's done?" I asked, causing Alex to glance down at his watch. His eyebrows raised. "Twenty minutes."

I nodded. I seriously wanted to fall asleep—I needed more sleep than I had gotten last night. And my sexy dream guy hadn’t made an appearance again either. Of course, Lola slept in for ages, because well…she was Lola. And she hadn’t made a promise to hang out with a cute, sorta hot guy she kissed once who she, nine times out of ten, saw as a friend.

Alex and I talked and walked, trying to pass the time before we would go pick up his brother. Somehow, we ended up in a clothes shop even though neither of us was completely interested in it.

I didn't mind clothes shopping, but it was always better when I was looking for something, not browsing. We aimlessly walked around before I paused at the discount rack. I hadn't planned to shop, but Lola was always stealing my clothes, so maybe more wouldn’t hurt. And I might need some new outfits if…if anyone actually bid on my virginity.

I quickly pushed the thought away, shaking my head. Then in the corner of my eye, I saw a tight-fitting dress that had a really nice belt with it. I pursed my lips before turning my head when I felt a hand on my shoulders.

"Didn't know you were the dressy type," Alex commented. "I always see you in jeans or leggings."

"I never really go to things that require getting dressed up.”

Alex paused, then started laughing. “Do you remember our little…date?" He seemed not to know what to call it. "How my car broke down, and we ended up having to go to McDonald's."

I burst out laughing. "Of course, and I got to try the new McFlurry.”

“I remember,” he said. “You had ice cream on your lip, and I wanted to kiss you again so badly.”

I didn’t know what to say to that. “Alex…”

The kiss had led him on, and I felt so bad for it. Even though the kiss had felt good, it felt worse after the fact. The worst part was that it didn't seem like he was even trying to date anyone else.

He smiled and tilted his head. "How about a deal, Hart?”

“What kind?"

"If I buy you this dress, you give me a second date."

"I don't want you to buy anything for me, Alex." I shook my head. I had to let him know how I felt. “We’ve been friends forever, and you’re a really important person to me, bu—”

His face lit up, then he nodded before his eyes widened. “It’s a date. What day works best for you? Wait, dammit. I think I left my phone at Starbucks.” He closed his eyes, huffing. "Do you mind looking there while I look at the fountain?"

"Sure." I knew the panic people felt about a lost phone.

After pushing through people, I finally ended up at the table we’d sat at. I looked high and low, even in a set of plants nearby. No phone. I was about to try to go find Alex when I saw him coming from the shop with his phone in his hand.

But that wasn't the item I was looking at. In his other hand, he held a shopping bag.

Of course—only he would trick me so he could buy me something. I didn’t know how that made me feel. “Alex, go return that, right now."

"Receipt's gone…you can't. It's rude to reject a present. Are you really going to be rude?"

Well, I didn’t like that. After he held out the bag for a while, I finally took it, offering him a forced but grateful smile. "Thank you, Alex...you really didn't need to do that, though."

"At least it's a definite yes to getting a second date, right?" He winked, and I bit my lip. Alex was a smooth-talker and to most people seriously boyfriend material.

Lola popped into my mind, and I instantly felt guilt. It reminded me of what she said the other day—not to lead him on or date anyone because of the little idea we had.

My virginity.

Sex with someone who wasn’t Alex—if I even wanted that to begin with. Deep down, part of me knew if I asked Alex, we’d probably be off making out right now.

Thinking it over, I realized how stupid and embarrassing that whole plan was. It wouldn't happen. We wouldn’t find anyone who wasn’t a total creep and could pay anywhere close to what I’d need to cover my mom’s bills.

Maybe I should cancel the whole thing and settle.

I jumped when my phone buzzed, not expecting anyone to call me. Alex arched an eyebrow, and I gave him a small shrug before answering.

Speak of the devil. "Lola, I was actually about to call you. I’m not so sure—”

"Shut up—I rang first, I speak first!” She paused, and when I didn’t say anything, she continued. "How does $400,000 sound for your virginity?"

**Episode 4**

I spluttered, choking on my own saliva. Alex stared at me in shock, and I gave him a thumbs up. "Sorry, sorry—excuse me one moment." I turned away, hurrying off. “Lola, what did you just say?"

"I said someone offered $400,000 for your goddamn virginity, Cali!" She was screaming into the phone.

"This has to be a joke."

“It's not! This site has rules and regulations. People who bid have to show proof of how much money they can spend and like, IDs and shit, so no jokers are on it."

My stomach did an uncomfortable flip. “Why would someone bid that much? No doubt they could get cheaper."

"I may have put some…information. How you're shy, and you’ve always had a fantasy of rough guys, although you're so innocent. How your virginity is sacred, and only the most amazing guy can choose you…and all this stuff that toxic rich guys love."

"But $400,000? I don't believe it," I muttered, knowing this definitely could not be true. “Is there a photo of the guy who bid?"

"No, but I'm going to message him when you're home."

“Um, yeah, okay. I have to go, Lola.” She started shouting at me, telling me to wait, but I hung up. This scenario was obviously fake. As fake as all the plants around this mall. Lola got overexcited and believed anything. This. Was. Fake.

I turned and let out a scream when I saw Alex right in front of me. "Bidding? $400,000?” he asked. "What're you bidding?" I could see how suspicious he was.

"It's part of a game." I forced out a laugh. "Isn't it time to pick up Leroy?" He glanced at his watch and nodded.

Walking to the car I said, “You really didn't have to buy this.” My eyes landed on the beautiful dress in the bag.

"It's not a big deal, Caliana,” he said as we hopped in the car. "I'll drop you home after we collect Lee. Thanks for coming out today." He smiled, and I returned the expression. He was so sweet… Suddenly, I felt so bad. Even if I didn’t like Alex, we were friends. I shouldn’t be rude and avoid his texts when he was only trying to be there for me.

We drove in silence before he began chattering about some show he wanted me to start watching. We finally pulled up to the house Leroy was at.

He rushed out the door the moment the car pulled up. "Hey, Cali!" His smile was bright, and I grinned back. I held out my fist for our usual fist bump, then blew it out and pulled my hand away.

"Why were you hanging out with this loser?" Leroy asked, and I couldn't help but laugh.

Alex tsked. "You should show me more respect."

"Nah." He sat back in his seat. "The day Caliana wants to go out with you is the day I'll show you respect."

The car fell silent, awkwardness filling it. Leroy noticed what he just caused, so he clicked his tongue. "Cal, will you adopt me and take me away from Alex?"

"Brotherly love," I hummed.

They both rolled their eyes at the same time. We drove until Alex pulled up into the drive to my and Lola’s small place. I looked toward Alex then back to Leroy, grateful. If he wasn't there, I wouldn't know how to say goodbye. Would Alex have expected a kiss?

"Thanks for today—and *this*. You shouldn’t have.” I held up the bag, reaching over to give Alex a hug. "Your big bro needs some respect, Lee." I winked at him.

I opened the door, and Alex grabbed my wrist. "Remember what that dress means?"

"Yeah, yeah." I laughed, and he let go. I shut the door and waved until they disappeared from sight. Days with Alex used to actually be fun, and it wasn't awkward between us.

I turned toward the house, and with a sigh, I opened the door. I didn’t really know what I was going to find on the other side, but it was as good a time as any to find out.

”Cal?” Lola’s voice echoed down the stairs.

"Yeah?" I ran up the stairs, taking two steps at a time. Lola looked to me, her eyes wide. She waved me over urgently to our couch, and I did as I was told.

"So…I said I'd wait for you, but I didn't."

Of course.

"The guy wants to Skype with you! *And* he said if you agree to the deal quickly without making him wait, he might add in some bonus cash."

“Lola, this is probably going to be some troll," I muttered.

"Why aren't you excited?!"

"Because no one pays that much for someone’s virginity! Let alone mine!” I sighed. "Did you even see what he looked like yet?"

"No, but like I said, we’re going to Skype in a minute." She glanced at the bag I dropped on the floor. "Is that food?"

“No,” I said, leaning back on the couch. "Alex bought me a dress."

Her brow furrowed. "Why?"

"He saw me admiring it, so he bought it for me, and said I could use it for our next date."

She raised her eyebrows and tapped her chin. “Caliana, I’m sorry, but no. *No Alex*! Not now anyway. *Now*, Skype time!” She pulled me up into a regular sitting position. “Let’s please don't judge him on his looks straight away. It's what's on the inside…but I'm going to laugh if his video is just of his di—"

"Just call him."

She hit the green button, and the Skype dial tone rang through the room. Just when I thought he wasn't going to answer, the call picked up, and my stomach dropped. I stayed off camera while Lola sat directly in front. There was some talking in the background, but of course the camera wasn't on. I’d seen *Catfish*. That was never a good sign. I shared a look with Lola that she tried to ignore.

"Hello?" she asked.

"One second," a rough voice said. We heard a click, and then the camera was on. Both Lola and I froze as we stared at the man on the laptop screen.

"Who are you?” Lola asked.

"I'm Colton."

“Colton” was shirtless and had a tattoo of something on his right arm. His body was well built, and he was...*beautiful*. He had light brown eyes and tousled hair. He smiled at us, showing off his gorgeous white teeth.

"Very funny," Lola said.

Colton raised his eyebrows, his small smile turning into a grin. "What's funny?"

"This whole set-up."

"It's not a set-up."

"A person like *you* does not pay $400,000 for sex."

"They do for a virgin—especially with the description you gave. Sometimes there are desires you want to scratch the itch for." The innocent smile was a lie. “Where’s my girl?”

"You're like twenty-something! You don't have this kind of money. You *aren't* seeing her."

"How about this? You agree to this deal, and I'll pay you right now. Straight to your PayPal, but you have to show me the girl first. Remember…maybe even a bonus if she's hot enough and has potential to be good in bed."

Lola narrowed her eyes but turned to me. *Of course*. I nodded, not even fazed. In fact, I was kind of delirious. None of this seemed like it was happening. And nothing would happen if he saw me—no *way* could he pay that much.

Lola turned the camera toward me, and I watched Colton’s face change. His eyes lit up, and a wicked smile came across his face. My stomach twisted, not entirely unpleasantly. “Caliana Hart. Do you agree to the deal?”

Did I know what I was getting myself into? Lola had put god knows what else on that profile about me and what I was into. But this…this was more than just how I felt about myself and how this guy looked. My family needed help, and that had to come first.

“Yes, I agree," I said.

"Great. I have that recorded. A deal is a deal,” Colton said, then he hung up. I sat, staring at the screen in shock.

He was incredibly rude.

"He *was* cute, though, right?” Lola asked, giggling.

“For a creep? Sure.”

“He seemed like he might be nice! He could be really good in bed.”

I rolled my eyes. Of course she would say that. I walked over to my desk and opened my own laptop.

“What are you doing?” Lola asked. “We need to talk about this! You just said yes!”

“Uh, no I didn’t. I haven’t signed anything.” My phone buzzed, and I pulled it out from my pocket. It was from Alex. “Hang on.”

*Thanks for today. You saved me from dying of boredom.*

I responded quickly, then regretted it.

*No problem! Thanks for the dress, it's super pretty. Tell Lee I said to be nice!*

I shoved my phone away from me with a groan when I heard a ping from Lola's laptop. Then another.

“Um, Cali? Check your bank account."

"To be reminded how poor I am?”

"Just check it..."

I looked back at her, but her eyes were wide on her screen. It was probably Colton playing some trick on her again, but there was only one way to end this once and for all.

Lola rushed over as I pulled up my bank’s website. Lola’s eyes were glued to my screen as I typed my password in. When the page loaded, I froze.

I read the numbers on the screen. And then read them again. That morning I’d had $16.76 in my account. And now?

“This can’t be right,” I said, my heart racing. “It *can’t be*.”

Now I had $400,016.76.

**Episode 5**

"WHAT THE HELL IS THIS, LOLA?! WHY IS THIS MONEY IN MY ACCOUNT?!" I was screaming, staring at the digits. This was surreal. Lola stared at the screen in shock before the Skype jingle filled the room.

Both of our eyes snapped toward her laptop, and we ran to it. With a shaky hand, she hit the answer button, and there on the other side of the screen, was a grinning Colton.

"You..." Lola breathed out.

"Your faces are priceless!" He was clearly enjoying this. "I believe we have a deal, Caliana." I stared at Lola in shock. I was—this was SERIOUSLY HAPPENING?!

"I'll have you checked when you get here to make sure you're a virgin. A medical exam, too."

"Do you really think that’s fucking necessary? And where the hell are you?"

"You'll find out when I send you the flight info. You just have to print them off."

"Wait, *what*?!"

"I'm generous, I know—paying for your tickets and letting your little friend come along. I can tell you're terrified and wouldn't come alone."

I shared a look with Lola.

"And, no, this isn't sketchy. The site looks into the background of the bidders, so you're safe and sound." He gave us that innocent smile again.

"How did you do this all so fast?"

"That doesn't matter. What matters is you two will be here by tomorrow night. Hurry up and get packing, ladies."

"Wait!" I saw his hand reach out to hang up. He stopped and looked at me through the screen. "You can't just pay $400,000for someone's virginity, especially with how you look." I was confused. I couldn't get my head around this whole situation...

"I can and did. Thanks for the compliment, princess." He winked, and I flushed. He knew he was in control of this whole thing, and it was clear he enjoyed the power.

"You don't know me! You can't randomly pick a girl you don't know, buy her, pay for her travel—all just for sex."

He paused and arched an eyebrow, glancing between me and Lola. "It's sex, that’s what the website is for. Please don't tell me you're going to fall in love. That's not—"

"I didn't mean it like that." I scowled. "We could be scammers. You trust too easily." It was true. How could someone hand out $400,000 so easily? That wasn't normal.

Colton spoke the next sentence with a smile. "Because when I make a deal, I make sure the other person follows through. I can guarantee you won’t be a virgin for much longer, Caliana."

Then the call ended. He said the sentence with a smile, but his voice and words were far from friendly. I pushed the laptop away from me, sitting on the ground in shock.

"You better not be pranking me, Lola."

"I was about to say the same to you."

"Why are you so shocked? Weren't you the one who said you could find someone easily?"

"Yeah, but not someone *extremely* hot!" she snapped. "Why would he pay such a large amount for this? I know you’d set the price high, but I didn't expect…"

"He paid for your ticket, too," I mumbled.

She pushed herself up, snapping out of her shock. "I'll believe it when I see the tickets."

"What about all the money in my bank?" I asked. "That's enough proof that he’s serious."

"Damn…and he said tomorrow night. This is scary.”

"SCARY!? YOU AREN'T THE ONE LOSING YOUR VIRGINITY!" She had no right to be scared or nervous in this situation. She’d *created* it! I was almost angry at her for saying something like that. I’d agreed to this whole thing, though, so I couldn't blame her.

"I lost it to a creep—excuse you. I'll be with you the whole time. We'll bring my taser and some pocketknives. I promise I'll protect you at all costs." Her usual grin appeared, an attempt to cheer me up.

It worked. I smiled at her dumb plan, although I did agree that we should have some weapons with us just in case. The site did say it checked into the bidders’ backgrounds for the protection of the girls, but still.

"We're seriously going through with this?"

She paused. "If you don't want to…"

My mother and father popped into my mind. "The site really looks into the backgrounds, right?"

She nodded.

"Okay," I said. "Let's do it."

Lola grinned—she was always up for an adventure, even if it cost us our lives. Great friend, I know.

"We have to be ready for tomorrow night," she said. "We don't have much time to get ready. Okay, you need to wax downstairs…and anywhere else that has hair."

My face heated. "I shave anyway, excuse you!"

"Yeah, but wax the remaining hair. I have some in my room—I'll help!"

"NO, YOU WON'T!" I stared at the crazy girl in front of me, her mind moving quicker than anything else. She mumbled something before snapping her head up. "I'll run out and get some hot lingerie tomorrow, my treat."

"Please tell me you’re not serious."

"I'm not serious…" She stopped. "I am serious, but hey—I said what you wanted me to."

I rolled my eyes. Sometimes I wanted to pull this girl’s hair out. I knew how stubborn she was, so I didn't bother to argue.

"You get to packing our stuff. At least he's letting me come *and* paying for the tickets. He's also super-hot, like O-M-G!" I sighed. "Oh, and can’t forget your bank balance."

My heart jumped, the digits appearing in my head. I couldn't believe that much was in my account…how does that even happen?!

Oh yeah, by offering up my virginity.

"I SAID PACK, NOW!" I jumped when she ripped me from my thoughts. She had a serious look on her face. Looking at this psycho girl in front of me, I honestly felt safer. She'd kill anyone who tried to touch us. Literally, kill them without hesitation. I wouldn't be able to do that.

Alex suddenly came to mind. "Damn it, I promised Alex a date!"

"I said no dates," Lola said.

"Obviously!" I snapped. "How could I possibly even find the time when I’m flying out tomorrow and having sex for the first time?”

"I suppose you're right." She pursed her lips. "You better go and call him."

I nodded. I felt like an absolute slug for brushing off Alex again; he was genuinely a sweetheart. He always tried his best.

What if he thought I was blowing him off because I didn't want to go? I mean, I *didn’t*, but I couldn’t exactly tell him the real reason why.

Biting my lip, I pulled out my phone and brought his number up from my contacts. Without hesitation, I called him so I wouldn't chicken out. To my surprise, it took longer for him to pick up than expected. Finally, when I was about to hang up, I heard his voice. "Hello?"

It sounded like he just ran a marathon or something. I arched an eyebrow before leaning against the wall. "Hey, Al."

"Cal!" His quiet voice was loud in my ear. "What's up?"

"About our date—"

"Could we rain check? I'm busy that day too, don't worry about it."

How did he know? "Yeah, I’m sorry about it. Something came up."

"What did?" He stayed quiet for a moment. "Listen, if you don't want to go, you can tell me."

"NO, THAT'S NOT IT!" I shouted into his poor ear. I didn't know what I wanted honestly. I felt bad for him because he was cute and a sweetheart. If he hadn't been my close friend, I might have seen him differently.

"No need to freak out." He laughed. "What's up then?"

"Uh…Lola won a vacation getaway for two, and she's taking me," I lied through my teeth. I couldn't tell him what I was actually doing. Why did I even feel bad for lying to him? It wasn't like me having sex was his business or anything.

"That's awesome! You two will have a blast." He was so nice.

"Yeah, I think we will. Thanks a million, Alex, and I’m sorry again."

"No problem—you and Lola have a safe trip!"

"Okay, we will." I grinned. "Later!"

The called ended, and I was thankful Alex was so understanding.

Now, for my parents. If I left my place without telling them, no doubt they'd freak. I knew they’d have a million questions for me, too, if past school trips and sleepovers were any indication. I didn't even know where I was going; how was I supposed to spin that for my parents?

As if they knew I was thinking of them, my phone rang.

"Hey, Dad," I answered, smiling.

"Hey, sweetheart." His voice sounded weary. "Sorry for calling again so soon."

"You need to call *more*." I laughed. "I also need to see you more. How's Mom?"

"Mom's better." Something sounded off, but he quickly moved on. "Are you coming to visit?"

"Actually, Dad...I was about to call you," I muttered. "I—"

"Oh my god, you got a boyfriend? It's Alex, isn't it? He saw me the other day and said hi..." Silence. "He's probably the only guy your mom won't question to death, and I won't death glare."

I groaned, rubbing my face. "No, Dad! That's not it."

His laughter boomed through the phone. "Just teasing! What's up, sweetheart?"

"Lola won a vacation for two, and she wants to take me."

"Seriously? That's amazing. How long will you be gone and where?" The questions began.

"Lola wants to surprise me, so I'm guessing it's somewhere I’d like." I was impressed at how easily I was lying. "I'm not sure how long."

"It'll be great to get away."

"You and Mom should have a vacation soon." With this money Colton sent me, I could send them on one. I tried to convince him, but Dad brushed the topic off, saying they didn't have the money for it. After a bit I said, "Can I talk to Mom?"

"She's asleep." He sighed. "Do you want me to—"

"No, let her sleep." She needed it.

"I'll let you go—you probably have to get packing. I know how you pack ages beforehand."

"We leave tomorrow night, actually."

"Oh, wow." He laughed. "Then I'll definitely let you go. Have fun, Callie-poo." I rolled my eyes at the nickname. "Make sure to call when you land safely!"

"I will." I smiled. "Bye, Dad—love you." I ended the call and walked into the living room, just to see Lola closing her laptop as I entered.

“Well, he sent me the tickets,” Lola said.

I sucked in a breath. “And?”

“And looks like we’re off to Oregon first thing in the morning.” She stood and came over to me, pulling me into a hug. “Are you sure this is okay? That you’re ready for this?”

I hugged her back. I wasn’t ready.

But I’d be damned if I’d show that to Colton.

**Episode 6**

“THIS IS REAL! OH MY GOD, CAL. IT'S REALLY HAPPENING!” Lola said.

As I dragged my full suitcase behind her, my heart was pounding, and my stomach was swirling. We were going to Oregon. I had never been there before, so at least I got to see a new place.

Honestly, I was feeling kind of hopeful… Hopeful the airport would reject our tickets and send us on our way home.

Lola pulled out her phone when it buzzed. I glanced over to see she had an incoming Skype call. We shared a look, but she answered it.

"Turn the video camera on." Colton sounded gruff, like he’d woken up from a long nap or something.

"No, we're walking in the airport."

"Turn it on. Now." Something in his voice made Lola hit the button, but she continuously glared at her phone, not happy with the man on the other side.

"Turn on yours," I spoke up.

"You're not the one giving orders here, love." He chuckled. “Glad you two made it to the airport. I wanted to check that you were going through with it. Your plane should be leaving in thirty minutes, right?"

"Right," I grumbled.

"Great. Someone will be waiting to collect you when you arrive. Have fun.” Then the call ended.

Lola glanced to me. "Looks like I won't be the only person who lost her virginity to an asshole."

I narrowed my eyes. “Don't make me turn back."

"He's hot!” Lola said, holding up her hands. “Like, at the very least there’s that. And I'm coming with you and will murder him if you ask, so be happy. We’re going on a trip!”

"I could leave right now and go lose it to Alex. And he’d probably cry of joy if I asked."

She scrunched up her face. "And then I'd cry for your bank account.”

\*\*\*

A huge bump woke me, and I shouted, thinking the plane was crashing. The plane continued to bump, and Lola quickly clasped a hand over my mouth.

"We're landing, shut up," she hissed, her eyes wider than bowling balls.

My chest rose up and down quickly as I glanced around. Sure enough, the plane was rolling on the ground, but not only that, everyone was staring at me. My face heated, and I averted my eyes. "That scared me so bad."

"You scared me, screaming in my ear.” She shook her head. "What is wrong with you?"

I scowled. "Are we here?”

Lola nodded. We stood and grabbed our small bags tucked up top as our big suitcases had been put away. Slowly but surely, we moved along the aisle until we got down the stairs to the ground. Lola snatched my hand and pulled me so quickly I thought my arm would pop out of my socket.

We went speeding past people until we were in front, and finally through to where all the suitcases were.

"WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT?!" I snapped, rubbing my sore shoulder. She looked over her shoulder, and I followed her view.

Everyone was so slow, walking like zombies, and I understood. Lola wasn't a patient person and would have gone mental waiting in that line. I turned back around, my eyes searching for my case on the conveyor belt that went around. Lola ran to hers with a winning grin, probably counting it as a competition who got their luggage first.

My blue polka dot case finally came into view, and I walked over to it, picking it up with one hand, trying to hide the struggle I was having with its weight.

The realization hit me—we were here, right now. We’d been flown to Oregon by some crazy-hot, young billionaire who was probably a serial killer so he could “take” my virginity. We were actually going through with a plan I initially thought was only a fantasy. I tried to mask my panic and swallowed the lump in my throat.

Lola must have noticed my expression because she said, "Don't be nervous. I'm here and like I said, I will beat anyone who tries to touch you…well, he'll have to *touch* you since you’re going to have sex wi—"

"Not helping," I snapped, but she smiled.

“Want to grab something to eat? Calm your nerves?”

“I’m not hungry.”

My stomach grumbled, betraying me and siding with Lola. She raised her eyebrows with a smirk, and I let out my surrendering sigh. It took us ten minutes to find one of those pretzel places. We both got something and all but scarfed it down.

"We are so late," I groaned, rubbing my full stomach.

"Don't worry." Lola licked her lips and waved her hand. We stood, and it felt so good to be full. Not the type of full that made you want to throw up, but the type that satisfied you.

We followed the signs up above and finally reached the escalator where we went down. There we found a man with a sign down by his side, talking to someone on the phone. We shared a look, and the moment he saw us, he scowled. He held up the sign to show our names, and I offered a sheepish smile.

Lola was the person to blame—I'd totally sell her out. She nudged me in the ribs as if knowing my thought.

As we neared the man, we heard him speak into the phone. "No need to call them—they're here now." He grumbled, "Yeah, bye." He shoved the phone in his pocket.

"Well?" He glared at us. The man seemed to be older than Colton but still looked good.

"*Well*, what?" Lola snapped.

He took a step toward her. "You do realize how late you are, right?"

"Fashionably late." She narrowed her eyes, not backing down even though he towered over her.

I bit my lip and tugged her arm. "We're sorry," I said quickly. "It won't happen again—we got lost."

He gave me a look over before turning away. "Hurry."

We made sure to keep up with him but all the time, I shot glares at Lola. Why would she pull a stunt like that? Did she not understand the situation we were in? If this man had money, he probably could be acquitted before going to any trial for killing us.

She avoided my glare until we finally reached the car. The windows were black. "What if he murders us?"

"He won't." She pulled out a pocketknife and flicked it open.

I jumped. “Lola, what the fuck! How did you even *bring that*?"

She said nothing, and we got into the car. The moment the door shut, I felt like I was about to throw up.

Sure, I had a lot of money in my bank, but I was also on the way to have my virginity taken by a stranger. Of all the late-night fantasies I’d had…this hadn’t ever been one of them. I suddenly wanted to be home and in my bed. I’d wake up and find out this was all a dream.

But there was no going back now.

I was on my way to meet the man I’d sold my virginity to.

**Episode 7**

The door unlatched, and my eyes flew open as I began falling out, but my seatbelt saved my life. I sat up quickly, wiping my eyes as the man glared down at me from outside the car. "We're here."

I looked to my right, and Lola was already gone.

*Thanks for waking me.*

I got out lazily, letting out a loud yawn, trying not to stumble. The slam of the door made me jump, and I noticed my suitcase was already out. "You're a terror to wake up." Lola laughed, but I just shot her a glare.

We both looked at the car when the door slammed shut, and it drove off faster than you could say *bye*.

We stared at each other in confusion. The drive definitely felt like it was ten hours. Yep, *ten hours*. But I think it was really only one and a half. We had to take a few potty stops. So now, here we were...eleven p.m. I turned to look at the place.

It looked new and modern but old and unused at the same time. It was the only place in this huge forest. A total deserted type of space. Lola tugged me up to the front door after some resistance from me. She nodded to her pocketknife when my breathing quickened. The three loud knocks she pressed on the door made me want to pass out.

No.

Going.

Back.

No answer.

Lola knocked louder, and we both heard footsteps this time. The door was pulled over and I almost choked on my own spit.

Colton was there...but not alone. A girl stood in the back, her hair messed up, and a hickey clearly on her neck—so big you could see it from the moon. That wasn't the biggest thing, though.

She was naked...*fully* naked. I could see *everything*.

"WHAT THE HELL?!" Lola took the words from my mouth. I removed my eyes from the woman, my face hotter than the sun. Colton grinned at us, standing back to let us in, but neither of us moved.

"SHE DID NOT AGREE TO A THREESOME OR HAVING SEX WITH ANY OTHER PARTNERS!" she shouted, and he simply tilted his head.

"No need to shout. Come in and let's discuss this."

"No way," I spoke up now. This guy was a creep. “You brought us here under false pretenses.”

Colton walked outside before turning so he was behind us. He gave us both a hard shove, and we both fell into the house. He brought in the suitcases before locking the door.

"Now, listen." My heart was pounding when Colton spoke, but I did as I was told. "I'm not taking your virginity."

My brow furrowed. “Wait, what? You’re not?"

I was confused now, and the angry look was gone from Lola's face. We were both so confused.

"You're a present for someone." He gave me a wide smile, and he seemed to be amused at the horror that washed over my face. We obviously knew no one that hot would pay that much for a girl.

"NO WAY!" Lola growled, standing up and bearing the knife. He looked down to it but didn't seem fazed.

"Calm down." He sighed. "It's not for some creep."

She snarled. "Like hell it is!"

"I paid you. You’ll go through with it. And I'm assuming you got the checkup, since you said to cancel the one here."

That had been one of the most embarrassing doctor’s visits ever. I held my chin up even though I was shaking. "I have the proof I'm a virgin in the bag, but there’s no way you're getting it.”

"This is against the rules of the site!" Lola snapped, and Colton shook his head.

"I never said I was the person she’d have sex with, I simply said my name." He tilted his head as if innocent. "I don't believe you asked if it was *me* taking your virginity, so I broke no rules." I bit my tongue, holding back the profanities.

He wasn’t wrong. And that was the whole fucking problem.

We hadn’t asked.

The nude girl had wandered off into some other room by now. Colton’s eyes went to me. "Come on—let me show you him."

"Like hell!"

"You need to watch yourself." He narrowed his eyes at Lola. "This is my place."

She shut her mouth and narrowed her eyes.

"You're going to follow me," he gave me a smile, "or else."

The words he spoke were so scary, so threatening that I stood. Lola copied my actions, but he shook his head. "Alone."

"No way!" Lola snarled, but I held up my hand and gripped her own.

"I'll be fine, sweetheart."

We shared a look, and she understood. She slipped the pocketknife into my hand, and I quickly put it away before looking up to him. "Let's go."

He didn't question our change of mind and turned around, walking away. She patted me on the back to encourage me, but I just rolled my eyes. The first image that came into my head was a super big sugar daddy. Gold rings on his fingers, gold chain around his neck, already balding with a big, ugly mustache.

I sucked in a breath, not allowing myself to retch or make my disgust obvious. If this person was close to Colton, he may be insulted and have my head.

Just when I had the thought I could be walking to my death right now, he stopped at a door. Without even knocking, he slammed it open and sang, "Brother, dearest—I have a present for you."

"Learn to knock," the other voice growled, but Colton just smirked. "What is it?"

Colton stood aside and grabbed me roughly, practically throwing me in the room. I stopped my jaw from dropping when I saw the man lying on the bed. He was *not* what I imagined.

He had strong similarities to Colton, and it was clear straight away why he had called him brother. This man, however, was a bit taller. His skin was tan, and his hazel eyes flicked to focus on my own. I studied his face, noticing traces of stubble on his angular jawline. Something about his eyes unsettled me. I couldn't stop the tiny flip of my stomach as he tousled his mousy brown hair.

He glanced back to Colton. “What is this?"

"This is the present I promised you, brother." I felt a hand land on my back and nudge me forward

"A girl? Colton, why the hell would you—"

"Since *that* day, you haven't fucked anyone," Colton snapped. My face heated. "You have to have her, so I bought her."

Confusion crossed the man's face. "Why the hell would you buy her?! You know the amount of women that would—"

"Stop getting your panties in a bunch," Colton said with a wink. "This one is special—she's a virgin. Remember how good virgin pussy feels? Like *damn*. The look on their face when you enter for the first time, and the fucking blissful tightness—"

I found myself reacting to Colton's words even though I didn't want to. The thought that this man before me would be my first time… I shivered at the smile that appeared on the man's face. "She looks so scared. How much did you pay?"

"$400,000."

In a second, the smile was wiped away. "Why the HELL would you pay that much for someone like her?!"

Colton didn't so much as flinch while I jumped a mile. "Come on, we can afford anything—"

A low growl-like sound came from the man, glaring at his brother before his body relaxed. "I'm taking control of the account if you’re going to spend the money on dumb shit.”

Well, okay. Rude.

"You're no fun, Xavier. You have her for two whole weeks. To do whatever you want with her.”

Xavier arched an eyebrow. "I don't want her."

"Shut up," Colton snapped. "You haven't fucked in a long time—it's freaking me out. I'm worried about you.”

He seemed confused by what his brother said and glanced to me before he said, “If anyone should be freaked out, it's that my brother spent $400,000 dollars to buy an inexperienced virgin sex worker."

“Excuse me,” I spoke up, and both sets of eyes fell to me. "I am not a sex worker."

"I bought you off a website."

"Hired," I corrected him.

"Are you selling your body? Did you take the money?” Xavier watched me closely, and I held my breath. "Exactly."

I had no response, so I bit my tongue, stopping me from shouting any profanities. I really wasn't a sex worker. And a lot of their conditions sucked worse than these two brothers in front of me…

"Col—"

Colton held up his hands. "She's here for two weeks…or one and a half, I don't know. You can do it. Just once even—it's not like she's going to be glued to you. Have your way with her and be done.”

Xavier said nothing.

"C'mon, just think about how good her virgin pussy will feel. How delicious she’ll taste.” I squealed when Colton’s hand hovered over my lower body, and I slapped it away.

A smirk broke out on Xavier's face the moment I hit his brother, and Colton had the same reaction. "See? I know you love the scared ones. She’ll be a lot of fun.”

Xavier sighed, giving his brother a pointed look. “Fine. She can stay.”

"You should be saying *thank you*, instead of *fine*, y’know? I really busted my balls for you.” Colton frowned. "Anyway, I need to finish up with Katie before she's turned off."

"I think her name's Paula," Xavier spoke. "Didn't you say that this morning? When you were shouting her name?”

"Names don't matter—bitch will be gone when I'm done with her." He waved his hand, and it made me feel sick, talking about her as if she were a toy. I couldn't do anything but glare. The way Colton treated women made me sick. He noticed my look because a grin appeared on his face. "Something you need to say?"

I didn't know what to say—how to start saying how disgusting he was.

"Thought so." He looked back to Xavier as he left. "She brought a friend, too, so I have a free fuck."

I brought my hand out and slapped him across the face, to even my surprise. Talking about *me* like that I'd let slide, but Lola? No way. The slap stung my hand, and I saw the shock on his face.

The surprise clouded with anger, and he reached out as if to strangle me, but Xavier stopped him in an instant. "Colton," he growled. "No."

Colton glared at me before finally relaxing and looking to Xavier. "Make sure to punish the little brat." Colton stormed out, and Xavier chuckled before turning to me.

The smile fell, and he narrowed his eyes. He brought his hand up to my cheek, caressing it slowly and dragging his nail down my skin. My throat felt so tight that I completely lost my breath. This close to me, I could see the glint of green in his hazel eyes.

Xavier traced his fingers down to my neck, stopping on my rapid beating pulse. My mind couldn’t help but think of how close his lips were to mine. How he smelled of sandalwood.

How turned on I was feeling.

Xavier’s eyes burned into mine. “If you ever disrespect any of us again, you'll regret it."

My knees gave out, taking me to the floor. My breath was rapid, so much faster than it should be. He stood above me, looking down like I was a piece of dirt. "Get out."

I scampered to my feet as quickly as I could, and the door shut behind me. He was a complete and utter demon…and I needed to communicate that to a certain part of me that was beginning to ache.

I stumbled down the stairs and crashed right into Lola. Her mouth opened, indicating she was about to speak before her eyes dropped to my throat.

"What happened? There’s a scratch on your neck.” We both froze when we heard a moan from the other room. I quickly spoke so no other sounds like that would pierce my ears.

"Nothing," I said, not wanting her to worry. His nail must have snagged me when I fell to the floor. "He's into kinky stuff, I guess."

She pursed her lips. "Is he ugly?"

"He's better looking than Colton," I admitted. "They're brothers. Both assholes."

She snorted at my comment and pulled me into a hug. "It'll be over before you know it—then you'll be going home with $400,000.”

“For my mom,” I said, returning the hug.

“For your mom.”

We stayed there hugging for a moment. All I had to do was stay out of Xavier’s way and behave around here. I’d learn when to shut up and not get in trouble with either brother. I’d get the money to help my mom no matter what.

Which meant I'd have to find a way to sleep with the hottest man I'd ever met.

**Episode 8**

"We've been here three days, and he hasn't so much as touched me," I said. "It's creeping me out."

"How's it creeping you out? Isn’t that a good thing?"

It was, but with the money hanging over my head, I was stressing out. "I don’t know, he could suddenly pop into my room while I'm asleep! That's sexual assault, Lola!"

"Yeah, and I’d straight up murder him before I let that happen, Cal,” she said. “Listen, I think he could be a sadist. He knows this hot and cold attitude is working you up…”  She was right. Xavier was good-looking, yeah, but *clearly* had issues. Lola pressed a finger to her lips, then said, “You know, you’ll probably have day sex, so I might hear you."

"*Ew*. Don't say weird stuff like that." I frowned, pausing for a moment. “Wait, why would we have *day sex*?"

She shrugged. “They both go out at night. I saw them leaving last night at, like, midnight."

I scrunched up my face. "Probably a strip club."

“Wherever the closest one of those is. Fifty miles away?” She snorted. “At least you know he's clean." Colton had come to show us the STI tests—Xavier had no issues down south. Which was good. I really was not in the mood to catch something my first time on top of everything else.

Lola looked at her watch. "It's eleven now. I'm going to head to bed in a few."

It was dark outside; my night-light lit our room, giving it a cozy look. They had given us separate rooms, but Lola usually came and slept in here when they left. We felt safer that way.

Honestly, I avoided both of the brothers most of the time. I only had one run in with Xavier since the first day, and two with Colton. If I saw them, I ran away before they noticed me. Although we hadn't been here long, I already saw Colton with four different girls—two at a time once, so it was obvious what was going to happen there.

Luckily, he hadn't tried to go near Lola yet. I’d slap him again, despite Xavier’s macho bravado.

My phone buzzed, and I answered without looking at the I.D. Thank goodness they’d let us keep these. "Hello?"

"Hey, Caliana!"

Oh god. "Alex! Hey, everything good?"

"Everything's great. Just checking how you are. How's the vacay going?"

I couldn't help but smile. He was checking up on me! That was cute right? “It's going. Pretty cool. I'm grateful Lola's here with me." I bit my lip. I didn’t like lying.

"I'll let you go and have fun. See you, Cal.”

“Bye! Talk soon.”

Lola eyed me when I hung up. "What did Alex want?"

"To see how we were doing."

"How *you* were doing," she corrected me, and I smiled. "Damn that boy really has a thing for you, huh?"

I didn't respond, just made a grunt-like noise before lying back on the bed, my head landing on the soft pillow. At this move, Lola pushed herself off the bed. "I'm heading to sleep. If I wake up, I'll head back in here."

I nodded, getting sleepy myself.

She left the room, shutting the door behind her, and I sighed, pulling my phone back out. I decided to send a goodnight text to my parents. They had called me before and after I left for Oregon; I had gotten to talk to my mom, and she sounded better…ish.

I sent them a text saying I loved them, and I'd talk to them tomorrow.

*Having soooo much fun with Lola, talk soon! Luv ya! xoxoxo*

Sitting up, I pulled back the covers and snuggled underneath. Usually, I slept in just my bra and panties, but I didn't feel comfortable here. I didn’t necessarily think Xavier would just barge into my room whenever he wanted, but better to be prepared. So I layered up.

Which was ironic since I was supposed to be naked sometime in the near future.

I was getting used to the idea of sleeping with Xavier, but I knew the moment it was about to happen I'd probably panic. I’d sort of been fantasizing what it would be like if he hadn’t been such a massive dick initially. He was hot. There was no denying that. I had to remind myself that I wanted this and tell my anxiety to call it quits. No way in hell I’d be taken advantage of, no matter how nervous my brain was trying to make me.

I pulled the covers over my body, wrapped in my tight bed-time tank top and night shorts. They were a bit small for my liking, but at least they covered more than panties. I shut off the light and closed my eyes, and after a few minutes, I finally dozed off.

Then my body shook, and my eyes snapped open. I rolled over in surprise, cussing when the tall figure stood by my bed. I turned on the light, wincing as I stared at Xavier. My heart began to thud.

*SLOW DOWN HEART! SLOW DOWN!*

Yep—it sped up and it felt like it was about to pop out through my mouth. My eyes went to the clock, and I opened my mouth to say something. It was two a.m.? I'd been asleep for almost three hours. Was Xavier really here or was I dreaming?

"Come on."

"I-It's late."

"I said come on," he growled. I pulled myself out of bed slowly, my legs shaking underneath me.

"Plea—"

"Shut up." He grabbed my wrist and tugged me from the room. I sucked in a breath as I realized where he was taking me. He guided me all the way until we finally reached his room.

Oh my god, was this it?

I didn't have the energy! I couldn't do it! Oh my god, I was going to die. My chest rose up and down, faster than it should. He shut the door quietly behind him and practically threw me on the bed. He watched me with no expression.

"Strip."

*Excuse me, what?* I stared at him, horrified. I knew I had to get naked at some point, but I wasn't ready for this. And I especially wasn’t ready for how I’d feel hearing him order me around.

"I can't," I breathed. He said nothing else, but the moment he took a step toward me, my hands went to the bottom of my tank top. "Okay," I said quickly.

I pulled it over me, shutting my eyes. My body felt colder than it should, goosebumps prickling everywhere on my skin. The thought of being bare in front of a guy like this made me more than nervous. How did he expect other girls to be? Experienced? Well, I certainly was anything but.

I dared to open my eyes, but his weren't on me. Instead, he stared out the window.

"Shorts," he ordered, turning his gaze to me.

I did as I was told.

Blood rushed to my cheeks as he watched, making me shiver from the mixture of fear and anticipation.

What was wrong with me?

Suddenly a sadistic smile appeared on his face. "You really are terrified of me, aren’t you?”

"What do you expect?" Had I crossed the line?

“Why?” he asked, cocking his head to the side. “Because your poor, precious virginity is going to be taken? Aren't you the one who sold it?"

I bit my lip, not wanting to say anything. That wasn't even the reason. “You’re not ‘taking’ anything,” I said, lifting my chin. I hoped I looked more confident than I felt. My entire body was still pulsing. “It’s an agreement.”

"Go back to your room."

"*What*?" My brow furrowed. All that show for nothing? Maybe Lola was right, and he *was* a sadist.

"What? You want to fuck now?" The smirk that was plastered on his face gave me shivers—not the good type.

"No," I said. "You dragged me in here, so I should be asking you that question.”

Xavier took slow steps forward, pulling his shirt off in the process. I bit my lip as I took in his bare chest. The sliver of light coming in from his window gave me a perfect view of his abs—perfect washboard, the kind you saw on TV. I gulped as I moved my gaze to admire the curve of each muscle in his arms and shoulders. He dropped the shirt to the floor and ran both hands through his hair.

*F u c k*.

He stopped to lean down over me, putting one hand on either side of the bed. My breath hitched, and the corners of his mouth twitched with a smile. I watched his gaze look me up and down, then he came face to face with me. “The fear in your eyes…” he said, the smile returning, “it’s amusing."

His eyes bore into mine as if challenging me.

He was just as bad as Colton. Worse, maybe.

I stood, forcing him to back off. We stayed staring at each other for a moment. Then I quickly gathered my things and left. Once in the hallway, I sprinted to my room, thankful Lola wasn't there, so no questions would be shot at me.

*What had just happened? Like, for real what* was *that?*

No doubt, I had a restless sleep after that.

\*\*\*

Lola’s mouth was wide open. "And he didn't touch you?"

I shook my head. "He's such a sick person. Who even does that? Takes you into their room to have you both strip and then leave?”

"Last night, I saw them coming back late," Lola said. "I thought I saw blood on Colton for a moment, but it was the moonlight, I think, giving an unusual tint. I almost freaked and went to grab you until I realized how stupid I was."

"I wouldn't be surprised if it was," I said.

“Did Xavier have any on him? Like, did you see any when he, you know, took off his shirt?”

I shook my head. “Nope. Just abs and more abs.”

She sighed. "Well, what do you say we check out this place?"

"I've seen most of this place, and some rooms they told us not to go into."

"I’m talking about outside."

I shook my head. “No, he might think we're running. I can’t afford to do anything that might make me lose the money for my mom.”

Lola stood and shrugged. "Fine, I'll go alone."

Of course, in the end, she got me to go with her. We left out the sliding back door, both ignoring the bra and thong on the couch that most definitely weren't ours. The backyard was huge and had large, wooden fences blocking the view. It went all the way back until woods appeared.

It kind of weirded me out that this garden led into huge, creepy woods. "Let's venture!" Lola grabbed my hand, but I tugged it away.

"Are you mental?!"

"It's the woods… Are you scared Slenderman is waiting for you?" She wiggled her eyebrows.

"No," I snapped. “Just an old-fashioned murderer. It’s freaky out here, Lola. What if an animal attacks us?"

"Fine. I'll go alone." She walked off.

"I'll go back inside. Have fun dying!" I shouted after her. I stood still for a couple of seconds, but when she didn't turn back, I groaned and chased after her. She gave me a sideways grin when I appeared beside her.

"I knew you loved me too much."

"I'm using you as a distraction if something attacks us."

"I was just going to say that about you!" We both laughed.

Soon we were walking through the woods. The hard dirt was covered with fallen leaves. So many that our footsteps crunching on the ground when we walked was pretty loud. I glanced back. "Lola, we're going to lose sight of the opening soon. I can't even see the house anymore."

"We're just walking straight." She continued, her eyes examining the place. "It's so quiet and calm here. I love it." She was right, but I didn't get to appreciate it because I was worried a murderer was going to come out of nowhere. They tended to do that.

I gave in and let my senses take in the nature around me. The wind rustled leaves on the trees, a bird would sing now and again, showing us it was in our presence, and the smell of nature surrounded us.

"We should move here, it’s gorgeous."

"Um, no." I stared at her in disbelief.

"I mean like the countryside or something, not Oregon." She waved her hand. "It's so calm and relaxing."

"We’ll go on walks to our own local woods." I shrugged. "Minnesota doesn’t exactly have a shortage on trees, thank god."

"I don't like walks."

"Dude, this was your idea—" I stopped my sentence when I heard a rustle. "Did you hear that?" I snapped my head in the direction.

"Yeah, I heard the noise of us walking." She rolled her eyes. "Stop being paranoid."

I stopped her, and we both stood still. Bringing my finger to my lips, I shook my head. She arched an eyebrow but stayed quiet, a frustrated look on her face. That expression disappeared quickly when she heard the same noise too.

It wasn't the noise a bird makes—it wasn't just the wind. It was *something* walking, and it sounded closer this time. "This is nature, it’s probably a bunny," she spoke, her voice low. "Let's go back anyway."

Just as she said that, the rustling sped up, and the sound grew louder and faster, coming toward us. We both screamed. I didn't know if I saw something in the distance coming our way, but there was no hesitation. We both sprinted, running downhill to get back to the house.

We swerved through the trees and at some point, I lost sight of Lola, but I knew she was okay because I heard her running in the same direction. My throat hurt as I breathed rapidly, my lungs burning.

As I neared the opening in the trees and saw the house, relief rushed into me, but I didn't stop.

Literally, I couldn't.

I was running downhill—way too fast, and I couldn't stop.

Just before my legs reached the flat ground, someone came running in our direction, which was a mistake. I couldn't stop and basically crashed into the person, pain spreading through my body. It felt like a wall. It sent both of us flying, causing me to tumble over and land on top of him.

I breathed hard, pushing myself up and glancing down at the person I was sitting on, and I seriously wasn't surprised when I realized it was Xavier.

**Episode 9**

"What the hell?" Xavier grunted, rubbing the back of his head. I stared down at him wide-eyed while Lola laughed. My eyes went up to Colton who was out on the porch.

"Getting it on in the yard?"

I hopped off Xavier quickly. "Definitely *not*."

"What the hell were you doing out there?!" He pushed himself up and immediately towered over me.

"We were bored," Lola spoke up.

Colton glared at us. "Did you get our permission?"

"We need your permission?" Lola scoffed.

"Do you know where you are?" Xavier growled, his eyes glaring into my own. "You're in *our* house, and you do as you’re told. You will not go out there again.”

My nostrils flared, pissed off at how he was talking to us, but as always, I said nothing. I nodded before glancing at Lola, telling her with my eyes not to fight back.

"Inside," Xavier snapped, sharing a look with Colton.

"Don't bother getting mad at her," Lola said. "I forced her to go outside with me."

Damn it, Lola!

Colton narrowed his eyes. "Then let me show you around. I'll take you for a little drive."

\*\*\*

I was home alone with a monster right now—a beast, basically. My heart was racing. I had no clue what to do. Lola had gone off with Colton because he practically forced her.

Xavier's footsteps appeared on the stairs and sounded like they were coming this way. I was sitting on the couch in the living room…the one that didn't have the bra and thong on it earlier.

No doubt, this couch was probably destroyed too, at some point. I should get disinfectant.

My eyes flicked to Xavier, and he was shirtless. Immediately, last night popped in my mind, my entire body flushing. His hair was damp, but he had sweats on, at least. "What are you looking at?" he asked, although he wasn't looking my way, he still knew I was. Damn it. “See something you like?”

"Nothing," I mumbled.

He paused and turned back to me. I cursed silently as he walked over. "Colton's confused, you know?"

I avoided looking at him. I wouldn’t give him the satisfaction. "Why?"

"He's confused about why I haven't fucked you yet." My eyes shot to him, and he smirked as my face turned a shade of red. "He's wondering why I haven't touched you."

I almost choked when his hand went to my thigh. I couldn't speak—I just stared at him. I felt lightheaded. I wouldn’t be the one to break first.

His hand slowly made its way up my thigh. "He's wondering why I haven't eaten you up.”

“Romantic,” I said, trying to deadpan as my heart beat faster.

His hand flexed as it continued to move, and he leaned in, his breath hot on my cheek. “Should I make you moan my name?”

"W-Why?"

"You know why. Because I see the way you tense when I walk by, wondering if it's the moment we’ll finish what we started. It's fun for me, like a game. I'm the wolf, you're the sheep."

"Oh?" I didn't even hear my voice come out.

"The moment I touched you and glided my hand up your thigh, you were turned on. I bet you’re wet right through your panties. I'm right, aren't I?"

"N-No," I lied through my teeth. I was disgusted at myself. This guy tried to intimidate me last night. He was scary. And yet, when he simply touched me, it made me hot with need.

"Do you want me to check if you're lying?"

I shook my head.

Another lie.

"Are you sure?"

To be honest, he was all I was thinking about—straddling him, moving his hand somewhere…else.

The door crashed open, and I jumped away from him, but he stayed in the same spot. He stood from the crouched position he was in, looking at Colton and Lola as they entered.

"X, we need to talk," Colton said.

"Okay," he replied, unbothered. I was flustered, the memory of moments ago planted in my brain. He walked off with Colton while Lola watched me.

"Why are you breathing heavy and red as a tomato?” she asked.

I blushed furiously. “I don't want to talk about it."

"You know I'll make you."

"Yeah," I said. She wasn’t wrong. "He—"

My phone buzzed in my hand, and I checked the caller I.D. *Alex*. I picked it up immediately. Once again, he sounded breathless, which was making me feel all sorts of ways right that minute.

"I hate jogging!" It was the first thing he said, and I couldn't help but smile.

"Hey to you, too," I said.

"Everything good?" He copied me from yesterday.

"Yep, fine," I lied. "How's home?"

"Home's normal. Like always."

"How's the lil bro?"

"A terror, per usual. How's the lovely Lola?" He gave her the sarcastic nickname a while ago when she was being rude. Or basically just being Lola.

"Lola's fine, too. It's all fine on this end," I said. Lola shot me a glare, tugging at my sleeve, and I knew if I didn't hang up and tell her what happened now, she'd break my phone.

"Hey, Al, I have to go. Lola's pestering me," I said.

"Yeah, no problem." He chuckled. "Later."

I hung up and shoved my phone in my pocket. We walked to my room, where I told Lola the whole story of what happened. Even though “nothing” happened, it seemed like everything happened at the same time.

“You want him,” Lola said simply when I was through.

“No,” I said. “Absolutely not. He is a complete dick.”  
 “Mmm.”

“Stop it!” I said. “He is a complete dick, and I don’t care how hot he is, that will remain true.” None of this was a game to me. My mother’s life was on the line, and I had to figure all of this out.

“Okay, but…you got turned on?"

“No! He thought I did.” I blushed at the memory.

“But…you did."

“A bit," I admitted with a groan. "But I'm…terrified of him. I just can't wait to fuck and get out of here."

Her eyebrows raised. "You can't wait to fuck him?"

"You know what I mean! I mean I can't wait for all of this to be over. I feel like we're caged mice. Can't wait to be home."

“I mean, TBH girl, you sound like you’re into him,” she said with a shrug. “And you’re making excuses because you can’t help but anticipate when he’ll make another move. You want him to. Your lady parts are tingling for him.”

“Ugh, gross, no, stop it,” I said, but I could feel my face heating. Was she *right*?

“Aww, is the baby missing Alex?" She pouted her lips and faked rubbing tears away.

I glared at her. “Is this baby missing Tommy?"

If looks could kill, I'd be dead on the spot. I bit my lip from holding back a laugh at the disgusted look on her face. "We agreed not to bring him up."

I shrugged. "You bring up my embarrassing shit all the damn time."

Lola sighed, knowing it was true. She was worse than me. She even brought up embarrassing things in front of people. Like, please. Stop.

Lola and I talked about everything a bit more before we devolved into YouTube videos of people making quick recipes from Buzzfeed. This house had an amazing kitchen—it was too damn bad it was Xavier and Colton’s. After a few hours, we were both yawning, and Lola got up to go to her room.

"Do you have to go?" I whined, grabbing onto her waist to not let her get off the bed.

She laughed and tried to unwrap my arms. "Baby boo, I'm wrecked. I need sleep."

"You know what happened last night—what if he does it again?"

"You have to accept it. After all, you *were* paid for."

I rolled my eyes. "Stop saying it like that. You're the one who sold me."

"You agreed!"

"I didn't think it was real!" I hissed.

"Fine…I'll stay a bit longer." She sighed and sat back down.

"Good." I stood and walked to my window to retrieve my phone that Lola had thrown—yes, thrown—there earlier. My eyes went out the window to the woods we were in earlier. It looked creepier in the dark but beautiful at the same time as the moonlight shone down on it.

I returned to the bed. "I could never camp in the woods after today."

"Agreed. Screw moving out to the country.” Her eyes brightened, and she sat up on the bed. “Wait, the guys are out right now, right?”

I nodded. “Yup, like clockwork. Where are they even *going*?”

“Who cares? You know what I should do?"

"What?"

"Sneak into one of their rooms and fart on their pillow.”

We both burst into a fit of giggles. It was so stupid, it was perfect. “No way! That’s totally gross.”

"I know, and they’ll never know about it. It’s the perfect crime.” She nodded with a large grin. "I'm going to do it. As revenge for them being total dicks. You just have to keep an eye out for me—easy."

And just like that she was up and out of the room. Reluctantly, I followed as she sprinted from the room. Why did she always have ideas like these? It was hard to think she was in college. I mean 22 and fart pranks? Come on…

I followed her to Colton’s room and stood outside the door, panicking the whole time. We already weren't in their good books; this seemed like a death wish.

"You know, when Ant meets you, he's going to run," I informed her as she exited the room with a wide grin, totally proud of herself. Dork.

Ant was this guy Lola had been talking to online. Lola had told him straight up at the start she did not online date because there was no sex, and she wasn’t interested in phone sex (though I swear I heard some interesting things coming from her room sometimes… But, hey, who am I to judge?) They'd been together six months but still hadn’t met.

I wonder if she’d told him about what we were doing.

“He would understand what needed to be done. And OMG! With the money, I can fly out to see him! Cuddles *and* sex!" She cheered as we headed back to my bedroom.

"Sounds hot. Can I get in on some of that last part?” Colton’s voice made me jump a mile. He walked past us and we both held our breath as we watched him go into his room. Xavier wasn't anywhere to be seen, but my heart raced. Almost immediately, Colton reappeared at the door. *Angry*.

"Who was in my room?" he growled.

Lola placed a hand on her hip. "No one."

He walked toward her. "I can smell— I can see you messed up my bed!"

"Colton," Xavier's voice rang downstairs. "I need you."

Colton backed off, his jaw clenched. Their emotions could change so quickly, and it freaked me the hell out. He stormed past us, and I was surprised that no steam came from his ears.

Lola frowned. “It wasn't one you could smell. But I'm heading to bed before grumpy-butt returns."

I nodded—I just wanted to get to sleep, too. Fast. I hurried into the room I was staying in, shutting the door behind me. Part of me was nervous that Xavier would come into my room again tonight. Or was Lola right? Did I want him to? Was I hoping he would? I shook the thought off as I walked over to shut the curtain.

I froze, my hand gripping the curtain tightly. There was something in the woods.

A bear…

No…a wolf?

It was *huge*...That thing could eat a human. And that thing was in the woods with us earlier.

I didn't know what it was, but it was staring right at me.

**Episode 10**

Lola sighed, glancing over her shoulder to look back at me. "You, my friend, need to calm down."

We were outside in the hallway near her room. I’d rushed over immediately and told her about what I’d seen. "There is a goddamn monster here, Lola. HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO CALM DOWN?!"

"Which one are you talking about? Xavier or Colton?"

I groaned at her terrible joke. "Lola, I'm not messing around, do you understand? I saw a huge wolf-bear thing right in the woods. It looked right at me before disappearing."

"I don't think wolves are in these parts; it was probably a rabbit."

I gaped at her. "You think I'm mixing up a wolf-bear with a *rabbit*? You were there yesterday—something was out there!"

"What was where?" Xavier appeared around the corner.

"I thought you were gone."

"What was where?" He repeated, his voice firm.

"I forget…Lola, did you forget, too? You did? Great." I offered him a sarcastic fake smile. An eyebrow arched, and he crossed his arms, causing his muscles to flex slightly. My lips parted, and I looked away.

"You're going to tell me what you saw. Immediately."

Why was he pushing this? "It was probably a dream, y—"

"What did you see?" His voice was deep and dangerous now. “Do not make me ask you again, Caliana.”

Lola spoke first. "She thinks she saw a bear. Does Oregon even have bears?"

Xavier looked dubious. "A *bear*?"

"It wasn’t a bear, it was like…a wolf. But as big as a bear. A wolf-bear," I added.

Xavier narrowed his eyes, and my stomach twisted—not all unpleasantly. Ugh. "Where was it?"

"I saw it out—" I stopped. "No."

"No?" Both Lola and Xavier asked at the same time.

"I see what you're doing. You're messing with me. You think I'm stupid and seeing things.”

He looked at me, saying nothing. The silence was eerie as he took a step closer to me, leaning down to my ear. "Do you think I'd waste time on you if I didn't want to know?"

Instantly I was fuming. *Who does he think he is?*

He was only a guy who was going to “take” my virginity for money. Nothing else. Something he paid for and seems to want to follow through on. He doesn’t have to like my company, and honestly, I didn’t care. But he didn’t have to be a jackass.

"Five seconds to answer."

"It was at the place I crashed into you,” I said hotly. I could feel my cheeks growing warm as I remembered his body touching mine. “Oh my god, Lola…that's what was chasing us!"

"Don't go stir-crazy on me yet, Cali,” Lola said. “It was a raccoon or something. You’re seeing things.”

"She's right," Xavier said before stepping away. I watched him pull his phone from his pocket.

Lola leaned forward. "Do you think you’ll do it tonight?"

"Ugh, Lola, stop!” I huffed. “Why can’t you take me seriously right now? "

"You’re not holding out on me, are you—"

"I would tell you if we did it,” I said hotly. “That's why we're here, after all."

"You think he would have wanted to do it by now. You’d think he’d want to get it on the whole time you're here. That's why we're here more than a day, isn’t it?”

"Nice wording, Lola.”

She laughed. "I'd let him use me." She closed her eyes and sucked in a breath. "He's gorgeous."

Clearly, we weren’t going to talk more about what I saw. “It's supposed to be about what’s inside, and his personality is a huge no-go for me.”

“You don’t have to like him,” Lola said with a wink. “Don’t you want to? Even just a little bit?”

What was she asking? Did I want to run my fingers down his perfect abs ever since seeing him shirtless? I wouldn’t answer that even though the heat flushing my whole body said otherwise.

When she realized I wasn’t going to answer, Lola said, “Hey, do you want to explore outside?”

“What? Are you serious? After everything I was just saying? No.”

"Oh, come on—we won't go to the same place as yesterday. We can go to a place where people are. How about that?"

“And where the hell is that?"

“No idea, but I have a great sense of direction. I'll find civilization in no time."

I raised my eyebrows. We were in a strange place, saw a monster, and she wanted to go out there? It was a crazy idea.

My eyes returned to where Xavier had just been standing. The crazier idea was staying here in the house with that guy, even if my body wanted to…

“Okay,” I said. “Fine.”

"Really?" A smile broke out on her face, and I rolled my eyes. This girl loved adventures, but I enjoyed safety, particularly right now.

"Let's go!" She stood and grabbed me by the hand, pulling me toward the front door. Before Lola could reach for the doorknob, it forcefully opened, and a frustrated Colton stormed in. I backed away, but Lola stood where she was.

"What are you doing?” he asked, staring down at us.

Lola flipped her hair behind her shoulder. “Going out."

"Where?"

"It doesn't concern you. Come on, Cali.” She tugged me, and we tried to step around Colton, but he blocked us. Then he looked behind us further into the kitchen.

Craning my neck, I followed his view, unfortunately, to see Xavier. The two brothers stared intensely at each other, saying nothing. Could they communicate telepathically or something? One second Xavier was staring at Colton, and then his eyes snapped to mine.

"You're not going anywhere,” Xavier said.

“Why not?" I asked.

"You aren't allowed to ask questions," Colton snapped.

"Pretty sure I am," I said, not breaking eye contact with Xavier. "I came here to have sex with you, that’s it. I'm not some animal you can keep trapped in a cage."

The corners of Xavier’s mouth turned up. “Can't I?"

"No, you can't," Lola said. “It was never part of the deal that we’d stay trapped in your house."

“Well, it is now," Colton said.

I spun to look at Colton, furious. “That’s not how it works. You let us out yesterday."

“And did we say you were allowed to?” Colton shrugged.

"Allowed to? Are you kidding me? You aren't my dad," I snapped. Colton looked down at me, his head tilted slightly. Then he leaned down, his lips curling into an evil smirk.

"I may not be your dad, but I'm sure you call Xavier *Daddy*."

*Wow*. I scrunched up my face and stumbled back.

"Colton," Xavier said, but his brother grinned, finally pulling back.

"Let me know what her secret kinks are when you're finished,” Colton said to Xavier. "She looks delicious."

Xavier sighed, sharing a look with his brother. It seemed as if he was holding back saying something.

Lola tried once more to pass him, but this time Colton caught a firm grip on her. "I said no."

“And I asked why with no real answer," I spoke up again. "You can't lock us in here for no reason."

Xavier seemed to think for a moment. "How about because there are big, scary monsters out there in the dark. Scarier than what you saw."

Colton snorted a laugh, grinning at Xavier.

"You are so immature," Lola snapped, clearly frustrated with their attitudes. I had to agree with her there; I couldn't put up with this much longer, so I gave in.

"Leave it, Lola." I put my hand on her shoulder. I knew these two were not going to let us out. Even though they were joking, there was something dark and sincere about their words. It was like a warning. And I'd be lying if I said it didn't scare me.

I knew this was a mistake.

Lola didn't want to back down, but when her eyes met with mine, and she saw the pleading look, she nodded, understanding. She turned back to Colton. “Whatever. Have your stupid secrets.”

Colton locked the door, dangling the key over my head. "Good girls."

He walked past us to where Xavier had been standing. I hadn't even noticed he had left, but I was happy. There was something here that made me feel sick—just this gut feeling about the brothers and the woods…

"I'm worried," I told Lola.

"Same."

I did a double take when she said that. Lola was never worried. She always had the situation under control.

"What do you mean *same*? You're supposed to be like, ‘Oh, it's nothing, don't worry about it,’" I said, and she turned to me.

The smile returned to her face, and she shoved me. "You know I'm kidding—there's nothing to worry about. They just want to scare us. That's what sadists do."

I shook my head. “They seem more like masochists, if you ask me."

She pursed her lips. "You know, you could be right. People are good at hiding it."

We both laughed before flopping onto the couch. "We made a mistake coming here, right?” I asked.

"It'll be over soon."

I scowled. “That's what people who kill people say."

A huge grin formed on her face, and she nodded. "He will kill you."

“*What*? Lola—”

"KILL THAT PUSS—"

Lola stopped herself when Xavier appeared at the door, Colton not far behind. Had they been listening to our conversation? I wanted to pass out. I looked up, praying to the gods above me to send Xavier away.

"What do you want?” I asked.

"You can't ask me that when you're in my house," he said. "We're going out now and locking you in."

I said nothing as a shiver ran down my spine. Xavier’s eyes found mine, and I didn’t break away. He was challenging me. Well, I wouldn’t back down.

“If you try *anything* without our permission,” Colton said, his hand on the doorknob. “We’ll kill you.”

I watched them both go outside and into the darkness—what. Feeling sick to my stomach, I remembered to take a breath. Something about the way Colton said it, I could feel in my gut that they weren’t joking. They’d kill us if we tried to leave…

Lola and I needed to get out of there. Immediately.

**Episode 11**

I said nothing to them. What do you respond to someone when they say that? Especially when they sounded so serious.

I shut my eyes when Lola spoke up. Couldn't she just be silent until these two left? "So, you don't work?"

"What?"

"You go out, but you never go in proper work clothes. You don't work, but you're rich."

"We aren't rich," Xavier spoke up, which came as a surprise to both me and Lola.

"You spent a load of money on me, though," I pointed out. Oh god—saying that aloud made me feel ashamed and embarrassed.

"He spent a lot of money on you without asking me." He shot a look at Colton.

"That was a lot of money, though."

"Not our m—" He cut himself off. "This isn't your business anyway. You're here to keep your mouth shut and your legs open."

My cheeks heated, and I knew if we were alone, Lola would laugh, but she kept a straight face, continuing to glare at Xavier. She opened her mouth but quickly shut it, which I was grateful for. Knowing her, it was going to be something that would get us in trouble. Xavier walked past Colton, heading to the front door. He immediately hurried after his brother, and we copied.

They turned back to us as they pulled the door open. "No leaving out this door, understood?"

Lola smiled. "You got it."

I was happy. She finally calmed down and instead of going against these people, she was agreeing. That was one worry off my mind. I let out a sigh of relief, and when I looked back up, my eyes met Xavier's. My breath got caught as his eyes drilled into my own. He seemed to be reading me like a book—he made me feel like I was open, and that he knew everything about me.

It was a strange and scary feeling, like I was naked in public. I tried to open my mouth to talk, but nothing came out. What was wrong with me? He turned away and left without saying anything, Colton quickly at his heels. The door shut and locked behind them.

"Are you alright?" Lola's words made me jump. Had I been in a trance? "Don't make me repeat myself." Although the sarcasm laced her voice, I heard concern as well.

I turned to look at her, nodding.

Her hand reached out, resting upon my cheek. She raised her eyebrows. "Your face is on fire, and you look like you just had the orgasm of the century."

"WHAT?!" If my face wasn't roasting before, it definitely was now.

"You're breathless and shaking. Seriously, are you alright?" Her brows knitted together, and a frown crossed her face. I quickly nodded, resting my cold hand upon my forehead to cool it down.

"Yeah, just tired," I lied. She raised her eyebrows but didn't press on the situation. I was confused—no, beyond confused.

Why were we here?

I knew *why,* but nothing had happened. It was like he was torturing me—leaving me in suspense. At any moment, he could decide he wanted me, and I didn’t know when. I felt like a caged animal. I wanted out, but I knew I wasn't able to go.

"Let's go."

"Sorry?"

"Outside," Lola said, and I burst out laughing. She looked at me like I was a crazy person, and I immediately imitated her look. She was the crazy person here.

"I'm sorry, have you lost your mind? You better be messing with me."

"What?"

"What the hell do you mean *what*?! They threatened to kill us if we went outside! It's confirmed—you've lost your mind. I'm alone now…I'm the only sane person in this place." I was actually starting to flip out.

"Listen." She grabbed me. "You're going insane because we're stuck in here. He told us not to go out that door right there." She pointed to where they left before a grin spread across her face. "So, we go out the door in the back"

"Thank you."

"What?" She tilted her head.

"For confirming you're insane." I nodded. "They must have done something with your brain."

"You're freaking out for no reason."

"I have a lot of reasons to freak out, Lola!" I shouted at her. I was losing it. It was sudden, and I didn’t know why I couldn’t calm down.

She laughed. "Wait, you actually think they meant they would kill us?"

"Yes." I gave her a sincere look. "I'm dead serious."

"You're the one who has lost their mind—not me, only you. They aren't going to kill us for going outside, idiot. We have rights."

Technically, she was correct. They didn't really have any right to keep us here...

"Why do you even want to go?"

"I'm bored in here, and this is like a mini holiday."

"A mini holiday my butt. You aren't the one selling your virginity."

"I'd rather lose it to one of them instead of the idiot I had sex with. I'd probably pay." She nodded, and I rolled my eyes.

I shook my head. "I don't know why I'm your friend, honestly."

"Come on, *please*. We'll be back before them."

"How do you know when they'll be back?"

"I have good instincts. If we get caught, I'll take all the blame." She held up her hands. "Promise."

"And what about the wolf-bear? If Xavier doesn't kill us, that thing will."

"That thing is not real. You're going so crazy that you're seeing stuff now, see?" She gave me a wide smile. She was such a sadist—she loved teasing people and freaking them out.

"No." I turned away, but she grabbed me immediately.

"Is the baby scared of big daddy Xavier because he's going to spank her if she leaves?"

I scrunched up my face, slapping her away. "NEVER SAY THAT AGAIN!" I shuddered while she continued to laugh at my reaction.

"I'll never say it again if you come with me now."

"No."

"Pretty please with daddy—"

"FINE, JUST SHUT IT!" I shook my head. "I want you to know that I hate you."

"I love you, too." She blew me a kiss. Lola left the room, and I grabbed my jacket quickly before chasing after her. I stopped at the open back door. She stood outside, looking around. When I didn't follow, she turned back with a frustrated look. "Come on scared-y pants. You can do it. One step at a time."

I glared at her and followed her out, shutting the door behind me.

"Now where? We aren't going to go too far or I'm turning back," I warned her.

"You are no fun, you know that?"

"I am!"

"Believe what you want, babe." She walked up the garden and went toward the forest. I chased after her and gripped her hand, tugging her back. "Not that way, Lola."

"Wait." Her brow furrowed. "Don't tell me you actually think there is a wolf-bear, or whatever you call it."

"I do." I frowned. "I don't want either of us to get eaten."

"Aww, you care about me!"

"No, I just don't want to be alone with those two and have to explain what happened. How am I going to pin the blame on a dead person?"

"You show me too much love, you know that?" She scowled, and I was the one who offered the grin this time. "We won't go the way we did last time; we'll stick to the edge"

"Fine, but you go first." Lola giggled at how scared I was but agreed. She walked ahead and—as she said—stuck to the edge of the woods. As we walked forward, the leaves crunched under us. I listened closely to them, making sure it was only our footsteps I was hearing.

It felt like someone was watching us. Eyes staring at us, drilling into our backs. I looked behind me but saw nothing. My eyes went around the whole area, and although I didn’t see anyone, I couldn't shake the feeling.

"Something's watching us."

"You mean some*one*—there's no wolf-bear thing. If there was, it would have charged and eaten us already."

"W—"

"*But* I agree."

"What?" I asked curiously.

"Someone's watching us." Her eyes scoured the air, and hair stood up on my neck, a shiver running down my spine. Her saying that freaked me out way too much.

She turned back to look at me before she smiled. "Just kidding."

"Can you not?" I snapped. "It's seriously not funny."

"I—" Her whole body froze. "Cali…"

"What? Don't joke around."

"Run back to the house. Now."

**Episode 12**

"Run? What do you mean ‘run’?"

She grabbed my arm and pulled me behind a tree. I winced at the strong grip she had and hit her hand, indicating for her to let me go, which she did.

"If it's the wolf-bear and he can smell us, we're dead. Nice job."

She rolled her eyes and put her fingers to her lips. I shot her a look, telling her that I would talk if she didn't explain what she was on about. She nodded around the tree, and I was about to walk out to check before she stopped me.

"Glance," she hissed.

I peeked around the tree. "What—oh...oh my god." I hopped back behind the tree. "I thought they went the other way."

Why were Colton and Xavier walking through the woods? "Maybe he's the wolf-bear you saw."

"He was in the house," I hissed.

She shrugged. "Probably a serial killer…we should go back."

"You're saying that after dragging me out here?" I glared at her. "I hate you sometimes."

"Fine, we'll stay out. Let's follow them."

"No! I didn't mean we have to stay out; I am one hundred percent okay with going back to the house right now."

"Nah, it's okay. We'll stay out." Lola grinned. I sucked in a breath, grinding my teeth together. This girl wrecked my head the majority of the time I was with her. Before I could stop her, she crept out from behind the tree.

I snapped. "Lola! They'll see you!"

She squinted before shaking her head. "They're gone."

I jumped from behind the tree, my eyes searching for them. "What?" It took me a minute to locate the two, and they were already far off. "There," I told her.

She quickly hurried after them. I probably shouldn't have pointed them out to her, because now she was locked in detective mode. I could have persuaded her to go home if she hadn't seen them, but of course I had to open my fat mouth.

"Wait for me," I hissed, chasing after her. I was not getting left behind, alone with the wolf-bear. If it were to suddenly appear, we could bait it to the guys and get away ourselves.

Every woman for herself, right?

"Why are they going deeper in?" I frowned, making sure my voice was low.

"That's not the only thing Xavier will be going deep in."

"Can you actually not?" I slapped her, and her response was a giggle.

They stopped suddenly, and Colton said something to Xavier. He nodded, then they kept going.

"They can't multi-task," Lola said. "That's the male gender for you."

"What?"

"They had to stop just to talk before continuing. We are superior to men." She winked. "Wait, where are they?"

I zoned back into the search, my eyebrows knitting together when I saw no sign of the men. How could we lose sight of them? They were in front of us the whole time. "Maybe we can't multi-task either. Seems we can't talk and see at the same time."

"Shut up!" She shoved me, and I grinned. She loved annoying me, and now she understood how I felt. She grabbed my hand and sped up. "They went that way."

We were going up now, the woods slightly on a tilt. The leaves crunched below us, and I knew if we got too close, they would hear us. First, we'd have to find them. "We need to be quiet."

"We need to find them."

"They'll kill us if they see us!"

"They won't see us."

"I can guarantee you they will," I argued but allowed myself to be tugged after her. For a short girl, she was extremely strong.

She paused, her eyes examining the area. "That way."

"How do you know?"

"Because I do."

"No, you don't." I stopped her by pulling her.

She looked back to me with a frown. "We'll lose them, Cal—we need to hurry."

"I'm okay with losing them. I know you. You're going with your instincts, which are wrong the majority of the time, so I'd rather not."

She pouted. "For me?"

"No."

"Please."

"No!"

"Ple—" Her words were cut off by a rustle. Both of us looked in the same direction but saw nothing. Another rustle from another direction. A twig breaking. Something scraping against a tree. Then a growl, and something fell from above us, hitting my foot. I let out a scream and tore off. I was pretty sure Lola did too, but we ran off in different directions.

I was going in the direction of the house—or where I believed it was. I knew Lola was stupid enough to stay out…but I also knew she would meet me back at the house. Otherwise, I would have stopped.

My legs were sore from running, and my lungs were beginning to burn. I didn't run, ever, so this was draining for me. It was hard to catch my breath, and my throat stung.

I let out a choked cough when something tough crashed into my stomach. It was as if I ran right into a branch, and it halted me. It winded me momentarily before I realized I had to keep running. Before I did, I studied the branch only to realize it wasn't a branch. It was an arm.

An arm that belonged to someone I didn't want to see. I almost wanted to turn back and run toward the monster that was lurking in the woods. I'd rather get eaten by that thing than have to deal with the disaster now at hand.

I sheepishly looked up to Xavier. He stared at me, a grim look on his face. His gaze seemed darker than usual as he shot daggers at me with his eyes. I could feel heat radiating off him from the anger. I backed away from his arm and frowned. "Hello…"

"Hello?" He arched an eyebrow. "That's what you have to say?"

"I didn't want to come—Lola made me."

"She made you do nothing. You make your own decisions."

"She forced me tech—"

He snapped. "You make your own decisions, and that is why you are out here." I swallowed the lump in my throat. I didn't know what to say. I felt like I was a child in class, getting caught by the teacher for doing something bad.

Then the teacher calls you out in front of the whole class and your face heats up and you want to die in a hole because your anxiety is shouting at you, and you know people are watching you. Although he was the only one looking at me here, it felt like millions were watching.

"Do you know where you are?"

"Outside?"

He narrowed his eyes, obviously not pleased with my response. I frowned. "In the woods?" What was I supposed to say? The two things I had answered with were true, so why he was giving me a stupid look was beyond me.

"No," he stopped my guesses. "You are not at your house. You are not at your home. You are spending your time at my place because my brother is an idiot. Do you know what that means?"

He didn't even give me time to answer before he quickly continued, most likely because I couldn't properly answer the question he’d asked earlier, and I continuously embarrassed myself.

"It means you do as I say, and I said stay at the house. Why did you think it would be a clever idea to wander off? Especially when I threatened to kill you. Are you an idiot? I'm trying to get into your mindset, and I just can't."

Wow, that was extremely rude.

"Your brother paid me so you could have sex with me. Not so you could order me around like a servant!" I argued.

"It is my house you are staying in." He lowered himself, and my breath hitched as I stepped back, only to stumble slightly, making my face heat. "That means you do what I say unless you want to sleep outside. Do you get that now?"

I wanted to take that money from my bank account, throw it in his face, and tell him to go fuck himself. But of course I didn't. Instead, I shut my mouth and didn't argue.

"Where's Lola?" I asked him.

"I'm not your minder. Hopefully missing," he said before turning away. "Go back to the house."

"No."

The second those words were out, he rotated to look back at me, a sinister look on his face. "Repeat yourself."

"I said no. What if Lola is still out here?" My eyes landed on Colton walking over to us. I forgot he was out here also. He didn't even look at me, instead walking to Xavier, whispering something to him. It reminded me of boys from high school. *How mature*. I rolled my eyes.

"Something you want to say?" Colton asked.

"Of course not," I said. "Have you seen Lola?"

Colton arched an eyebrow before looking to Xavier and walking off. "Go home, freckles."

FRECKLES?! I had a tiny bit of freckles across the bridge of my nose, nothing obvious, and yet he noticed that. Okay, then.

"I said no."

"Don't anger me."

"Anger you? I don't care if I anger you." I did though. I was terrified of angering him. He could snap me in two without any trouble, but Lola was my main concern. He was probably right, though—it would be better if I went back to see if she was there. She most likely was, if she wasn't out here.

Right as I was about to give up and agree, I was picked up and thrown over his shoulder. I let out a cry as I hung upside down, staring at his back.

"I'll be right back, Colton," Xavier called to his brother. "I need to deal with her first."

**Episode 13**

"What do you mean, you're going to *deal with me*?!" I shouted, hitting my fists against his back as he carried me away from his brother and toward the house.

No reply.

"Hello?! I swear to god, if you kill me, people will find you! LOLA! LOLA!" I shouted, then I was dropped. I let out a whine, thudding against the ground.

He crouched, covering my mouth with his hand. "Silence," he whispered. "You don't want the wolf-bear to find us, do you?"

I debated licking his hand but decided against it. Instead, I glared at him, and finally he retracted his hand. "Good girl," he said, attitude lacing his tone. He honestly seemed like he wanted to throw me in a ditch right then.

I stood back up and brushed myself down, glancing past him and…for some stupid reason, started running. Well, tried. In an instant, I was stopped. He held my top and pulled me back harshly, causing me to slam into him.

"Ouch," I groaned, over-exaggerating the hit.

"Stop being a child," he growled, and once again I was hauled over his shoulder. I probably should have made the smart decision and walked back to the house myself, but I had it in my mind that he was going to kill me.

I gave up and let my body dangle like a corpse over his shoulder. I wanted to make myself as heavy as I could before feeling self-conscious and throwing that idea away. He seemed to be carrying me with no difficulty though, like I was a rag doll—that worried me. If we saw the wolf-bear, he could easily throw me to it and let it kill me.

Wolf-bear.

I laughed quietly…maybe I was going insane. I just wanted to go home—I didn't like it here. I wanted to get it over with, go home, and *boom:* have the money. Put the nightmare behind me. I was so excited for that.

"What are you laughing at?"

"Nothing."

It seemed way shorter to get back to his house than it took me and Lola to get lost.

"CALI!" I heard Lola cry, then she went quiet. "Why is he carrying you?"

"Help me! Get me down," I called to her. I was relieved she was okay, but now it was my turn. She needed to save me. I risked going up against him and Colton so I could find her, so this was the least she could do.

"I got you," she said, hurrying over. I felt her grab my foot and tug off my shoe.

Xavier acted as if he didn't hear us and kept walking. Lola reached out, but he pushed her away. She stumbled back and tripped over my shoe that had just fallen to the ground.

"HEY!" she called after him.

He ignored her again and walked through the doors, closing them behind him. My eyes widened when he didn't put me down and carried me through the house, all the way up to his room.

He closed the door with his foot, locking it with his free hand. My heart was racing, and I was worried. Although I had said I thought he was going to kill me, I knew the chances were slim...

But now...maybe he was going to kill me.

He flung me onto the bed so hard that I nearly bounced off onto the ground. I let out a small cry of despair, thinking I was about to fall, but my grip was so tight it saved me. I shimmied back into the middle of the bed and sat up.

He stood there, watching me.

I opened my mouth to speak but stopped. What was I going to say? What was I *trying* to say?

"Please let me out."

"Let you out?"

"Yes."

"So you can run off again?"

"N-No."

"So you can be nosy and try to find out what my brother and I are doing?"

"No, we didn't mean to a—"

"What? You didn’t mean to…what? Go against what we said?"

I shut my mouth. I didn't know how to get out of this.

"You're annoying," he told me. "You two are like little pests, but my brother won't let you go until you finish the job you've been paid to do."

I sucked in a breath.

"Is that what you want? Are you trying to get my attention, freckles?"

"What?! No!"

He looked evil, his eyes dark as he watched me, enjoying my misery. "Are you sure? Deep down, you want it to happen."

"N-No…we were bored."

"Do you want me to amuse you?" He reached out his hand and grabbed the collar of my top, pulling me up so I was kneeling, face-to-face with him as he lowered his tall stance.

"N-No." I was stuttering so much. I shouldn't show my fear—he was enjoying this.

He held me up roughly. "Are you sure? This isn't what you want? I think you were the one who offered your virginity."

*How do I respond to that?*

"You want me to call you *kitten*? Sweet names in bed make you feel good? Do you want to be touched?" His lips were close now, and I felt weak. Like my whole body was drained.

I was scared. But that wasn't the biggest issue here. I partially liked this—it was making my blood rush and my head spin.

"Look at you." He tilted his head. The movement made his lips brush against mine momentarily. "You're red and heating up, huh? Have I gotten you excited?"

I shook my head weakly.

"Good."

My brow furrowed.

"I'm not going to call you sweet names. You are a whore. A slut who is selling her body for money. I will fuck you and be done with you. You are not special—you are easy." He let go of me, and I dropped on to the bed.

He turned, unlocked the door, and left the room.

I stared after him for a minute before my eyes dropped to my hands. I looked at the wetness, confused. I brought my hand to my eyes and realized I was crying. I bit my lip, repeating the scene in my mind. How had I relaxed and momentarily gotten excited? It was pathetic...

Sure, they were just names, but for some reason—and I was an idiot for it—but I let it hurt me.

Maybe because it was true.

I couldn't justify selling my body because I was trying to help my parents with money and for my studies. I was selling my body to a stranger. My *virginity*. I knew how important that was to some girls, saving it, yet here I was giving it to a stranger.

"Cal?" Lola appeared at the door. I looked up to her, and instantly her eyes were on fire. "I'll kill him."

She was gone in a flash, and I jumped off the bed, stumbling after her. I ran as fast as my legs could carry me, jumping down the stairs two steps at a time. I caught up to her just in time and grabbed her.

She turned back to me. "He'll disappear, let go."

"Please don't," I begged. "Please. I don't want you to talk to him—it was nothing."

"Nothing? You're crying." Her eyes examined me, and she pulled up my top. My face heated, and I pulled it down.

"No marks," she commented. "Did he hurt you?"

"No." I shook my head.

"You're crying—he did something."

"He…teased me."

"*I* tease you. You don't cry—stop bullshitting me."

"He just called me names. Like a child, I got offended. He called me stupid," I lied. She watched me, knowing I was lying.

Lola also noticed I really didn't want to talk about it, and I was grateful when she didn't continue to pester me about the whole situation.

"I need a nap." I sighed.

"What?"

"I'll talk to you later." I turned away and went to my room, letting the tears fall.

**Episode 14**

Lola hadn't left me alone. She stayed with me, and honestly, I wasn't surprised.

Even if I locked the door and refused to let her in, she'd smash the window and get into the room. That was Lola for you—that was my best friend. She sat on the bed, her back resting on the headboard. Her legs were flat out in front of her, and my head rested against them. Her hand was on my hair, patting it.

"I want to leave this place. I knew guys were disrespectful, but this is a whole new level." I frowned.

"We can if you want," she told me. "We'll refund the money to him."

I lay there with my eyes shut, trying to decide what to do. I wanted to go home, I wanted to throw the money back in their faces and call them horrible names.

Then my parents’ faces appeared in my mind. My future, too—the price of college. Not only that, but if I backed out, I'd look like a scared-y cat. Okay…that point was extremely stupid, but still.

"No.” I pushed myself up, so I was kneeling on the bed. I shook my head, making sure to avoid her eyes. “I'm going through with this."

"Cali," she said, "if you don't, I'm not going to think you chickened out. I'd probably do the same." I smiled when she said that; she knew me like the back of her hand.

I spun around to look at her. The tears from my eyes had dried up, and my emotions had subsided. "It's not only that. You know there are other reasons."

She nodded, understanding. "But having sex with someone like him…" She scrunched up her nose. "Sure, he's hot as hell, but I'm worried he'll murder you."

"Murder me?" My eyes widened at her serious tone. "Why the hell would you say that?"

"MURDER YOU WITH THAT BIG DIC—" I dove onto her, placing my hands over her mouth. My eyes burned into her. I actually thought she was going to be serious for once—I was dumb for thinking so.

"Grow up." I got off her, a scowl already on my face.

Lola pushed herself up with a grin. "Aww, I thought I was going to get a kiss from you."

I got up off the bed and walked to the window, pulling the closed curtain back. My eyes roamed the view, but nothing was out of the ordinary. Was I expecting something to be? I was in such a weird mood lately.

"How long has it been since they left?" I asked her, my eyes locked on the window. I squinted, thinking I saw something move in the distance.

She was right, I *definitely* was going insane. What was wrong with me? Embarrassed, I shut the curtains and walked back to the bed.

"A few hours," she told me, turning off the television.

"Now what?"

"I don't even know. It's so boring here…let's pull a prank."

"Are you joking? You better be."

"What?" she asked.

My jaw dropped. "The last time we went with your dumb plan, let me remind you what happened: I was the one who got in trouble, not you. I was the one who got attacked even though it was your idea," I snapped.

"I told you, I'm sorry. It's not my fault he's a complete and utter douche."

"Still," I muttered.

"You know what they say—some guys are mean to you if they like you."

"Lola, let me tell you why that is one of the dumbest things to ever come out of your mouth: He and I barely know each other—we do not talk at all. The only time we do talk, it ends badly. And that, in there…" I pointed to his room. "What happened was not just mean. It was messed up. No one who likes someone would say those things to them."

"My ex said something similar to me," she informed me.

"Exactly. That's why he is your ex. You proved my point."

"He loved me at one point."

I shook my head. "Nah, he didn't."

"That's rude." She frowned, shoving a finger at me. "Here I was, almost feeling bad."

"Lola Spillane? Feeling bad for someone? Pigs must be flying." I grinned. She tried to keep a straight face, but finally a smile broke out. If someone saw us together and heard how we insulted each other, they would think we were enemies. We never meant it though—it was all sisterly love. Well, I hoped she didn't mean it.

"I wonder if he's going to make you suck his pee-pee."

"Why the hell did you say that word?! And why would you even ask that question?!" I glowered.

"What word? Pee-pee?" Her brow furrowed. "Does it make you feel awkward?"

I shook my head. "It's a weird word. A childish word."

"To answer your other questions, I'm legitimately wondering: does it include the add-ons? Is it not only sex?" She pursed her lips.

"It's concerning that you are interested in this and want to know what's happening more than me. I'm the one doing something."

"I'm looking out for you, my love." She gave me a kissy face, and I let out a groan. This human in front of me made me want to pull my hair out almost every time I talked to her. She was extremely strange...but unique. *Special* would be the word I'd use, but also *amazing*. The main one though: *annoying*.

Both of us looked toward the door when we heard the main door click open.

"Uh oh," I mumbled.

Lola left the bedroom, and I ran after her. I followed her silently downstairs and to the hallway. We had eyes on the front door where both of them arrived.

Strange how when we went out the back, that's where they were, and yet they leave and enter through the front of the house. I mean it would make sense if they were trying to hide something, but both Lola and I had already seen them around the back—it made no sense.

How cliché would it be if I sneezed, and we got caught?

"What do you want?" Colton turned to our direction. I wanted to jump back and hide around the corner, but of course, Lola stepped out. Her hand was on her hip. She said nothing but glared at the two men in front of her.

I gripped her arm. She looked at me and saw me begging me with my eyes not to say anything about the incident earlier. She looked disappointed, upset, but she did what I wished and kept her mouth shut.

"Where were you?"

"Why do you think that's your business?" Colton asked.

"Because you left that way but went the other way like you're trying to hide something," she explained. "Don't be stupid."

I shut my eyes. She told him not to be stupid when *she* was pulling an idiotic move. I thought I told her upstairs that from now on, we were going to be quiet when they were around. We weren't going to disturb them, and hopefully time would go faster. Either she forgot or lied about the agreement. My mind automatically went with the second one.

My eyes landed on Xavier, and my heart quickened when I saw his eyes were on me. There was no emotion—he didn't even react when he saw me notice he was watching me. Instead, his gaze stayed locked on my own.

Usually I would back down—I would look away, and my face would heat up. I would feel nervous and scared, like I was below the person. Less-than.

I didn't this time. I stared back. *No*, I glared back. My lips were in a thin line, and I raised my head, letting him know I didn't care.

His own eyebrows raised, and he finally turned away when Colton hit him lightly. "Did you hear me?"

I grinned to myself. I won. *Yes*. It was a staring contest, and he was the one who backed down.

Lola gave me a sideways glance, clearly confused by the huge grin on my face. I wiped it off quickly before the guys could see.

Colton said something to Xavier that I missed, and I regretted being distracted. I wanted to know what was said.

"Don't worry," Lola whispered to me, then winked. "I know how to find out."

**Episode 15**

"What was that?" Colton asked, interrupting Lola.

"What?" she asked. Lola was an amazing liar; she could lie through her teeth and almost anyone would believe it without giving it a second thought.

Xavier's whole body suddenly stiffened. He stood still as a statue, his eyes going to the right. Colton looked at him just as quickly, and the whole room was silent.

Then Xavier shook his head.

"What is wrong with you? You guys are so creepy." I frowned. They were. They kept going out to do “private” stuff and then—at the same time—they'd freeze up. They were like soul mates or something.

"That's what I was thinking," Lola cheered. Colton didn't look amused, but Xavier, as always, had no reaction. He was emotionless. Not a sign of guilt or remorse from earlier. In fact, he looked like he was annoyed with me. I was getting worked up over him for no reason.

"Keep talking shit." Colton shrugged. "I'm not the one who’s going to punish you."

My brow furrowed in confusion before my slow mind got the point. My cheeks flushed red, and my whole face felt warm. Why were people so open about joking about inappropriate things? Especially with strangers—it made me feel so awkward.

"Do you want to stay here, and I'll go out first?" Colton asked Xavier, who hesitated.

"Yeah, okay." He nodded. "Be careful."

"When am I ever?" Colton grinned. They were like an old married couple. I couldn't help but roll my eyes at how they acted with each other.

"Problem?" Xavier asked after Colton had left.

"None," I sneered, glaring at him.

He raised his eyebrows. "Good." He walked past me and Lola, going to his room. I stayed silent until I heard his door shut behind him and let out a breath.

"I get so tense when I'm around him," I groaned.

"Well, obviously. He's going to fuc—"

"CAN YOU STOP?!" I shoved her, which only made her burst out laughing. She got so much out of teasing me with this. I knew it was only for now, and afterwards she would hopefully never mention it again, so this dreaded nightmare would only be a figment of my imagination.

That was what I kept telling myself. It would be over soon, and we would be free. Everything would be normal again—the only thing different was my virginity. To me, that honestly wasn't a big deal. I didn’t want to be judged for not giving a damn about it.

"I'm going out," Lola hissed.

I turned to her, taking it as a joke. "That's not even funny."

"I'm not being funny. I didn't see what I wanted to when we went out, because your dumb ass got caught."

"You cannot blame me for that!"

"I can, and I will. I'm not asking you to come. In fact, I'm asking you to stay."

"Why?" Although I wasn't going to go anyway, I was surprised she didn't want me to go out with her. Wherever she went, she usually dragged me with her.

"Two reasons." She nodded. "One: you're clumsy, and you'll get caught. The bigger one, though…I need you to be a distraction.”

"A distraction?" I ignored her first insult.

"Yes, you know…if Xavier comes out and sees us both gone, obviously he'll know."

"You want me to let you go alone, cover for you, and stay in the house alone with that beast?"

"Basically."

"Not happening."

She frowned, leaning against the wall. Just as she was about to open her mouth, I held up my finger and narrowed my eyes. "What happened last time we used your idea?"

Her lips pressed into a thin line. "That was your fault." Of course.

"I'm not staying alone with him."

"You can't come with me, or we'll definitely get in trouble."

"Better than staying alone with him." I shrugged. I did not want to be near him after what happened earlier. I was still embarrassed and shocked over it. I knew if he came into the room, and I was alone, I'd break. I'd either attack him or just be upset. I could not face him—not alone. With Lola beside me, I was brave and could stare into his soul…but not alone. No freaking way.

"I'll go," I said before thinking.

"What?"

"I'll go out. I'll go in the direction they were going…where we got caught. I'm decent with directions."

"You want to go out there alone? Without me?"

"No." I looked up. "Obviously I don't *want* to, but that option is better than staying here with a monster alone."

I knew if I were alone here, the chances of dealing with Xavier were too high. Although I was preparing myself, I wasn't going to lose my virginity on the day he embarrassed me.

"I don't know…"

"Are you worried about me?" I grinned.

"No." She shook her head. "I'm worried you'll fail."

"Thanks for the support."

"No problem." Her smile grew large, then it disappeared. "Cal, you don't need to do this. I can stay here with you, if that's how much you don't want to be alone with him."

Now she was making me feel guilty, even though that wasn't her intention. I dragged her along to this horrid place, and now I was keeping her from having her type of fun. She was right, though—I couldn't stay here alone.

"I'll go. I'm kind of excited now," I lied, which of course she saw through. "Only thing I'm worried about is running into Colton."

"If you hear a noise, run! Oh my god…my baby is growing up and leaving her nest. Look how brave you are." She pinched my cheeks, and I slapped her hand away.

"Grow up, you child," I snapped.

"I'll keep Xavier distracted. I'll say you're ill or vomiting or pooping or something. You know how good I can lie, trust me."

"...Sure."

"Do you need food? A backpack? Anything you want to take with you?"

"Are you serious? I'm not going on a hike, Lola. I'm simply going to where we were and following where they went to see what’s happening, then I'll be back. In fact, I'll run, so double the speed."

"Good luck with that." She laughed at my idea.

"Yeah, whatever." I shrugged. "I'm going so I can get this dumb thing over with. You better cover me, or I swear to Zeus, I will—"

"I got you, boo." She grinned. "I'll protect you."

I went to the back door, and we stayed silent for a second, listening for any signs of Xavier getting up, or Colton coming back.

Nothing.

"Good luck," she whispered. "Don't die—I believe in you." She rooted me on.

I left out on the short journey and felt her eyes on me until I disappeared from sight. I hadn't turned back to wave or anything because I knew I'd run to her and ruin this whole idea. I just couldn't stomach being in that silent house, not knowing when he was going to come from his room. Maybe to murder me, or—

*Snap*!

My heart jumped when I heard the snap from my left. I quickly looked toward it, but it was only a tree—a large tree. I assumed a branch had fallen from it. Maybe I hadn't even heard anything, and my mind was already trying to play tricks on me.

I continued on my trek, humming songs to myself. I hummed them low enough so only I could hear. I did it to distract myself from any of nature's normal sounds, so I wouldn't get worked up.

The leaves could rustle in the wind, and I would think it was a monster after me. My whole mind was a train wreck right now; I was such a scared-y cat—one of my worst flaws. It was so embarrassing, and once someone found out it was your weak spot, they enjoyed scaring you.

I sped up my walk, my mind reminding me that I had told Lola I would run. That was a lie…I wasn't going to run—I never ran.

People who did that were insane. I liked to walk...if I even did walk. *Run*! I realized this was where Lola told me to run earlier, where we saw the guys. I looked forward but, of course, they weren't there. I didn't know why I was expecting them to be.

With a quiet groan, I pushed myself in the direction Lola and I had split up from the noise. I suddenly realized, the guys must have seen us and made noises to scare us. Then we ran, and they caught us.

*Snap*!

*Don't look*, I told myself, *it's just a tree*.

Since when did it feel like a tree was watching me? A low rumble came, like a low growl.

I didn't want to look.

No way something was there. There was no presence a minute ago; I didn't even feel like I was being watched. I heard nothing. I turned slowly, and my heart dropped. I went weak at the knees as I stared at the wolf-bear.

*Nope*. This was fake. This was some movie stuff. This was not real.

A wolf that wasn't the size of a wolf...it was bigger…just stood there. A WOLF! A WOLF I HADN'T HEARD SUDDENLY APPEARED OUT OF NOWHERE!

It was in a stance I recognized from my neighbor's dog, ready to attack. It growled, confirming my thoughts.

The panic set in.

I let out the loudest scream ever, and the wolf's ears perked. As I turned to run, I saw its hind legs tense up, ready to spring. If this beast ate me, then at least I wouldn't be eaten by the beast back at the house.

*Awesome*.

**Episode 16**

The way the creature’s eyes bore into my own freaked me out. The eyes looked almost human, as if there was real emotion behind them. It was terrifying.

Which was why I did a 180 and started running the fuck out of there.

Where was I supposed to go? No doubt it would catch up to me, and I couldn’t turn back to run to the house! I’d run face first into it!

Maybe I was hallucinating. There wasn’t a wolf-bear behind me—only a manifestation of cabin fever. Nope, nothing to worry about at all, just taking a jog in the woods.

The panting and rumbling at my heels convinced me otherwise.

Then, I was screaming. Like full-on scary-movie, a-serial-killer-following-me screaming. My lungs were burning, and fear coursed through me—was my fear triggering the beast more?

I turned to look behind me—a *terrible* idea—and I saw nothing. Holding my breath, I stopped. No way. I’d SEEN the wolf-bear right in front of me. And now it was nowhere to be found.

Was I losing my mind?

“Watch out!” a deep voice shouted.

Turning, I let out a cry when I was thrown to the ground. The impact knocked the wind out of me, the sick feeling in my stomach threatening to come up. For a moment, my vision was blurry. Then I made out Xavier kneeling next to me.

“Why the hell were you just standing there?!” His voice was raised. “You were going to let that jump on you and rip you apart? Are you *insane*?”

“What was that thing?” I asked, pushing myself up weakly. My entire body was shaking as I got to my feet.

“Something that wants to kill you,” Xavier said way too nonchalantly. “A wild wolf.”

I shook my head. “No, those aren’t normal wolves.”

Xavier rolled his eyes. “You starting with that wolf-bear thing again?”

I didn’t answer. For all I knew, Xavier was a mad scientist breeding those creatures, and I was next. I didn’t care if that sounded crazy—it felt like nothing would surprise me after what I’d just seen.

Quickly, I began heading back to the house, not really caring whether Xavier was following me. I needed to get back to the house. To Lola. Panic was still pumping through my veins. What if a wolf-bear snuck up on me again? Or Xavier…

He was hiding something.

I got back to the house faster than I expected. Bursting into the house, I found Lola sitting in the living room.

“Hey Cali—whoa, are you okay? You look like you’re about to pass out,” she said, hurrying toward me. “Sit down.”

“No,” I said, grabbing her hands. “We have to go. We can’t stay here. I think they’re hiding something. Something *bad*.”

“What? Who? Colton and Xavier?” she asked. “Cali, calm down, and we can—”

“DON’T TELL ME TO CALM DOWN!” I shouted. “They’re crazy, and they’re hiding something, Lola. They’re probably going to kill us! And there’s a creature in the woods! They paid us that much money because they’re going to experiment on us to become wolf-bears!”

Lola stared at me for a second. Maybe I was letting my imagination go too wild, but we were in DANGER! We needed to leave. Now.

The back door opened.

I grabbed Lola’s hand and pulled her up. Leading her, we went upstairs, and I pulled her into the first room I saw and slammed the door shut.

“ARE YOU INSANE?!” Lola asked. “You’re trapping us up here!”

“Use your body to block the door while I find something!” I said.

I ran to the window, looking out it. It was a pretty high drop down there. My eyes scanned the room for something to barricade the door. A set of drawers, but that would take way too long and be too heavy.

“Ow!” Lola yelped as the door opened.  
  
“Ladies,” Colton said, strolling in with Xavier close behind.

Fuck it. I pulled the window open and climbed up. The shocked look on Xavier and Colton’s faces was actually nice to watch.

“WHAT ARE YOU DOING?! GET DOWN!” Lola screamed.

"I will jump out of this window before I become a human experiment!" I pushed Lola off me. "I can get us help!"

"*We* don't need help! *You* will if you jump out that window, though." She stared at me, terrified.

Lola was probably right, but things usually looked higher than they actually were, so the jump wasn't life threatening, right? But what was life threatening was staying with these people.

"Grab her before she jumps!" Xavier shouted at Lola.

She did as she was told, about to pull me back in, but the adrenaline kicked in, and I jumped. The only sound I heard before I crashed to the ground was Lola's horrified scream. I let out a yelp as I hit the ground. My butt hurt. Bad. I moved the rest of my body, relieved when I noticed nothing was broken. My eyes studied the bush I landed in, and the relief quickly faded.

Nettles.

My worst enemy as a child. Being stung by them...it wasn't the worst thing ever, but it definitely hurt. It was irritating and created gross bumps.

I tried not to move too much, slowly lifting my arms in the air because they were exposed. I winced when I realized there were already bumps forming on them. My top had hitched up a bit, and the nettles managed to reach my back—I knew there would be a stinging sensation later. Ugh. Nettle rash was one of the worst things ever.

“ARE YOU INSANE? WHY AM I EVEN ASKING?! YOU *ARE* INSANE!" Lola screeched at me, huffing after she’d run out to get to me.

My head snapped up to look at her, and shock was the first thing I felt when I saw tears streaming down her cheeks. Her eyes were already puffy, and her nose was as red as Rudolph’s.

"You're...crying?"

"OF COURSE I AM! MY BEST FRIEND JUMPED OUT A WINDOW. I THOUGHT YOU WOULD DIE OR BREAK SOMETHING!" She seemed horrified that I was surprised she was crying.

Two figures walking toward us caught my attention, and I suddenly remembered why I had sacrificed myself by jumping out of the window. I pushed myself up in a panic, trying to ignore the stinging sensation all over my body.

Once I was up, I tried to run, but my left foot came into contact with the ground, and I let out a cry and fell over. Lola caught me just in time, kneeling so I landed on her.

"I'm fine," I reassured her. "You need to run, though."

"*Please* tell me you didn't hit your head. What's wrong with you?"

"I told you—they're evil, Lola! You need to run. Get away!" I tried to push her off, but she held me tight, her lips pressed in a thin line.

"She's alive?" The deep voice made my hairs stand up and sent shivers down my spine.

"I think her ankle is injured, and she..." Lola turned to look where I landed. "She fell in nettles. Do you have a first aid kit? I can treat it."

"NO! DON'T TREAT IT! YOU NEED TO RUN IF YOU WANT TO GET OUT ALIVE." I struggled in her arms. "Please trust me, Lola! You always do."

She watched me before giving me a small smile. "What makes you think I'm doubting your insane thoughts? I'm not running because you're here—I wouldn't leave you with some maniacs."

I stared at her before tears formed in my eyes, and I hugged her. "LOLAAAAA, I LOVE YOU!"

She hugged me back with a laugh. "Please don't jump out any more windows."

"Bring her inside. Xavier's getting the kit," Colton said.

Lola pushed herself up, supporting me. I knew she wasn't going to run; I couldn't get away with her even if she did. She wouldn’t leave me, so my only choice was to go back with her into the house.

This was a stupid move.

If they attacked us now, I wouldn't be able to get away. I gave them an advantage. As Lola helped me inside, Colton looked over his shoulder at me. When our eyes met, I could have sworn I saw a grin appear, but he turned away before I could confirm my thoughts.

My blood ran cold as Lola sat me on the couch.

She spoke when Colton left the room. "What's going on, Cali?"

"There was a wolf-bear. I'm not lying. Xavier saved me from it, but then I realized he saved me because he needed me for an *experiment*. Another wolf-bear attacked the wolf-bear that attacked me, but Xavier wasn't afraid of it. He was *looking for it*. He can control it! I'm not joking—he CONTROLS them."

The clueless look she gave me made me rethink my words, and I realized how crazy I sounded. I let out a loud groan. Goosebumps appeared on my skin when I heard footsteps come into the room.

Lola was passed a first aid kit and an ice pack. She put the ice pack on my ankle, causing me to wince. I bit my lip to not let any profanities out. It felt like forever until Lola finally bandaged it up tidily. She made me use the ice pack for a while before using antiseptic spray and wrapping it. It was *tight*.

"It's just a sprain…not even a serious one." She was more relieved than me.

I glanced around the room, searching for Colton and Xavier. We were vulnerable, and they weren't attacking? Maybe they enjoyed the chase—they enjoyed torturing their victims by making them wait in fear.

"Where did they—OW!” I let out a cry when Lola poked my arm. My eyes snapped to the area, and I saw the nettle rash.

"We need to get you in a warm bath after I put this cream on and it dries."

"Where did they go?" I hissed as she began applying cream to the places that had the nettle rash. My back, my arms, my ankles, and hands.

"I don't know, Cali." She sighed. "They aren't going to kill us. Now don't run into anything, or the cream will rub off. I'm going to get a hot bath running for you."

"Lo—"

"No. You're taking a bath. It helps, believe me. You did this to yourself, and now I'm fixing you. No buts, understood?"

I watched as she pointed her finger at me and immediately knew she won. I looked away, sulking. "Fine, whatever."

She left me in silence, and I sat back down on the couch. I made sure not to lie back so the cream wouldn't rub off. I was ignoring the irritating sensations, hoping the bath would help.

"You've been making some accusations." My body tensed when I heard Colton. My stomach turned. Why did he come now when I was alone?

Were they trying to take us out one by one?

Taking a deep breath, I turned to look at him. He had his hands in his pockets, and his eyes bore into my own. "Hm?"

"Don't play dumb." He shook his head. "What's making you think all this weird stuff? You have quite the imagination."

"Imagination?" I challenged. "Is that what it is?"

He raised his eyebrows, not expecting my attitude.

"Do you have proof for your insane theory?"

"Xavier wasn't afraid of that wolf-bear. That wolf-bear didn't even *think* of attacking him. Instead, it saved him. Like a dog protecting its owner. That wasn’t a normal wolf either—that was the weird wolf-bear thing. A mutant creature."

"Mutant, huh? Wow, that might hurt the creature's feelings."

"Are you going to get it to kill me? Eat me?"

Colton watched me. "Kill? No. But I can guarantee one of those creatures will eat you soon." A grin appeared, and he chuckled like he made some joke.

I didn't laugh. I felt sick, and the hairs on the back of my neck stood up. I watched him closely, not understanding him.

"You guys are going to take the money back."

"What?" Colton looked confused.

"You paid us to come here. Then when you turn us into the wolf-bear, you'll take it back."

"Smart idea." Xavier came out from the door next to Colton.

My heart sped up. I was dead. Was this it?

"Hey," Lola called, peeping from the bathroom. "It's ready."

My savior. My hero. My queen.

I rushed past the guys, only now realizing how sweaty my palms were. My whole body was sweating. When I turned to look back at them, they were whispering to each other.

"You look petrified," Lola commented as she tested the bath's temperature with her hand. "It's perfect. Get in. The towel’s there." She nodded to the railing.

"You'll be okay. I'll protect you." She grinned before shutting the door behind me. I wanted to trust her words, but I couldn't.

Peeling off my clothes, I hopped into my bath. It burned my skin as I adjusted myself but slowly, I got used to it. The heat relaxed my tense muscles, and I could feel the tingly sensation surrounding the nettle rashes. I let out a relaxed sigh, lying back and shutting my eyes.

I almost fell asleep twice, I was so drowsy and stressed. The water soothed and massaged my body. I didn't know how long I had been in there, but when the door clicked open, I knew it was Lola telling me to get out before the water got cold, and I got sick.

"A while longer," I mumbled sleepily.

"No."

That wasn't Lola's voice. Unless she turned into a guy.

I shrieked and jumped up, covering myself. Water splashed onto the ground and my clothes. Xavier stood there, his eyes avoiding my body.

"OH MY GOD, GET OUT!" I attempted to lower back into the water to cover myself.

"No, you get out."

"What?" My face was boiling.

"Lola's waiting for you."

"Wait. What do you mean waiting?"

"You want to find out about the wolf-bears? If you do, come with me now."

"DID YOU TURN HER INTO A WOL— OH MY GOD! LOLA!" I jumped out of the bath, wrapping a towel around me and running out of the room before I was stopped abruptly. I was pulled back and slammed into Xavier's hard chest.

"Don't run. You don't want to injure yourself again, do you?"

I breathed heavily, but he walked past me casually. Needless to say, I was *terrified* of what was going to happen.

**Episode 17**

"Not like this," I called after him. He looked back to me, raising his eyebrows.

I pointed down to my body, reminding him I was only wearing a towel. "I'm not going out like this."

"Why not?"

"WHAT DO YOU MEAN WHY NOT?!" I asked. "First of all, it's indecent. Second of all, if you're going to kill me, I don't want to be found naked, obviously."

"Okay?" The word came out more of a question than anything. "You may want to hurry, though." He left without another word. Why did everything they said sound so sinister and threatening? *You may want to hurry, though.*

So I did. I turned and rushed to my temporary room, almost plowing through my closet. I ended up in the first pair of leggings I saw and a *Crash Bandicoot* t-shirt. After quickly drying my body, I threw them on as well as undergarments. I glanced at the hair dryer but just tied my hair up into a bun instead.

I raced out of the room and sprinted out back, only wearing socks. I didn’t know if I had time to put on shoes; I felt like I’d already wasted enough time. As I pulled the sliding glass doors open, all I could do was hope Lola was all right and not injured.

"Lola!" I shouted when I spotted her sitting on the grass. "Are you all right?!" I sprinted over, kneeling next to her.

She looked up to me, raising her eyebrows. "I'm fine."

"You never know with these two." I sighed. "We might die right now."

"You're crazy."

"I'm serious." I sat next to her. We were basically accepting our fate. Although I was sitting, my muscles were tense, ready to spring up at any moment and pull Lola with me. My eyes continuously flew around the area, trying to find any wolf-bears.

"I have an idea of what's going to happen."

"What's that?" Lola asked.

"Either they're bringing the wolf-bears to eat us, pretending to show them to us, or worse—they're going to tie us up and experiment on us until we turn into one of them."

"If you think that's going to happen, why aren't you panicking?"

"Oh, I am."

"Why aren't you running?"

"Because you won't run, and I'm not leaving you behind, obviously."

"Hey!" I jumped when Xavier shouted. "Follow me."

Lola pushed herself up and casually walked toward him. I chased her, gripping onto her arm tightly. She gave me a sideways glance and a small smile.

I didn't return it. Xavier disappeared from the garden, going into the woods.

"Yup," I confirmed. "Definitely about to die."

As we left the garden, I was grabbed and torn away from Lola. I spun around in fear, a hand clamping over my mouth.

"LET HER GO!" Lola cried, reaching for me.

"I'm not going to hurt her," Xavier said calmly.

"THEN LET HER GO!" She was about to hit him.

"I can't. She'll run."

Lola looked behind her as if expecting someone to be there. "Run? Run from what? What are you doing?"

"Showing you something," he said, his eyes blank. I furiously struggled in his arms, attempting to bite his hand, but it didn't work. He didn't seem one bit affected by it.

"*You* won't run." He looked to Lola. "This one will."

"I'll hold her—I won't let her run." Lola had a stare off with him. "Let her go." Her face was a blank expression, and her eyes burned into Xavier's. She didn't fear him as he towered over her. Her hand reached out and grabbed my arm. "Now," she added.

Suddenly, his arms untangled from me, and he dropped his hand from my mouth. "Fine. If she runs, it's your funeral." He was angry. He stared at Lola, flames in his eyes.

I fell into her arms, my heart racing. I only snapped out of my heavy breathing when Xavier whistled loudly. I looked at him, my brow furrowing. Lola was searching the area with her eyes, trying to determine why he whistled.

Shivers ran down my spine, goosebumps rose on my arms. I knew why he whistled. And it only took a few seconds for the large creature to appear.

"I TOLD YOU! WOLF-BEAR!!" I shook Lola vigorously.

Her eyes were wide, and her jaw dropped. "W-What is that?" It was rare for Lola to look so scared.

Xavier glanced at the wolf-bear with little interest. It looked over to him momentarily before looking at us.

"Sit," Xavier said.

The wolf-bear glanced back at him, letting out a snarl, which only made Xavier grin. A rare expression for him. That snarl was enough for me and Lola to spin on our heels and run.

I heard what Xavier said right as we sprinted away, and the words sent a shiver down my spine. "Get them."

We probably shouldn't have run, but now that we already were, we couldn't stop. We were going to be killed if that thing caught up to us.

*If* it caught up to us. More like *when*.

The loud thumping of its paws racing after us sent my body into overdrive, and I sped ahead of Lola, grabbing her hand and dragging her along behind me. Even at top speed, we were no match for it. We didn't have a chance.

Its dark color sprinted past us, and before we knew it, the large wolf-bear stood in front of us. Its eyes burned into ours, snarling loudly. It bared its teeth, lowering its head and creeping forward.

I backed away, my eyes burning from fear. Then I whacked into a wall.

A human wall, that is.

"What did I say?" Xavier asked. "I wasn't finished with you yet."

Lola was pale, and the fear in her eyes hurt me. I tightened my grip on her hand, and she looked up to me for reassurance. I was the one to give her a small smile now. She had been strong for me all this time, but now it was my turn. I turned around to face Xavier. "What do you want to do with us?"

"Oh, look who's playing brave now."

"Playing brave? No. I'm sick of this. You're messed up—both you and Colton! I DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT THING IS! IS IT A WOLF OR A BEAR? IS IT SOME HUMAN TURNED INTO A WOLF-BEAR? BECAUSE THAT THING IS NOT NORMAL." I glared at him. "And y-you...paying for us to come here to scare us like this…it isn't normal."

"That's what you're here for?" He tilted his head. "Are you sure that's why you took our money?"

I sucked in a breath, not letting my cheeks warm. I was in a life-and-death situation now. There was one monster in front of me, and one behind me.

"I don't know what you're going to do to us, but I’m the reason we’re here, so please let Lola go."

"Wh—"

"Shut up, Lola," I stopped her and turned back to Xavier. "I don't care if you turn me into a wolf-bear, just don't harm Lola. I'm begging you." Okay, I *did* care if he turned me into a wolf-bear. In fact, I was terrified as soon as the words left my mouth.

But as long as Lola got away, as long as Lola was okay, I'd be fine.

"You're crazy," Lola told me. "I'm the reason you’re here. I posted the ad; I accepted the offer from Colton..."

"That's a lie—I accepted it."

"Have your little heart-to-heart love-fight later." Xavier sighed, bringing his hand to his face. "Are you two going to shut up now and let me speak? *Or* do you want to continue this game of catch until he has to drag you back with his teeth."

This man was terrifying. He knew it, and he enjoyed it.

"We'll shut up," Lola spoke up before I could continue my little speech. I turned to glare at her, but she focused on everything but me. She refused to turn my way.

"What are you two thinking right now?" Xavier asked.

I wanted to shout at him to stop toying with us, but Lola spoke first. "You know how we feel," she said. "Why are you asking?"

"Because he's a sadist," I answered for her.

He looked at me. "Are you sure you want to be giving me attitude?" He raised his hand and brought his index finger up, pointing behind us. "Are you hungry?" The loud rumble behind us made me want to vomit right then and there.

"Do you want to apologize?"

I bit my tongue. I didn't want to apologize; I wanted to do the exact opposite. I wanted to tell him to go jump off a cliff, I wanted to cry and run away. I wanted to hit him, but I couldn't do any of those. We were trapped.

He knew he had us trapped. He knew he was in control.

"I have a question." Lola raised her head. The look of fear had disappeared off her face, and now it was shock...as if she’d realized something.

She gave the wolf-bear a quick glance behind us before turning back to Xavier. He was watching her now, waiting for her to speak.

"Ask your question," Xavier said as I watched in confusion. "If it is a question."

As if something he said confirmed her thoughts, she stood up straight with her mouth slightly open. She looked over to me, but I still had no idea what was going on. She noticed I was clueless and turned back to Xavier.

"Where is he?"

"Who?" I asked.

"Where is Colton, Xavier?"

Xavier smiled. It looked almost nice but obviously wasn't.

My brow furrowed as I thought about her question, and just as my mind began to realize what she was hinting at, Xavier answered. His eyes went past us and landed on the creature behind us. "He's been here the whole time."

**Episode 18**

"Okay..." Lola breathed out. "I was right."

"You named your wolf after your brother?"

Xavier gave me a look like I had three heads before glancing at Lola, arching an eyebrow. "Care to explain?"

Lola glanced over to me, looking faint. "That's Colton. Actual Colton. He is...this wolf."

"Okay, no." I laughed. "False."

"You can't just say false." Xavier raised his eyebrows.

"Well, I did."

"So...it's okay to believe in wolf-bears and us being evil scientists, but you're not okay believing this?"

"Are you crazy?" I laughed. "Of course not. What I said is scientifically possible, in a fucked-up way. What you’re saying is something from fairytales."

"This isn’t a fairytale."

"I got that." I paused. None of this stopped the fact there was a hungry wolf behind us who could eat us at any second. I turned to look at Lola. She was watching the wolf, so I couldn't read the expression in her eyes. Her face was extremely pale, her lips almost white, too—the bright pink color draining.

"Hey, Lola...he's not serious," I said, concerned about how she was acting. I reached out, grabbing her arm. "Come on, snap out of it."

Her blank eyes flashed to me for a moment. "He's not lying."

"Yes, he is," I argued. "You called me crazy earlier—now look who's acting crazy."

She nodded her head. "Your theory is more believable, but in this case, you're wrong. And I think I'm going to pass out."

How could she believe this so easily? I turned to look at the wolf again…it was staring at me now. Its eyes locked on mine as if watching my soul. When it noticed it had my attention, it licked its lip with a snarl. I wasn't afraid at that moment—I was focused. This had to be some sick joke.

His eyes, though...

So human.

His ears fell back, his head lowering. He steered toward me, the snarl growing louder, ready to pounce on his prey.

"Stop playing." Xavier's voice was deep. "Show her."

The wolf-bear's head snapped up, aiming in Xavier's direction. It was scary, as if it understood his words correc—

IT ROLLED ITS EYES!

"OH MY GOD, THE WOLF ROLLED ITS EYES!" I screamed. "I'VE NEVER—OH MY GOD."

At the sound of my terrified scream, the wolf bear returned its gaze to me. It let out a huff, sounding more like a sigh than anything. Then came the sound of bones cracking. The wolf began…not shrinking, but it looked…deformed.

I was the type of person to get weak at hospitals, so the moment I heard the crack, I let out a cry and shut my eyes, not wanting to see what was happening. I knew Lola was fine, but I didn't want to see.

It could have been mistaken for a tree branch the first time, but the cracking continued loudly before finally stopping. I stayed silent for what seemed like forever before peeking out through my hand.

"See?" Lola's voice shook.

My eyes widened, my jaw involuntarily dropping. I stared at the man in front of me. Colton stood there, his eyes flicking from Lola to me and then Xavier. My face heated at his naked body, but he wasn’t even fazed by it.

Usually, I would turn away in embarrassment and apologize for looking at someone naked, but this time was different. Now I stared at him in shock, horror, and confusion. The wolf was gone. Colton had arrived. Those eyes.

There was no mistake.

His eyes matched the wolf-bear that was here before.

"Oh my god," I breathed. "Y-You...YOU EXPERIMENTED ON YOUR BROTHER AND TURNED HIM INTO A WOLF-BEAR!"

Colton's expression changed, and he stared at me like I had three heads. I looked to Lola, who watched me, biting her lip.

"Not exactly."

I hesitated. *Okay*. I was out of scientific solutions.

"You're a wolf...like...a werewolf thing from the movies?"

Colton shrugged. "Yes and no, I guess."

"You were quick to realize," Xavier spoke to Lola. "Your friend here…not so much."

A smirk appeared on Colton's face, and he shrugged. "She's taking it better than expected. She's almost acting normal." Better than expected? Is that what he said? Probably.

But he was wrong.

Everything was silent, my ears ringing. My vision blurred, covered by black, hazy rings. I tried to nod and open my mouth to talk, but it was too late.

The last thing I remembered was falling to the floor with a loud thump.

\*\*\*

My eyes wouldn't open. They didn't want to. I felt myself lying on something comfortable.

"Cali," I heard Lola's voice. "Cali?"

My eyes peeled open, desperate to find my friend. After a moment, they adjusted, and I noticed her sitting above me, a relieved smile on her face. When I saw the smile, I also noticed worry in her eyes. I slowly recollected my thoughts of what happened. I had passed out because...

My stomach swirled, and I felt nauseous. I forced myself up with wide eyes, and my heartbeat accelerated. She immediately knew why.

Lola gripped my shoulders and calmly laid me back down. "Cali, look at me." Her voice was so soothing that my body almost relaxed.

I was on a bed—the bed in my temporary room. Had they carried me back?

"W-What happened?"

"Based on your mini freak out, I assume you remember?" Her brow furrowed, confused.

I nodded quickly. "Wolves."

"They are—"

"They are hybrids."

"Well...I'd call them werewolves; I don't know if that's the right term."

"Why are you so calm about this?! We just found out something that was never taught to us. There are real humans that can turn into wolves like in stories! Does NASA know? Have they hidden this from us? Does this mean unicorns are real? I can't trust this world anymore." I started panting.

"Calm down—listen to me." She brushed my hair back from my face. "I am...concerned as well. But I’ve been awake and have slowly started accepting this. I'm not saying I'm calm about the whole thing; I'm just saying we can't afford to freak out."

"What if they kill us? They hid it from us, so they probably hide it from everyone! This means it's a secret. A secret people like us shouldn't know! Why the hell would they tell us?"

"I blame you."

"First, that does not answer my question. Second, how the hell is it my fault?" I stared at her in shock. I couldn't tell if she was serious or not.

"If you hadn't been so nosy and continuously dug—"

"No, no, no! *You* are the one who wanted to go out that day! *Both* days. Remember, I went in your place, so you cannot blame me for this."

Her lips pressed into a thin line. "That was your choice. Not to mention, you're the one who screamed at them about it and tried to run away and report them. If you had kept quiet about the whole thing…"

"Who the hell can keep quiet about that?!"

"I'm not saying fully quiet, you should have just told me."

"You called me crazy!"

We stared at each other for a moment before she sighed. "This isn't getting us anywhere."

"Let's not argue right before we die."

Lola frowned. "Don't be so depressing. We aren't going to die."

"Yes, we are. They don't trust us. Why would they tell someone they don't trust? Probably because they plan on killing us. A corpse can't tell secrets."

She had a blank expression and didn't say anything for a few moments, which worried me. Lola always had an argument against my logic, but this time she stayed silent.

"Lola?"

"I can't imagine they'd kill us bec—" She sighed. "Listen, I don't know. Why don't we ask them?"

"Okay, you're crazy. What we do is run. Far, far away. We go home—forget about the money, forget about these two men not being humans, and continue on with our lives casually." I gave her a bright smile.

A grin appeared on her face. "I thought about that."

I was relieved she didn't find my idea crazy but worried because she said *thought*. This meant she didn't want to do the plan or that she thought it was a bad idea.

"Then why didn't you offer the idea?"

"Think about it, Cal. Those guys, they're...werewolves." She almost choked out the word. "If that's even the word for them.”

"I'm aware."

"If we run, you don't think they'd notice? Wolf noses are amazing. Maybe they even have a better nose than normal wolves. Not to mention, they could outrun us four times over—we wouldn't get anywhere."

"We aren't certain Xavier's one," I commented.

"They're brothers. Of course he is."

"They could be adopted brothers."

"They look the same." She shook her head.

I bit my lip. "It's not impossible that he *isn't* one, Lola."

"That's beside the point, Caliana." She sighed. "Whether it's one werewol— I'm just going to say wolf. Whether it's one wolf or ten, we cannot outrun them."

"There are two of us."

"You think two of us could take on that giant thing?"

No, we certainly couldn't. That wolf could rip us both in half with one bite. He would pounce on us, and it would be over. I knew she was right, but I was trying to think of every possible solution.

"What if we call someone to rescue us?"

"Like who? We don't have many friends."

"Our parents."

"You want to endanger your parents' lives?"

"No." I sighed. "The cops?"

"You think they'd believe us? Think about it. You tell them that they're wolves, they ask why you're here, you say to sell your virginity. How do you think that's going to go down?"

"Stop being so logical!" I snapped at her. "Ugh, I'm sorry."

"It's fine." Lola sighed. "I'm worried, too." When Lola was worried, that was when it was really time to worry. Although she acted childish, she was an extremely calm and collected person when needed. She was logical and always...well, *almost* always found a way out.

We both froze when we heard footsteps coming toward the room. Our eyes flashed to the door. I had been nervous even before I found out what they were, but now that I knew what Colton could turn into...I was terrified.

We sat in silence forever until the handle finally moved, and the door opened. Colton appeared with a wide smile on his face. "Hello, ladies."

Neither of us spoke.

"Try not to be scared, they can sense fear," I hissed to Lola.

"I can hear you." Colton sighed, leaning against the doorframe. "My, my. You two both look awfully pale. Is there a problem?"

We didn't say anything, only continued to glare at him. I was trying to show my angriest and most pissed off look, when in reality I was absolutely petrified.

"Silent treatment?" He tilted his head. "Did I do something wrong?"

"Stop playing dumb," Lola snapped. "What are you doing?"

He glanced around. "Standing in a doorway, talking to you two?"

"Cut the crap, Colton!"

He shut his eyes with a sigh before they flashed open, a sinister smile on his face. He looked hungry as he eyed both of us. "We want to have a taste..."

**Episode 19**

I watched him for a moment before averting my gaze. They landed on a vase, an unusual one, and of course, my quick thinking went into action.

I know some may think of it as a stupid move but for me, I saw it as a clever one. He just threatened to eat us after we found out they were giant wolves that could easily tear a human in half.

Now, for a normal person, they might think *Oh, it's perfect! It's going to be a love story; you're going to fall for the werewolf and have were-puppies! He's probably an Alpha too, so hot! Who cares if he threatens your life and plans to eat you? He's hot.*

That was only in movies and books. This was no *Twilight* nonsense. There was no Count Dracula or Edward Cullen about to appear. This was a terrifying, unexplainable thing that showed up in our lives. One we would either die from or run away and never speak of again.

When I grabbed that vase and smashed it over his head, of course I thought it was a better idea than sitting around, ready to be devoured.

The smash made me jump as it collided with his head, the glass breaking. My heart sped up when I realized how hard the impact was, and I knew this was bad.

I grabbed a horrified Lola by the hand and pulled her past him. Colton was now on the ground, holding his head.

I had hoped that would knock him out. Maybe it was because he was a wolf-bear or werewolf thing, but how could I be sure? I was rarely a violent person.

"WHY?!" Lola screamed at me as I tugged her down the stairs.

"I DON'T KNOW!" I responded in the same tone, pulling her toward the door. My heart was skipping too many beats, and my head was spinning.

The air was knocked out of me, and I lost my grip on Lola's hand. I was thrown to the wall, a loud, choked cough leaving my mouth. I was only on the ground for a few seconds before I was lifted by the scruff of my collar. I stared at Colton, who was raging. His eyes were burning, and he shot daggers into my own.

My breath was raspy as he held me up against the wall with little effort. I kicked my legs and flailed my arms, but he barely even noticed. He was mad—he could probably only see red.

"I will kill you," he growled, and his voice sent shivers down my spine.

Another smash.

I was dropped to the ground, and only then did I realize how much air I lost. I spluttered and coughed as Lola dragged me up. When I looked back, I realized she smashed something else over his head. What it was, I wasn't sure, but I sure as hell hoped it was bigger than that vase.

Lola let out a scream as she was tugged to the ground, causing me to flinch back as I held her hand.

Colton. *How* was he already up from that?

My heart raced as he grabbed Lola by the shirt and pulled her off the ground aggressively. I'm surprised I didn't let out a war cry as I charged at the injured man, diving onto him. I knew my fists and punches wouldn't help in any way. If smashing two strong objects onto his head wouldn't take him down, then I couldn't do any harm with my fists.

Instead, I opened my mouth wide and bit down onto his skin. He dropped Lola and grabbed me to throw me off. I landed on the couch, thankfully not injuring my head.

"STOP!" The loud voice made me jump. It was demanding and threatening; it held so much authority that I instantly stopped and calmed down. I pushed myself up from the couch weakly, glancing around.

Colton stood up straight now, his eyes on Xavier. Lola was sitting up from her spot on the ground. Her eyes left Xavier's to look at me. I noticed her eyes roam my body, checking if I was injured, but I nodded, giving her the sign I was fine.

A relieved look appeared on her face, and she nodded back, letting me know she was okay, too.

"What happened?" We all turned to Xavier. "Why did you try to kill them?"

*Kill them.*

"I made a joke, and they tried to kill me!" Colton snapped.

"Explain."

"I simply said we were going to have a taste. My joke was toward that little bitch." He pointed to me. "I was talking about how you and she are going to have sex. Meaning you'll probably eat her, sexually, but of course this idiot jumped to conclusions."

"This idiot found out you're a monster that could easily kill us!" I retorted.

When he looked my way, hairs stood up on my skin. My mind reminded me not to talk to him like that again.

"Continue." Xavier arched an eyebrow.

"She grabbed that thing in the room and smashed it onto my head." He brought his hand to his hair and showed the blood to Xavier. "Then when I chased them, the other one smashed me over the head again."

“And you’ve done nothing to me? You’ve been harassing me since I stepped inside this house.”

"Hmm." Xavier seemed to think, taking in both of our words. "Well, these two are nervous from our little secret, so I think you should have let them off with a warning."

"This was a warning. I just hadn't finished it yet," Colton said. "Why would I kill them so quick? I'm not that nice."

Xavier shook his head while a large grin formed on Colton's face.

"Now," Xavier spoke to us. "What you did to Colton. If you ever attempt to do anything like that to me, both your necks will be snapped in seconds. Understood?"

The mature Xavier who had seemed to be on our side, seemed to be calming down the situation, was gone. Colton walked over and punched his shoulder lightly. "Atta boy, Xav, you show 'em who's boss."

"Don't lose your temper again." Xavier glared at his brother. "Understood?"

"Okay, sorry, Mom." Colton rolled his eyes before glancing back at us. "Well?"

"Well, what?" Lola breathed out, obviously still taken aback from being pushed down.

"Are you going to run?"

"Are you letting us?" I questioned.

"Sure." Colton nodded.

"Sure," Lola said. "Meaning you'll let us run, but you won't let us escape?"

"Correct."

"You two should be grateful," Xavier spoke up, eyeing both of us. "Yet you do the exact opposite. Didn't your parents raise you to be proper ladies?"

The tone in his voice pissed me off. "Grateful for what?! Being kidnapped by monsters?"

"First of all, it's rude to call us monsters." Colton shook his head. "Second of all, you came here willingly."

Xavier stood forward, but it was so different from Colton. Xavier had so much...authority? One look from him was intimidating. His eyes flashed from Lola to me. "You can leave if you want."

"What?" Colton looked confused, glancing over to his brother. I was curious...no, *scared* was the right word. Was he actually letting us go? Colton seemed to think so.

"You may leave," he repeated, "but I can't guarantee you will live."

"Isn’t that basically what Colton said?" Lola spoke up.

Xavier shook his head with a sigh, pointing to Colton and then himself. "I didn't say it would be we who killed you, did I?"

My eyes widened. *Wolves.* Wolves lived in packs.

My face drained of all color, and Xavier noticed immediately. A small smile appeared on his lips as he walked over to me. "You understand now?"

"There are more of you."

"Correct." He nodded. "And if they find out you—little humans—know they exist, you'll be dead before you even realize what's going on."

"They don't know, though, so we can go. We won't tell on you guys."

Xavier tilted his head, bringing his finger under my chin, tilting my head up. He arched an eyebrow. "Why should we believe you?"

"Because if we told anyone, we’d be signing our own death certificates."

"Good point," Colton commented.

"So?" I asked hopefully.

"I said you can leave." Xavier nodded. "But your safety isn't my concern when you leave this house. Once you are gone, you survive on your own."

"The others don't know we know about them."

"Are you sure?"

I blinked before my mouth fell open. "That wolf..." I mumbled, pointing to Colton. "The one you fought. The one that tried to kill me..."

"Clever girl."

I didn't know what to say. I didn't know what to think. The one sentence that was replaying in my head wasn't the most important one. It wasn't the one I should be worrying about, but it was the one that confused me the most.

They had risked their lives to save me.

**Episode 20**

"You saved me," I breathed out.

"What?" Xavier seemed surprised by my words.

"You and he…saved me?" I was trying to put two and two together. Why would they save me?

"That's what you’re thinking about right now?" Colton sighed.

"Let me get this straight." Lola broke into the conversation. "They know we're humans?"

"Yes."

"They know we know about you?"

"Now they do, yes."

"They aren't part of your pack?"

"Pack," Colton hummed. "No, we don't have a *pack*."

"So…werewolves—I don't know if that's what you guys are properly called—but they don't live in packs? Is that just in movies or how does this work?"

"They can."

"A—"

"Wait," I interrupted Lola. "Why are you telling us? Why are you answering her questions?"

Colton arched an eyebrow. "Why wouldn't I? You saw what I turned into. Why hide anything else?" A sly grin formed across his lips.

"These ones aren't your friends? Why don't you have a pack?" Lola continued.

"It's easier that way—way more fun, too." Colton had a wide grin on his face. Xavier was expressionless, listening to the questions and allowing his brother to answer. "But, no, they aren't our friends. Wolves that aren't in packs together aren't really friendly with one another."

"They can turn human, too?"

"Correct."

"Why are you two alone?"

Silence. Dead silence.

Colton, who had a relaxed look on his face, seemed to change. He had a blank expression momentarily before screwing up his face like he was lost in thought.

"I think that's enough," Xavier said. "You understand now?"

"You're good guys?"

Colton barked a laugh, throwing his head back. "The good guys?!" He acted as if she said the funniest joke ever. Lola stared at him, not changing her serious expression.

"You saved Cali."

"Saved?" Colton tilted his head before looking at his brother. "Incorrect."

"There are no *good guys*. This isn't some superhero movie," Xavier spoke up. "We didn't *save* you because we wanted you to live. We didn't know if you informed friends you were coming here, so it wouldn't be a good idea to let you die and have the police pester us."

"I did it for fun. Killing people...I can't tell you how relaxing it is. Releases all stress in your body." Colton shivered in joy. It scared me.

"No one knows we're here."

"Cali!" Lola snapped.

"Thank you for that information."

I shut my eyes, cussing quietly at my huge mouth. When I reopened them, Colton was right in front of me. His eyes bore into mine, a smile still on his face. "You owe my brother something."

"Thank you?" I asked hopefully.

"Your V-card."

My eyes passed Colton and found Xavier, who was watching me casually. "Okay."

"Okay?" Colton and Lola said in unison.

"Let's get this over with."

"What?" Lola and Colton were in perfect sync, and if I weren't so worked up, I would be laughing. They both seemed to be taken aback by my response, but Xavier just arched an eyebrow.

"Okay," he said.

*OKAY*?! HE WAS SUPPOSED TO SAY NOW IS NOT THE TIME!

"Now?" My eyes widened.

"You said it."

"Of course I did!" I snapped.

"Wow. Now we all know you're having sex in the other room, how awkward is that?" Colton was trying to get under my skin, and honestly, it was working.

"And you’re not fully human!" Lola shouted back.

"Why would you bring that up now?" I groaned before freezing up. I turned toward Xavier, offering him a suspicious look. "How come you didn't turn into a wolf-bear?"

"Stop calling us that; I find it offensive,” Colton spoke up, interrupting the conversation.

Xavier raised his eyebrow at my question. “Who knows?”

“Stop the mystery act. Are you even one?”

“Maybe not.” He shrugged. “Come.”

“I’m not a dog.”

“Now.” He narrowed his eyes. Something in his eyes lured me toward him as I chewed on my cheek in frustration. I followed him slowly, becoming more nervous as I got closer to him. I glanced back at Lola in desperation, and she saluted me. Like a soldier. My eyes widened as I stared at her in shock, her horrible support letting me down by a mile. She gave me a weak shrug and a look that said *you asked for it*.

And I did.

I took money for this—I was in no place to complain. I had no right to run away, which was honestly what I wanted to do. I acted so brave just a moment ago, believing he wouldn’t want to do it right now.

I followed him silently, and to my surprise, neither Colton nor Lola said anything. I think they were having a moment of silence for me. Or, Lola was, at least.

Colton was probably enjoying this.

My cheeks tinted a light pink when I noticed Xavier looking back at me. He arched an eyebrow when I met his eyes, which confused me, because HE was the one watching me first.

He turned away from me and continued on to his room. When he entered, he stood near the door, allowing me to enter before shutting it behind us.

The click literally made me jump. This was happening. Like right now.

I had to deal with this. Like right now.

"Well?"

"Well," I responded.

"Are you ready?"

"Yes."

He nodded toward the bed, and I slowly made my way over, nibbling on my lip so hard I was surprised I hadn't chewed it off yet.

"Are you going to kill me?" I couldn't hold it in anymore. I was terrified. Was he just going to do it with me then kill me? Oh my god! What if he killed me before he did—

"No."

I sat on the bed and looked up to him, surprised by what he said. I had honestly been expecting a *yes*. Then again, a murderer didn’t usually warn you when they were going to kill you.

"Not unless you misbehave."

"Misbehave?" My cheeks flushed, my eyes quickly averting from his.

"Your mind really went there?" he asked, a touch of amusement in his voice. I looked up to him immediately, staring at him in shock.

"What do you mean *my mind went there*?" I snapped. "Of course it did! You're about to take my virginity, and you're surprised I have sexual thoughts in my head right now?"

He nodded. "Fair point."

"What do you have planned?" I eyed him.

"What do you mean, what do I have planned?" His brow furrowed, and he honestly looked confused.

"You're being...decent."

"Decent?"

"You made me cry before."

"If you cried because of that, it's pretty pathetic."

"Everyone cries! And I have hormones," I snapped.

"Well, I'm trying to be nice because I'm worried you'll have a heart attack."

"From *sex*?! I'm not an old woman. Oh my god, are you that big that I'll have a—"

"No." His lip twitched, but it stopped the moment I blinked. "You have a very unusual mindset, girl. I'm saying that you found out a lot of stuff recently, and some humans are prone to that…maybe?" He seemed unsure.

"And you care if I have one?"

"I don't know how to deal with that. I don’t want to be bothered by such a nuisance."

"So…what? We're going to do it, but…gently?"

He sighed. "You make this so awkward."

"Are you a wolf?"

He arched an eyebrow. "Excuse me?"

"You made Colton change. You didn't show any signs of doing anything yourself. You always say he'll hunt us down, but not you. Colton seems to act more on impulse too, kind of like there’s a wild side of him."

He watched me, his lips in a thin line. "Does it matter if I am?"

"I'd be more relaxed if you weren't. You know, so you don't accidentally rip me apart like your brother did to that other wolf."

"You should be grateful for that."

"Are you one?"

"Yes."

"I want to see."

"No."

I raised my hand and slapped him across the face. The slap rang through the room and made my hand sting.

"I hear some spanking going on in there." I heard Colton's voice as he walked past the door, going toward the direction of his room.

I stared up at Xavier, now extremely terrified. He looked at me with anger in his eyes. If I were crazy, I would have almost said they darkened.

"Why did y—"

"I saw it in *Twilight*! Bella slapped the wolf guy, and he got angry and shape-shifted into a werewolf." I held up my hands, playing innocent. "I thought it would work!"

He narrowed his eyes, wrapping his hand around my throat. I let out a choked gasp as he brought his face to mine, his eyes burning into mine with anger. His jaw tightened, and he tilted his head slightly. “If you ever—"

“This is hot.”

His anger turned to confusion as his eyebrows knitted together. His grip loosened slightly. “What?”

*Yes.* Distraction worked. Now to make sure I definitely wasn’t going to die from this, I needed an ultimate distraction.

I wrapped my arms around his neck and planted my lips on his. His hand around my neck fell to his side, from surprise or something, but it didn’t matter because I was safe.

Now....now it was time to finish the deal we had made.

**Episode 21**

My eyes were shut while my arms snaked around his neck. I was straddling him now, kissing him. His body had gone limp for a second, obviously not expecting my actions.

And yet here we were.

His hands held onto my waist tightly as I edged my body closer. It was sad to say, but this was probably the most action I’d had in my life, and my body was clearly excited by this, not letting my mind stop what was happening. His tongue slid across my lower lip, asking for entrance. A shiver ran down my spine as I parted my lips and let his tongue fight with my own.

Xavier tasted good, smelled good—he was like a drug.

My hands knotted in his hair and after what seemed like forever, I finally pushed against him, causing him to fall back on the bed. I pulled away from his lips, my eyes meeting his. He raised his eyebrows as I brushed back my hair from my face.

"We're not going to do it clothed, are we?" I was confused. My brows had knitted together, and suddenly his eyes shut, and he let out a sigh.

"I don't know if I can do this," he muttered.

"What?" I stared at him, offended.

"You're making it beyond awkward. You ask so many questions."

"I'm sorry for being nervous about my first time!"

"You shouldn't have sold it if you were going to chicken out." He pushed up so he was leaning up against the pillows.

I was still straddling his waist, staring down at him. "I'm not chickening out," I commented. "I simply asked a question."

"You seem frustrated." He tilted his head.

"I am!" I snapped. "I just want this over."

Xavier shut his eyes once more, removing his hands that were on my waist and putting them behind his head. "Okay. If you want this over, if you're not interest—"

"Wait, no. I don't know what to do. I can't do it alone."

His eyes flashed open once more. "Do you have to make everything awkward?"

"I can't help it." I frowned. "I'm ne—"

"Nervous, I know." He rolled his eyes. "It's just sex."

"Do you have a condom?"

"Once again, questions make it awkward." He paused. "Do you have condoms?"

"NO, I DON'T BECAUSE I'M A VIRGIN, XAVIER," I snapped. "But I have been educated enough to know protection is important. I am too young to be a mother."

"I don't have one."

"Do you call your kids pups or babies?"

"Why?"

"Why what?"

"Why are you like this?"

"That's offensive," I commented.

"You're really ruining the mood." He didn't look amused one bit. I studied him, and I could see how I was ruining the mood. He wasn't even hard.

My cheeks flushed from thinking about that, and he noted it with an arched eyebrow. I averted my eyes, trying to think. How do I seduce someone like him? I tried to wrack through my mind, thinking of things I learned from different movies.

Wolf. Alpha. Dominant. Possessive.

I was trying to tie in everything he could be into. Wolves proved their dominance, right? And he was a wolf. Kind of. Or maybe he was a Beta and…submissive. Was this even a thing?

I felt him move under me, and I assumed he was about to stand. I quickly put my hands on his chest, stopping him from doing anything. His eyes rolled up to look at me, slightly curious.

"I…" My mind thought of many things. "…want you to punish me?"

He didn't seem surprised by my words. What I said, I’d never really heard it come out of a normal girl’s mouth. Then again, this was my first time. Maybe this happened all the time in bedrooms.

"Why did that come out as a question?"

"It didn't."

"It did. Definitely."

"N-No. I—" My sentence stopped as I focused on him. I saw the hidden smirk on his face. He was messing with me, enjoying my embarrassment. "Sadist."

"You're into some weird things, Caliana."

"NO! YOU'RE INTO IT, NOT ME!" I almost screamed it, my face heating. This was humiliating. I shut my eyes, taking in a deep breath. After a few seconds of silence, I re-opened them, allowing my eyes to catch his. I shrugged. "It's fine."

"What is?"

"That you're a virgin."

He seemed surprised by this. "Excuse me?"

"You're not making any moves. You're just lying there. You don't know what to do. You're trying to embarrass me because you're embarrassed of yourself. Virg—" I let out a screech as I was thrown off him.

I don't know how it happened but suddenly I was under him. He stared down at me with an unusual look. It was kind of a bored one, yet one that showed he was proving something.

"Are you sure about that?"

"I think."

"You think…" His hand gripped the collar of my shirt, pulling me up. "You think I'm a sadist. You do realize whatever weird movies you watch aren't like real life? Do you want to see what a sadist really does?"

My eyes widened.

His hand wrapped around my throat, pulling me up into a sitting position so I was face-to-face with him. "Is this what you wanted?" He narrowed his eyes. "What else do you want me to do? Degrade you?"

"Wouldn't be the first time you did." I shrug. "If it gets you off, do as you please."

His brow furrowed when I said the words. I sounded so brave.

A knock came at the door. "Xavier." It pushed open, and Colton's eyes fell on us. He raised his eyebrows at the position we were in, before nodding. "Lilac's stopping by later."

"What's wrong with you?! Did you plan on walking in here to see us naked?" I was red hot now. We could have been doing it.

"You, maybe. Him? No." He shook his head. "I knew you wouldn't be doing it yet. You're a coward. In fact, I'm shocked you're..." he pointed to Xavier's hand on my throat, "…doing whatever you’re doing right now."

"Don't make this weirder than it already is," Xavier grumbled. "She's the most awkward girl I've ever met."

"Okay, I'll leave." Colton waved. "But remember: Lilac will be here later." He shut the door behind him. I stared after, incredibly embarrassed by the interruption.

I looked back to Xavier accusingly. "You should have gotten onto him more."

"Why?"

"Because—ugh, never mind." I threw my hands up before noticing his grip had loosened on my neck—it wasn't restricting any of my breathing.

"Have you ever killed someone?"

He arched his right eyebrow. "Why are you asking that right now?"

"I'm worried you'll forget how fragile I am and snap my neck." It wasn't a lie. He seemed so strong compared to me, and considering he wasn't fully human, he definitely was stronger than me.

He stared at me, frustrated, his jaw tight. I quickly shut my mouth, my lips pressing into a thin line as I offered him an innocent look. "No more questions."

"Good girl." He said it in a rude way, no praise involved. I scowled and wanted to say something along the lines of *you're the dog here*.

"Who's Lilac?"

"Did you not just say no more questions?"

"Sure I did, but you know...I can't help but be curious. This is a whole new world to me."

"You won't be in this world long if you keep asking questions that aren't your business," he snapped, narrowing his eyes.

I frowned, slightly frustrated at his attitude.

His eyes widened suddenly, his head snapping toward his window. "Get down!"

"W—"

I squealed when he pushed me off the bed, rolling me onto the ground. Almost the instant I fell to the ground, there was a huge smash from the door.

Xavier stood, sprinting out and down the hall. I pushed myself up weakly, even after he told me to stay, chasing him out. Lola was out there, and that was all that was on my mind.

"Lola?!" I called out, making my way down to the front. My eyes flew open when they landed on the glass door that was...no longer there. It had been smashed open, and it was easy to see who did it. My head turned slowly, a fake smile on my face. "Fuck."

My eyes came in contact with the huge wolf that stood in the room, eyeing Xavier and Colton. Never did I think I'd say it, but at this point…

I'd rather be back up in the bedroom with Xavier.

**Episode 22**

"Oh my god," I breathed out. Its gaze was on me for what felt like forever. Its eyes bore into my own, and I nearly fell into a trance. They were hypnotizing. Such *wild* eyes, yet you could clearly see the human element in them. It was quite the sight, enough to give you goosebumps.

"Is that Lilac?" I whispered to Xavier, who continued to glare at the large wolf, acting as if it couldn't rip us apart in seconds.

"I hope you plan to pay for that glass." Colton's voice was calm, which surprised me. My eyes fell to the shattered glass on the ground, and I sucked in a breath. There was no blood on the large wolf, yet he had managed to smash through this. "It cost quite a lot."

How could he joke in this situation? Maybe—hopefully—they were friends. That was a possibility, right?

Highly unlikely.

It didn't seem pleased with Colton's carefree comment because it let out a low growl and bared its sharp, white fangs.

"Cali, your top." I jumped when Lola whispered in my ear. Where had she come from? My cheeks warmed when I noticed, and I hurriedly fixed my shirt and hair. Xavier had started to take it off, but of course I hadn't had the time to fix it. After all, a huge wolf had just broken into the house.

My eyes fell to the smaller wolf behind the large one. When I say smaller, it wasn't exactly small. It was a bit bigger than your average male wolf, so *small* wasn't the exact word for it. Suddenly the front door creaked open. Almost everyone turned around simultaneously, even though we couldn't directly see it since it was out in the hall.

"Anyone home?" a young voice called out. "It's Lilac."

So the wolf in front of us wasn't Lilac. Definitely not friendly, then. Well, wasn't that great to know?

On the bright side, if this Lilac was a wolf, it would be three versus two. They could easily take down the wolves in front of us, I hoped. Or they would sacrifice us. Whichever worked.

Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed Xavier tense. His jaw tightened as he looked toward the door. I followed his gaze, and a boy looking to be in his teenage years appeared. Maybe somewhere from fifteen to seventeen; he couldn't be any older than that.

The boy's hair was messy, like someone had rustled it, or he had been in a fight. That wasn't the thing I first noticed, though. He had beautiful light purple eyes...the color of lilac. They were mesmerizing. If I hadn't been in a dangerous situation, I probably would have complimented them.

"Uh...what's going on?" His eyes switched between me and Lola before landing on the huge wolf that stood behind us. I had almost forgotten about him.

"Lilac," Colton's voice was serious, the joking tone disappeared completely, "go home."

Okay, so he wasn't fighting with them. Understandable, he was a teen. Maybe he wasn't even a wolf.

"I brought Violet with me." I could hear the concern in Lilac's voice as he realized what was going on.

"Go to her and leave. Right now," Xavier snapped. His anger obviously wasn't toward Lilac. Was he worried for him? Were they both? Was it true that these two actually had emotions?

"Understood." Lilac nodded and began to back off. The wolf was watching the boy like a hawk.

"What do you want?" Xavier turned back to the wolf when Lilac left the house. Did he understand the wolf even though he wasn't in a human form? This was amazing. I had so many questions, but I knew it obviously wasn’t the time to ask.

They watched each other closely. How intimate.

"Colton." Xavier's voice was low.

"Got it." My eyes widened when I heard the cracking of bones. I watched in complete shock as Colton transformed effortlessly. The sight gave me chills.

The large wolf narrowed its eyes and let out a loud, vicious growl that shook the whole room. Right as Colton changed, the enemy wolf dove on top of him. Lola let out a short scream when they began attacking each other, biting and scratching, both of them out for blood.

"Run."

"What?" I stared up at Xavier in confusion. Could Colton not deal with that wolf? He had dealt with the other one easily.

"Now!" I yelped when he shoved me. Then I heard it. I heard the loud, vicious growl.

That confirmed my thoughts. I stared at the wolf in sheer horror. The one that had been waiting behind the larger one had its eyes locked onto me. The look it gave me made my blood run cold. He planned to kill me.

I turned on my heel and sprinted off, dragging Lola behind me. I wanted to look back, not to see if the wolf was continuing after us, but for another reason. A dumb one. I wanted to see Xavier transform...or shift. I didn't know what they called it, or if it had a specific name. I wanted to see his wolf form because I had already seen Colton's.

Xavier hadn't even confirmed he could turn.

I was scared, though. Shaking. This could be the day I died. And by what? A goddamn wolf. My main concern wasn't myself, though—it was Lola. As long as she got away, I could accept my death.

We ran out the front door and slammed it behind us. As we continued to run down the drive, I turned back to the house to see if we were being chased. It could break through the door, after all. But to my surprise, there was nothing.

"It's not followi—"

"I don't care! We're running," Lola snapped.

"We don't know this place! What if we get lost?" I frowned, nervous being on the outside.

"They can sniff us out, they're wolves…or we can escape and go home" She was sweating now. Her face was red. Escaping hadn't even crossed my mind. "I'm shocked you didn't think of that." Lola laughed when she looked back to see my reaction.

"I was more concerned about not being eaten by that thing back there," I pointed out. "What if there are more wolves out here?"

"You always have such a negative mindset." She sighed.

"Really? I'd call it a cautious one." I shrugged.

I hadn't even realized where or how long we had been running for at this point. I let out a yelp when Lola pulled us to a standstill with wide eyes. "Listen."

"What?" I hissed. "You better not be trying to scare me, Lola. I'm not in the mood."

She shook her head. "Did you hear that?"

I held my breath then froze when I heard whispering. My eyes examined the area quickly. I would have run, but Lola had a different idea. She jumped toward where the noise came from, and there stood Lilac.

And a girl.

They stared at us with wide eyes when we jumped out at them. "Only humans." The girl was quiet when she spoke.

I tilted my head when I noticed her eyes. They were purple, like the boy beside her, except a slightly different shade. She had jet-black hair and an unusual expression on her face. Was this Violet? Probably.

"Only humans?" My brow furrowed. "You guys are wolf-bea—werewolves...or whatever you call yourselves."

"How does it know?" Violet hissed to her brother. I assumed they were siblings anyway.

IT?

"She was with Xavier; maybe she’s his pet."

"PET?!" I exclaimed while Lola burst out laughing. "Excuse you!"

"Well, why are you here then? Who are you?" Violet cocked her head, clearly no longer afraid of us. Was she even afraid before?

I opened my mouth to tell them before shutting it quickly. No way was I explaining the real reason I was here to two teenagers I didn't know. They definitely couldn't be older than seventeen.

"She's his girlfriend." My jaw dropped when Lola spoke, and I threw her a bewildered look. I couldn't say no and disagree now, or they would question us more, so instead I stayed silent.

Violet's eyebrows raised. "No way," she said in disbelief and looked to her brother. "Xavier. With a human? Tha—"

"Okay, getting off track—wait." Lilac paused. "Is that why those wolves were there? For you?"

My lips went into a thin line, and I shrugged. "I don't know who they are, and I don't know why they're there." It wasn't actually a lie. I wasn't a hundred percent sure they were there for me, honestly.

"I should help."

"No, Lilac! They told us to go." Violet tugged his arm roughly, a concerned expression on her face.

"You go, Violet, or wait here, but you need to hide. Something might happen to them."

Why was he so caring toward Xavier and Colton? How did they know each other?

"Your sister's right," I spoke up. "They can handle themselves. You guys need to go; I'm sure it will only worry them more if they know you’re still here. It was two against two, and they can definitely handle themselves."

I assumed they were siblings not only because of their unusual eyes but also because of the similar features they shared with each other. They could honestly pass as twins. The girl was watching me curiously, her head tilted slightly. When she noticed me watching her, she quickly dropped her gaze and looked to Lilac. "Please."

Lilac sighed but nodded. "Only because you asked, Violet." He looked back at me and Lola. "Not because of you guys."

"Understood." I nodded and put a hand on Lola so she wouldn't argue. I knew she usually would have called him a rude brat or something along those lines, but at this current moment, that wasn't exactly the most important thing.

Lilac turned to Violet and nodded; then, without another word, they both sprinted away. I noticed Lola frown. "I was hoping we'd see them shift. It's so cool."

"Don't be weird."

"You don't find it cool? You totally wanted to see Xavier change."

"Yeah, but only because I want to confirm what he is, and we've seen Colton change."

"You don't think Xavier can?"

"I don't know. I mean I'd rather make sure with my own eyes. You know?"

"They're brothers. He has to be—wait…you guys were interrupted earlier. Did anything happen?"

"Don't ask weird questions." I scowled. "We only kissed."

"That's all?" She seemed upset by this. "So you don't know how big it is?"

It took me a moment to understand what she meant, and my eyes widened. "STOP!" I covered my ears and made a face. "Where are we going?"

"I don't know. Away from the house was the goal; I didn't have a specific destination."

"Knowing our luck, we'll walk into some other wolves." I let out a nervous laugh. I wasn't joking. It was highly likely that something like that would happen to us.

"We'll be fine." Lola waved it off.

"Maybe it's just me, but I feel like we're being watched." I shivered at the thought, but Lola only rolled her eyes.

"Try to scare me all you want. It's not going to work."

"I'm not trying to scare you. I'm simply saying the truth and how I feel."

"Maybe we should wait here. I have no clue what direction I'm leading us," she said honestly.

"I don't know why I let you lead the way. Why do I put my trust in you?" I shook my head and gave her a disapproving look.

"Cali, I'm a trustworthy person, and ninety-nine percent of the time, I actually know what I'm doing."

"I think your percentage may be way off."

The snap of a twig made us both jump and freeze.

"I told you," I hissed. I was about to run again, but Lola stopped me. She brought her finger to her lips, shaking her head. Confused, I stayed silent, making sure not to say a word.

Another snap.

It confirmed our thoughts. We weren't alone. I felt like I was going to throw up when a large wolf emerged. I let out a blood-curdling scream, but once again, Lola stopped me from running.

"Look," she said. LOOK? WHY WAS SHE SO CALM?

When I realized the wolf was slightly injured and out of breath, I calmed down. I recognized its fur immediately when I looked at him.

"Where's Xavier, Colton?" I asked with a frown. "Is he okay?"

I suddenly felt weird.

"I'm pretty sure he's making sure we didn't run away while we had the chance." Lola watched the wolf version of Colton closely, and it looked like he grinned.

"Okay, Miss Wolf-Whisperer."

Colton let out a quick growl-like sound before turning away and running off. He wanted us to follow him.

"He looks worried," Lola commented.

"I think I know why."

I didn’t know how I knew. I didn't know what this feeling was, but it was unusual—I could just tell Xavier needed help.

**Episode 23**

I sprinted all the way back to the house after Colton. Lola tried to keep up, although she ended up a bit behind the whole way there. When we arrived outside the house, I stopped and looked around to see where Colton had gone, but my eyes found nothing.

"Alright Speedy Gonzales," Lola panted, pulling up next to me, out of breath. To my surprise, my breathing was normal. Usually after a run like that, I would be out of breath. That was most likely the fastest I’d ever run in my life.

"I lost him," I mumbled with a frown on my face.

"The house?" Lola arched an eyebrow, pointing forward. "You know, where the fight happened?"

I rolled my eyes and scowled at her sarcasm. "Really? I never thought of that. I just...there's an entry in the—you know what? Never mind," I responded to her comment with my own sarcasm.

"Well—"

"No. We'll have this petty argument later. Right now, we need to see what's happening and if they're okay." I began walking to the front door but was stopped with a firm grip on my wrist.

"What's up with you?" Lola’s eyes narrowed.

I raised my own eyebrows, confused at her sudden concern. My mouth formed a thin line. "We always have petty arguments. Why are you looking at me like I have four heads?"

"Why do you suddenly care? We could have run back there, tried to escape or at least enjoyed exploring while we had the chance. Instead, you raced back here to an asshole you barely know who made you cry, as if…I don't know." She sighed. "You get what I mean, though."

I hesitated, thinking through what she said before trying to form an answer in my mind. I shrugged out of her grip, and when I couldn't come up with anything, I let out a small sigh. "I don't really know why, or what I'm doing. But if he dies, we can't…do it…and I can't keep the money I need."

It was only a guess, but seeing as it was the only one I could think of, it was a strong possibility that was the reason.

"If you say so," she mumbled as I gripped the door handle. In the end, the wolf hadn't smashed through it and chased us—it was still intact. Did that mean they stopped him before he could?

I pushed the door open, and with Lola at my heels, sprinted to where the fight had taken place. I stared at the scene in horror. There was blood everywhere. It sent shivers running down my spine.

"Hello?" I shouted when there was no sign of either of the guys. There was fur—most likely ripped off during the fight—stuck in some of the blood. The sight made my stomach turn over. There was a trail out the back door like someone had been dragged out. It was something out of a horror movie. A horrific image came to my mind: a huge wolf dragging Xavier's bloody body. My heart pounded faster with each passing second.

"Don't shout." I almost screamed when I heard the voice. "You actually came back."

I turned around and felt my cheeks heat when I saw Colton. He was stark naked and stood there without a care, not bothering to hide anything. I quickly brought my hands up and covered my eyes. "Oh my god, be decent."

I focused my eyes on his face and his face *only,* so they wouldn't drop elsewhere. He arched an eyebrow but grabbed a blanket off the couch and wrapped it around his lower half.

"I'm surprised we came back, too." Lola gave me an accusing look. She didn't seem affected in the slightest that only seconds ago, Colton was fully nude. "She basically dragged us back. She ran after you like her life depended on it."

Colton offered me a curious look. "Hm? Well anyway, Xavier's injured."

"Where?"

Colton walked past us, and I quickly assumed we should follow him.

"I knew," I hissed to Lola quietly.

She raised her eyebrows at my words, clearly unsure of what I meant. "What?"

"I don't know...I knew Xavier was injured."

"What? You read Colton's mind when he found us? Are you a wolf too?" she teased, but I just rolled my eyes in response.

"I'm not messing around, Lola. I felt like...you know what, never mind. I couldn’t even explain it if I tried," I grumbled, giving up when we stopped outside the bathroom.

Colton pulled open the door and stood back to let us see. I noted the concerned expression on his face—unusual on him. My brow furrowed when I saw Xavier on the ground. There was some blood surrounding him, but not as bad as it was outside. He sat on the ground, his arm across his stomach, his back propped up against the bath.

He seemed to be glaring at his brother, probably annoyed that Colton let us in.

"Colton," I snapped, causing everyone to turn to me in surprise. "Why is he here?"

Colton looked at me, his brows knitting together. "He needed to move, so I helped him in here…"

"He's injured! Why wouldn't you bring him to the bedroom? You know, where it's more comfortable for an injured person?" My look turned into a sharp glare.

"He's bleeding. The blood would soak onto his bed."

"So materials are more importa—"

"No! Of course not. He didn't want t—"

"Who cares if he doesn't want to? If he wanted you to drown him, would you do it? He's *injured*; he needs to be in bed. If it gets messy, you strip the covers and wash them. It's not that difficult, even for someone like you."

I could feel Lola's stare burn into my back. "Ca—"

"I told him to bring—"

"Shut up!" I stopped them all, then turned to Xavier. "Of course you'd tell him to bring you here. You wanted to hide from us. Colton, help him to his room after I clean the injury." I turned back to Colton. "How is he more injured than you even though you fought the larger wolf?"

Colton's jaw tightened, and he looked down to his brother. Xavier shook his head, telling his brother not to tell me. Usually I would argue and try to find out the whole thing, but right then, that wasn't important.

"Where's the first aid kit?"

Colton silently opened the cabinet and passed it to me.

"Get me one dry towel and a damp one. Make sure the water is hot."

"Wha—"

"Now, Colton," I growled at him. He watched me with wide eyes but did as he was told. He looked like a child that had been scolded.

I knelt next to Xavier and pulled his hand away. I grimaced at the wounds. "You should really go to a hospital."

"No, I don't need it. My immune system is stronger than a human's." I could see he was still in pain, though.

"Cali." Lola tapped my shoulder. "You hate blood… Do you want me to do this?"

I barely heard her words. I hated blood—I usually felt weak at even the sight of it. I passed out when I had my blood drawn. But there I was, staring at this deep wound with blood surrounding us, and I was barely affected. I wasn't even nauseous. Was it the adrenaline? It had to be.

"No." I shook my head. "It's fine. Maybe it'll help me get over my fear." I hadn't realized I was still holding Xavier’s hand until I felt him move slightly. I quickly pulled mine away like his hand would bite me or something. I looked up to Xavier, narrowing my eyes. "You're going to behave and let me do this, understood?"

He slowly nodded his head.

"Is there any infection I should expect? Do they...do they have rabies?" It sounded dumber when I said it out loud.

He arched an eyebrow.

"I asked a question."

"No, they don't. They weren't Rogues," Colton answered for him and passed me the towels.

I decided to treat the biggest wound first—the deep one on his stomach.

"Call me if you need help." Lola frowned, and I nodded in response before they both left us alone. I began cleaning the wounds, pressing down to add more pressure to stop the bleeding. He growled a few times when I pressed down and even cussed at me once.

"If you call me a rude name again, I'll make that wound bigger," I snapped.

"It wasn't even directed at you," he grumbled like a child.

"You said *you motherfu*—"

"I said it wasn't directed at you!"

I rolled my eyes and pulled the blood-soaked towel back. There was no serious bleeding anymore, to my surprise. "This part will hurt." I pulled out antibiotic ointment.

"No." He shook his head. "Don't you dare put that on me."

"You fight a wolf, but you're scared of ointment?" I sighed, spreading it out onto a clean wipe.

"I told you, I'm fine." He slapped my hand away when I reached out.

"Fine, I’ll only put it on the small cuts, then." I scowled but after hesitating, he nodded in agreement.

He flinched slightly as I applied it to the small cuts. "What's up with you?" he asked.

"What?"

"You're acting weird." He hissed as I dabbed the ointment on his shoulder.

"How am I acting weird?" My brow furrowed.

"Even your friend looked concerned."

"You didn't answer my question, and her name's Lola."

"Earlier you wanted to escape. I'm pretty sure you wanted to kill me, too. You jumped out of a window at one point. But when you had the chance to get away, you came back, and you're more..." he hesitated, "demanding. Not as scared."

"I'm still scared of you," I confirmed.

He seemed to think. "Why are you helping?"

"You saved me once, so I'm helping you now. We're even; I don't want to have to owe you anything." I shrugged as my cheeks warmed slightly. I didn't know how else to answer him.

"Really?"

"And if you die, I don't get the money." I offered him a joking smile, and the corner of his lip twitched. I noticed how distracted he was and decided to take advantage.

"I'm sorry," I whispered.

Xavier’s brow furrowed at my words. "Wha— DAMMIT!" He winced as I pressed the ointment against the deep wound on his stomach. He flinched and struggled under me.

"Stop squirming! I'm almost done."

He grabbed my hand, trying to pull it away.

With my free hand, I grabbed the back of his neck and pulled him toward me. I pressed my lips against his. Why? I wasn't sure. It was my first idea for a distraction. Not only that, but I kind of wanted to kiss him. The whole time, I wanted that.

"Calm down," I whispered against his lips. To my surprise, his hand loosened its grip, and he stopped trying to pull it away. I expected him to push me off. I barely realized I was still against him and kissing him until the door pushed open. I shoved away from Xavier, falling back and hitting my head on the sink.

"Ouch," I whimpered in pain.

Colton raised his eyebrows. "You know, I knew you were treating my brother, but not in that way."

"HE STARTED IT!"

Xavier raised his eyebrows at my words but thankfully said nothing.

"Sure," Colton said but gave Xavier a curious glance.

"What do you want, Colton?" I crawled back over to Xavier. "I still need to bandage him up."

"Bondage? Wow, so you're into—"

"Bandage!" I snapped. "You know, because he was *attacked*."

"Is it important?" Xavier raised his eyebrows, aiming his question at Colton.

"Lilac called." Colton shrugged. "I'll tell him you'll call him back." He left us alone after one more curious look.

I pulled out the large bandage roll, ready to fix Xavier up, but I paused when I saw the unusual look on his face. "What?"

"So...bondage, huh?"

**Episode 24**

"Excuse me?" I raised my eyebrows at his words, my cheeks warming slightly. "Choose your next words carefully, or I'll make sure to clean your wound some more."

"You'd be a horrible nurse. Threatening your patients," he said, his voice serious. I could never tell if this man was joking or not.

"You're not my patient, and I'm not a nurse, therefore what you said is irrelevant," I pointed out. "Sit up."

"I am."

"Don't lean back on the bath. I have to bandage you up." I sighed, tapping the back of his shoulder for him to sit up straight. He let out a frustrated, aggravated groan but obediently sat up.

I got the large bandage and began wrapping it around his abdomen, where the larger wound was located. His body felt warm…maybe I’d even go as far as saying *hot*.

Hot...

I finished wrapping him up then sat back to look at my handiwork. I nodded, praising myself inside my head. "Don't move t—" My sentence was cut off when he began to push himself up. "Stop it! What are you doing?"

He shot me an annoyed glare. One that said *I already let you help, now leave me alone*, or something along those lines.

"Colton!" I shouted for his brother. Xavier's eyes shot daggers at me. Colton appeared from around the door with an arched eyebrow.

"Not bad," he commented, looking at his patched-up brother. I shook my head, letting out a small sigh—that wasn't why I called him.

"Help Xavier to bed and make sure he stays there to rest. Don't let him out."

Colton's brows knitted together as he moved to his brother. "I'll help him to his room, even though he doesn't really need it, but I don't have time to babysit."

"He needs to stay in—"

"You babysit him, then." I jumped when Lola appeared behind me. Her eyes met mine, and she was giving me a curious look—one that was trying to figure out what was happening. "After all..."

"After all, what?"

Colton left the room with Xavier beside him, so Lola and I were alone. I put my hands on my hips when she gave me an accusing look. "Say what's on your mind, Lola. Out with it."

"Do you know that thing in *Twilight*?"

"The vampires or the wolves? I didn't see all the movies, only the first two or three. I wasn't a big fan. Harry Potter was more my jam."

She rolled her eyes and moved closer. "Mates." Her voice was a low whisper.

"Didn't they like…what's the word?"

"Imprint," she finished.

"That was it. What about it?"

"You and Xavier did nothing sexual?" she pushed.

"I told you already—I wouldn't lie."

"Did he whisper some hypnotizing words to make you fall in love with him then?"

"What are you on about?" I stared at her, bewildered by her statements. Where was she even going with this?

"Earlier you were complaining about Xavier, saying how you hated him. You jumped out a window to escape, remember?"

"So?"

"Now you run all the way back here, where a wolf wanted to *kill* you, all to see if Xavier was okay. You normally faint at the sight of blood, yet you could deal with his bleeding and patching him up. Not to mention, you suddenly seem in control. You ordered Colton around, and usually you're scared of him."

Her words slowly sank in, and a slight panic ran through me. I had no real response. "Don't say weird stuff like that."

"I don't know, but I think you could be mates. It's a long shot, but I find it weird the way you suddenly changed."

"Do mates even exist? Like maybe they choose mates or something—movies always tell lies. Besides, I didn't feel like any zap or anything, and I know for a fact I'm not in love with him."

"Zap?" Lola chuckled. "So you get zapped if you get a mate? Wow, I didn't know you were so educated about wolves."

"Very funny." I rolled my eyes. "I don't know…they have to feel something. I felt bad for him. I'd help anyone who was injured, okay?"

"You ran—"

"Stop freaking me out! He is not my— Mates don't even exist, probably." I was slightly worried now. "Like I said before, I feel nothing toward him."

"Colton told me you two were kissing, though."

I gritted my teeth together, cussing Colton out in my head. "Of course he'd say that.”

"It's not true?"

I stayed silent for only a second. "I had to."

"What do you mean you *had to*? No one forced you to do it."

"He was in pain!"

"He was in pain...so kissing him magically made him better?"

"No! He was trying to push me off!"

"Oh, wow, so you climbed onto him, too?"

"Lola! He tried to push me off because I was cleaning his wound and it was hurting him. He really doesn't like antiseptic…or getting help."

"Do you realize how stupid you sound right now?"

I could only scowl at her. "Listen, Lola. It was spur of the moment, and in my mind, it was the only way to shut him up at the time."

"Did you like it?"

My lips pressed into a thin line. I wasn't going to lie to her, but I also wasn't going to answer. She understood immediately and let out a small laugh. "Well, then. Little Miss Caliana is getting it!"

I rolled my eyes at her childish words, but when I heard the door open, I quickly shushed her. Colton emerged from the room and looked between us curiously. "I smell something suspicious."

"Then for a dog, you have a bad nose."

"Question," Lola spoke up, ignoring both of us.

I turned to her, and she threw her eyes up.

"Obviously it’s not for you, Cali."

"I don't see how it was *obviously not for me* but go ahead."

"What's the question?" Colton asked, seemingly intrigued by the whole thing.

"Mates." When Lola said the word, my heart dropped to my stomach.

"Mates?" he asked.

I tried to stop her, terrified she would give it away or inform him about her thoughts on me and Xavier. I didn't really want either of the guys to know. "Lola, don't."

"Are they a real thing?"

"What do you mean?"

"Like…you know, in *Twilight*. They imprint. Do you guys choose your mate, or is it chosen for you already?"

His brow furrowed at her example before he shrugged. "Who knows? Maybe, maybe not. I don't believe in it. I think it's a stupid made-up thing so loners always hope they won't end up lonely."

"Do they?"

"Some do. Some die alone. I don't believe mates are chosen. What? You think something in our minds is brainwashed to fall in love with a random person we don't know?"

"So you don't believe in it whatsoever?" Lola tilted her head.

"Both Xavier and I have traveled a lot. All over the place. Not once have I felt anything for anyone—I choose my bitches."

I scrunched up my face at his word choice and rolled my eyes. I hated guys like him. Why did girls even want him? Because he was hot?

"Can one of you have a human as a mate or does it have to be...you know, like you," she pushed on.

He raised his eyebrows. "I told you, I don't know anything about it. I'm no love guru. Why are you asking about it?"

"Because—"

"Lola thinks she's your mate." Lola turned to me with a glare, even though she didn't look all too surprised by my outburst. She probably expected me to throw her to the wolves—literally.

"False." Colton shook his head. "She refused to have sex with me, so what's the real reason?" He turned to me.

My jaw tightened, and I swallowed a lump in my throat.

"You seem nervous," he commented. "Do you have a question as well?"

"Definitely not." I did everything I could to act cool. How did Lola always pull the best poker faces?

He continued to stare at me to see if I would break under the pressure, but when it was nothing but silence, he offered a small shrug. "Go babysit Xavier since you seemed so eager to take care of him."

"I'm not eager to take care of that beast. I'm saying he won't get any better if he moves around and doesn't give himself time to heal." I narrowed my eyes. "Not that it matters to you, right? You're the only thing that matters."

"If you're saying I don't care for my brother—of course I do." He narrowed his eyes. "But what does that matter to you? You're nothing but a toy to us. We bought you."

"Actually, you bought her virginity, not her. And she's not a toy to you, only your brother. Don't get ahead of yourself, pup," Lola snapped.

I shrugged, refusing to get triggered over this petty argument. "That's fine with me. I don't care if Xavier gets better. I have helped enough already. But don't ask for help when he gets an infection." I had cleaned the wound pretty well, so the whole infection thing was kind of a bluff.

"Go keep an eye on him, then," Colton grumbled. Lola shook her head at his words.

"I'll pass. Toys don't take care of people, so have fun minding y—"

I was tugged back toward him as I began walking away. "That's an order."

I pulled away, glaring at him furiously. "Who the hell do you think you are? You bought my virginity! I'm not a maid, and if you so much as touch me again, I'll bite your dick off."

Both Colton and Lola stared at me like I was insane before a huge smile broke out on Lola’s face.

Colton sighed. "Fine, whatever. Although I think he'd appreciate it if you took care of him."

"What?" Lola and I asked in unison.

He casually shrugged before walking off. I turned to Lola. "Did you hear him?"

"Yeah," Lola nodded, "I heard bullshit come from his mouth."

"Why do you think it's bullshit?"

"Why do you sound so eager to look after Xavier?"

"Do I?" My eyes widened slightly. "Lola...what's wrong with me?"

"Nothing," she hesitated before continuing. "Unless it turns out the man behind that door is your mate."

**Episode 25**

"STOP SAYING THAT, LOLA!" I almost bit her head off. I was losing it at this point. She cocked her head to the side, a smile playing on her lips. She enjoyed winding me up, so I knew she was loving this.

"Look, I'm just making sure he's okay and trying to find out what's going on."

She arched her right eyebrow. "You think that's a good idea?"

"It's not a *bad* idea."

Lola offered me a strange look. "But what if he is your mate?"

"There was no spark, okay? Stop freaking me out. He would have said something if I was his mate, got it?"

"Okay, okay, I'll stop." She chuckled, finding humor in my pain.

"You know, I have my own question for you later."

"What is it?" The tables turned, and I could hear the confusion and concern in her voice.

"Emphasis on the *later* bit, Lola."

"Cali—"

"Bye," I sang, waving to her while turning away. I made my way toward Xavier's room, my heart pounding. The palms of my hands were sweaty. I had turned away from Lola so confidently, but now as I reached his room, I was terrified. The adrenaline left me, and I was back to fragile, scared Caliana.

I pushed the door open as Xavier began to climb out of bed. "No!" I told him. "Lie back down, right now."

"I don't think you get it."

"Get what?"

"I heal quicker than you."

"Okay? That wound wouldn't heal for a few weeks on a normal human, and it would scar. Yours can't heal in less than an hour."

"It's not going to start bleeding again, though." He eyed me. "Why are you concerned?"

"Because the wolf who injured you was after me, so like I said…I owe you."

"Pay me by going away. Then we're even."

"I will if you answer a question. And answer it honestly."

"What's your question?"

"Why are you more injured than your brother?"

"I guess I was the runt of the litter." He shrugged, not bothered by my question. I was dead serious about it, though.

"Or maybe you're not like your brother at all."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"I have a keen eye. There was a fight out there with a lot of blood and fur. Three different shades of fur, but there were four of you. I noticed Colton's and the one he was fighting. I assume the other color was from the one you were fighting. But that leaves you."

He looked surprised when I finished talking. "How did you even notice something like that?"

My lips parted slightly, trying to think. I lied about the keen eye—I never really noticed stuff. How did I notice all that? At the time, I remembered seeing blood and fur, but I didn't actually focus on it all.

I stumbled on what I was trying to say. "Basically, you didn't shift, so you fought the wolf in human form, but why? How come Colton can change but you can’t?"

"Being nosy in this place can get you killed."

"What? Are you embarrassed because you can't shift?"

He sucked in a deep breath and shut his eyes. Why was he getting so upset, so angry over what I was saying? Maybe I was right, and it was true—maybe it was a sensitive spot for him.

"Drop it." He pushed himself off the bed and walked over to the window.

I was more curious than ever now. You know what they say, though: curiosity killed the cat. "Why?"

"Caliana." He turned to me, an expression I couldn't exactly place plastered on his face. His eyes bore into mine, and his lips were tight.

I tried to tell myself to drop it, tried to persuade myself it wasn't worth it, but of course I couldn't. I was a nosy, stubborn girl like any other. "Xavi—"

"CALIANA!" I jumped a mile; my heart began racing when he yelled. "I told you to stop asking. Don't try to act brave around me. Like you said, no one knows you're here. If you disappeared, no one would chase us." His sinister words almost made me tremble.

I sucked in a small breath. "I'm sorry."

He stayed silent and finally removed his eyes from me, locking them back onto where the window was, staring past it.

"Are they dead?" I asked, knowing he would understand what I was talking about.

"Yes."

"Will their pack be angry?"

"Very."

"Aren't you nervous?" Had I caused this whole thing? They had to be after something other than me, right?

He shook his head. "No."

"Why? There must be a lot of them, and it's just you and Colton.”

"Why?" He arched an eyebrow. "Because we have you."

"You have me?" I raised my eyebrows. My heart skipped a beat—if not one hundred. "You're going to sacrifice me?!"

He blinked before slowly nodding. "That's the word I was thinking of. If it comes to that point, then yes."

"I could kill you right here."

"You're funny," he said with no humor in his voice.

I stared at him, trying to see if he was joking or not.

"Calm down." He sighed. "We probably won't need to do that."

"*Probably*?!"

He shrugged but said nothing else. All I could do was stand there, terrified. How was I supposed to respond to that? He didn't sound like he was joking at all.

"Okay," I spoke up.

He arched his left eyebrow, his face straight. "Okay?" The word he spoke came out as a question.

"If you're planning to sacrifice me, I'm going to sacrifice myself first."

"What?"

"I’ll find those wolves myself."

His eyes that only a moment ago looked dull with boredom suddenly seemed brighter. "You're going to...find them?"

"You heard me."

"Okay. Then what do you plan on doing?"

"I’ll ask what they want."

"Before or after they rip off your limbs?"

"Well, obviously I can't after if I'm dead."

"I said they’d rip off your limbs."

"They'd kill me."

"No, they'll want to see you slowly die…in pain. They'd rip off all your limbs and feast on them in front of you while you're dying."

I scrunched up my face. "They're cannibals? I mean, they're still partially human, right?"

"You're missing the whole point here."

"*You're* missing the point, Xavier."

"What's that?"

"I'll be sacrificed either way. At least this way I have more of a chance of finding out why they're trying to kill me."

"Because you're human."

"They plan to kill all humans? They want us extinct so they can take over the world?"

"No. Only the ones who know about us."

I hesitated. "Does that mean humans can't be your mates? The—"

"What?" His brow furrowed. "Where did that come from?"

"What you just said," I commented. "So…you know what, never mind. How else would humans even know about you guys?"

"Legends, stories. They come to hunt us to see if we’re real. Or they crash into us at the wrong time, and that's the end of them. If you even caught a hint that we’re real...you're dead, basically."

"Then, why?"

"Why what?"

"Why are you not letting us die? You said you'd kill us if we ran, yet you aren't letting them kill us. You're going through all this trouble to help us, so I'll ask again. Why?”

He watched me for a second before cocking his head to the side. "Wait…"

"Wait?"

"You don't think I *care*, do you?" He chuckled, and for some reason, it hurt. "I have a beef with them. I don't like when they get their way. If anyone kills you, it'll be me." He paused for a second, and I was hoping he would say he was joking, but he didn’t.

"Don't worry, though. I won't torture you like they would. I'll put you down quick."

"DON'T WORRY?! DON'T WORRY ABOUT YOU KILLING ME?!" I shouted at him. "You're insane! Like, legit insane!"

"Am I?"

"You're acting like my life is worth nothing!"

"I mean, Colton thinks it's worth $400,000, so don't be too insulted."

I looked at him, confused, before understanding. My jaw tightened, and I stared at him with pure and utter hatred. I reached out to him, but he caught on to what I was attempting to do. He quickly covered his wound, slapping my hand away. "That's a low blow."

"Low blow or not—if it hurts you, I'm good," I snarled, narrowing my eyes.

"You're very aggressive, you know."

"I w—" I was about to shout before quickly calming myself down. I knew he was enjoying my reaction and how worked up I was getting; I could easily tell. What I couldn't tell was if he was serious about the killing part. He sounded serious, there was no clear sign of joking whatsoever. "Since I'm definitely going to die, why don't you tell me about yourself?"

"Sorry?"

"You're pretty much a closed book, so tell me about you. Since I'm going to die, you know I can't tell anyone."

"I'd rather not."

"Really?"

"Really."

"You don't want to tell me why you can't change?"

"Change?"

"Into a wolf."

"You're still on that? Who says I can't?"

"You were in a life-threatening situation, yet you didn't change like your brother."

"I liked my clothes. They would have ripped."

"They did rip! From the big wolf that almost killed you, remember?"

"Hm?" He tilted his head. Was he trying to confuse me? I really didn't understand this man.

"I want to see you as a wolf."

"That's weird."

"Not really. I want to see if it's possible for you to actually be cute, instead of the ugly beast you are," I snapped.

"That's rude." He didn't seem to be losing his temper this time.

"And you threatening to kill me isn't rude?"

"I mean..."

"Did you bring me here, knowing you were going to kill me?"

"Colton brought you here, not me. I didn't want you here in the first place—you're a waste of money." He hesitated. "Why are you so calm about being killed?"

I cocked my head to the side, imitating him. "You can't kill me if I kill you first, Xavier."

**Episode 26**

"*You* kill *me*?" He chuckled at my words, causing me to scowl. "You wouldn't be able to kill a spider, let alone me."

"Want to bet?"

"Sure."

"Really?"

"Why not? If you win, you're rewarded with the satisfaction of killing a *beast* and you have a tiny chance of escaping."

"Tiny chance?"

"Don't forget about the others who want you dead. You expect to be able to kill them all, too? Also, I don't think Colton would be happy if he found out you killed his brother.”

"I can get a car and escape with Lola."

"What do I get if you can't kill me?"

"My virginity."

"Don't I get that already? Hardly seems fair." He acted so calm about this whole thing, like we were betting on a game. We were betting on our lives, and he didn't even blink. Was that how confident he was? Maybe it was a bluff. Whatever it was, it made me nervous.

"Excuse me," I scoffed. "Like hell you get it!"

"What? We paid you for it."

" You expect me to go on a spending spree when I'm dead? You know, after you kill me…because last time I checked, dead people stay under the ground."

"Uh..."

"Yeah, *uh*. You said earlier either you or the others will kill me. If I die, that money goes to waste, so I'm not letting you take it for no reason."

"You want to die a virgin?"

"I mean, I hadn't planned to, but if I die here, I guess so."

My eyes fell to his hands, my eyebrows pulling together when he began trying to remove his bandage. "Hey! Stop. I just put that on!" I reached out and grabbed hold of his wrist.

"Why can't I take it off?"

"Why do you think? For the last time, you can't heal that quickly. Even if you say you heal quicker."

"Aren't you trying to kill me though?"

"I have an advantage if you're injured, so it's not counted as a fair fight. You need to heal before I try to kill you."

"You want me to get better...so you can kill me? I love your logic, Caliana." He rolled his eyes.

Why did my name sound so good when it rolled off his tongue? So smooth an— No! I'm not supposed to be thinking that way. I'm supposed to be killing this man. What concerned me was how I had been more stressed about giving up my virginity than killing a person. I didn’t think that was exactly normal.

"I fight fair." I shrugged.

"Have you even fought before?"

"Of course."

"Have you ever fought a wolf-bear?" he mocked.

"I haven't. I'm lucky you can't turn into one, huh?"

"You really think I can't."

"Positive."

"We'll see."

"No, we won't."

"You've very annoying. Have you been told that before? By now, I usually would have killed you."

"Aww, I feel special," I spat out, sarcasm lacing my tone. Colton opened the door—again without knocking—and glanced between both of us.

"Do you walk in on purpose, hoping to catch us in the act? If so, that's really weird."

He raised his eyebrows at the insult I threw before glancing to his brother, barely seeming offended. "Wow, bad temper. I sense a lot of sexual tension."

"Then you have horrible senses."

"Did I tell you, Xavier? Caliana thinks she’s your mate."

"What?" Both Xavier and I asked in unison, his tone much calmer than mine.

"Why on earth would I think that?!" I snapped and began praying Lola hadn't accidentally spilled it. I couldn't imagine her doing that, though. As clumsy as she was, when there was something she knew I wanted to keep secret, she was basically a human diary.

"You were asking about mates and if we magically fell in love. Not only that, but you asked if the mate could be human, and for some reason—out of nowhere—you're attracted to Xavier."

"She tried to hurt me and threatened to kill me," Xavier spoke up. "What an unusual girl."

"Threatened? I told you I definitely will," I snapped, although I couldn't help but be slightly grateful that he disagreed with Colton.

"Well, Lola is definitely not interested in me, so I assume she's either gay or asexual, and your original excuse was bogus. On another note, why else would you ask about mates?"

"You're wrong, which is honestly not a surprise. I was curious to see how much you differ from the wolves in the movie *Twilight*," I bluffed.

He watched me for a moment. "So when are you two going to have—"

"We're not," I stopped him, already knowing where he was going with that sentence.

"What do you mean you're *not*? I paid you $400,000."

"Ask your brother why." I stormed past Colton as dramatically as possible then shut the door behind me, which I instantly regretted. I had hoped to eavesdrop on their conversation in case they had a plan or something.

I jumped when Lola suddenly emerged from a nearby room. "Anything...interesting happen?"

"If by *interesting* you mean *sexual*, then no."

"Not even a kiss?"

"Not even a kiss."

"I'm proud and surprised all at the same time."

"Proud? You're the one who told me to sell myself!"

"Not sell *yourself*, sell your virginity."

"Yet you're proud that I didn't even kiss him."

"Touché, madame, touché."

I let out a groan. "I'm going to die."

"You'll get through it. You're strong."

I shook my head with a small chuckle. "No, Lola, like I'm literally going to die, according to Xavier."

"What are you on about, Cal?"

"Long story... and you're going to listen."

\*\*\*

By the time I had told her everything, she was staring at me with eyes the size of golf balls. "And you don't think he's joking?"

"He sounded dead serious to me. I saw no signs of joking or sarcasm."

"We need to go."

"I could kill him. I told him I would."

"You? Kill someone?" She burst out laughing, taking the sentence as a huge joke.

"I could, though, if I really hated the person. At this moment in time, I despise him."

"I don't think so, sweetheart."

"This isn't funny, Lola! We could die! We probably will die."

"I said you can't kill him…but I can."

"Lola, are we serious right now? About murdering someone?"

"Only if he tried killing us first. It's called self-defense."

"Why are you so calm about this?"

She sighed. "You know if I panic, you'll go into hysterics."

"You're a true friend, Lola." I nudged her with a small smile, grateful she wasn't freaking out for my benefit.

"I'm the best, I know." She shrugged proudly, and I couldn't help but laugh at her confidence.

"You're too cocky for your own good."

"Chill, baby girl—I'll protect us."

"Don't call me that, sugarplum." I smirked when her face scrunched up in sheer disgust. ‘Sugarplum’ was a nickname she had received from a cringe-worthy ex.

"If you never call me that again, I'll never call you baby girl, okay?"

"Deal." I grinned.

In that moment, it felt so good to laugh, to feel relaxed. I realized how bad of a situation we were in—how toxic it was, but it had felt like forever since I had laughed like this. Let alone felt…*calm*.

This place—these men were dangerous. We were basically being held captive. I hadn't fully thought of it like that before, but this was the same as being kidnapped. Were we actually going to die?

"Hey, hey, hey! Why are you crying?" Lola shook me.

I brought my hand below my eyes and sure enough, to my surprise, I felt the warm tear stain. "I didn't notice."

"You didn't notice you were crying?!"

"I—"

"Are you two talking behind our backs?" Colton appeared from around the corner, his serious attitude gone. His eyes landed on me, and I noted his confusion. "You're crying."

I heard a voice behind Colton, but it was barely audible. Even so, it was obvious who it was.

"Caliana," Colton responded to whatever Xavier asked, before Xavier then also appeared around the corner.

His eyes locked onto mine straight away, and although I was usually the one to cover my face when I cried, I didn't budge or break the eye contact. Instead, I stared—no, I glared. I tried to tell him with my eyes what he was doing to us and how *he* had caused this.

The way he watched me almost made me feel like he understood the point until he spoke. "Maybe she's on her period."

"Oh no," I heard Lola whisper next to me, understanding how I was triggered. You don't trigger me when I'm already crying; that was a big no-no. I stood from where I was sitting but said nothing.

I hadn't even known how fast I was until suddenly, I was upon Xavier. I grabbed my shoe, ripping it off my foot. "I will kill you! Right now!" I screamed as I brought my shoe down hard, aiming for his injured stomach. Just as it was about to make contact, the shoe was pulled from my hand. I turned to look up at Colton, a scowl on my face.

"Wow, you're acting like a she-wolf in heat." I knew he was only trying to annoy me, but it was working.

"Be careful what you say, Colton. I'm not messing around."

I had to crane my neck to look up at him since I was now sitting on Xavier who was still on the floor. "Remember, wolves...they bite," I finished, referring to how he had just called me a she-wolf.

And that's what I did. I leaned over and bit into his leg.

I, Caliana, bit into a wolf-bear man's leg.

I chomped onto it, hard. The best thing about it was his surprised, pained cry. Xavier quickly tugged me off his brother, also surprised by my response.

"You're next!" I tried to bite his hand, but he managed to sprawl it out and cover my mouth, restricting me. I honestly felt like a dog with a muzzle—it was quite embarrassing. I stared at him with anger, there wasn't much more I could do. I let out a whimper when my hair was suddenly tugged harshly.

"Colton," Xavier shook his head, "don't."

"Don't?! Did you not see what she did? Listen, just because you're a girl doesn't mean I won't hurt or kill you," Colton snarled, not releasing my hair from his grip, but instead, tugging it harder.

"Now, Colton." Xavier's voice echoed through the room, and suddenly I was let go. "Lola," Xavier snapped, and I turned back to see her hold something over her head, about to hit Colton.

I offered her a grateful smile but shook my head, telling her to put it down. I brought my hand up to my head and massaged my burning scalp.

She dropped the item with a sigh, and Colton glanced back at her before turning to me. "Listen and listen well, Caliana. If you ever try something like that again, I will not hesitate to kill you. No one will stop me, do you understand?"

"You're disgusting," I snarled. "Keeping two girls captive. How many people do you kidnap a year? How many innocent people have you killed? Go to hell!"

"Lost count." Colton shrugged, a sinister smile on his face. I couldn't tell if he was serious or not, which freaked me out.

"What made you like this? Heartbreak? Mommy issues? Daddy issues? Rejection? Being—"

"Caliana," Xavier gripped me tight, "I'd advise you to shut up. Right now." I winced at his tight hold on me. There was anger in his tone, but it also sounded defensive and hurt. My heart sped up, and I bit down on my lip softly.

To my surprise, I obeyed.

**Episode 27**

"I triggered him, Lola!" I brought my finger to my lip. "I'm close to uncovering their secrets."

"Their secrets? That they're werewolves?"

"No, their past. Maybe they were abandoned pups.” I paused. “Would you call them pups or children?"

"Abandoned pups? What—"

"Yeah, that's why there are no parents! He got annoyed when I talked about them. Or maybe someone broke their hearts."

"Cali—"

"What if they lik—"

"Cal!" Lola stopped me in my tracks. "Chill. It doesn't matter. Who cares? If we don't escape, we're as good as dead."

"I mean..."

"You mean nothing. You want to die just to find out about your killer’s childhood? You've lost it! Aren't you the one who wanted to escape from the start and never venture out?"

"I don't need to venture out to find out about their past."

"You think they'll just tell you?"

"Yes. No…maybe. They told us they were wolf-bears."

"Why aren't you scared? Colton was pulling your hair, and if Xavier hadn't intervened, I'm pretty sure you would have been hit."

"Why did he stop h—"

"THAT'S NOT THE QUESTION HERE, CALI!"

"What?"

"The question is how the hell do we escape from this place? How do we plan to survive? I can guarantee those two men out there would kill us in a heartbeat if they had to."

"I feel like we ask how we plan on escaping a lot."

"Well done, Cali. We need an answer to that—not more questions." Her tone was a mix between sarcasm and frustration.

I needed to get my head on straight and stop messing around. At the moment, I was focusing on their pasts when I should be focused on Lola. I should be concerned right now; we were in danger, and my main goal was to get Lola out of here.

"Okay." I pushed the other thoughts to the back of my mind. "What's the plan? I know you're saying you don't have one, but you do. I know you."

"Nighttime." She pushed herself from the bed, showing me her notepad.

"Nighttime?"

"Nighttime. When those two are fast asleep, it’s the best time to make our move. I'm going to leave a window open downstairs—barely, so it's not obvious, but wide enough that we can lift it open. We'll sneak out when they're both asleep. Then we won't need to find the keys when they lock up at night. We're less likely to disturb and wake them. I'll use Google maps to get us to the closest proper road, and from there we’ll get a taxi to the airport."

"What about suitcases?"

"We're leaving those. I'm pretty sure our lives are more important."

"But—"

"But *nothing*. Our lives or some artificial items?"

"So we're going by foot, then taxi, plane, and home?"

"Basically."

"And money?"

"Your card. $400,000, remember? They'll charge back the cash after we escape, obviously, but it'll be in the account when we get the tickets."

"What about the wolves trying to kill us?"

"After what happened with that fight, I expect they won't send them out again until they make a proper plan, so we should be safe. Hopefully."

"Wow, you really have this planned out. I'm proud of you—nice work," I complimented but stopped when her expression changed from the thoughtful look to a judging one.

She was throwing shade. "Thanks, I came up with it all by myself."

I sat down on the bed next to her with a small frown on my face. "I'm sorry for getting sidetracked and acting weird. I don't know where the hell my head is at, but I promise I'll focus solely on tonight."

"No trying to go all Sherlock Holmes and solving mysteries about their pasts." She was really going at me today. I gave her a disapproving look, but she just responded with a smile. "Deal?"

"Deal."

"I can't wait to go home."

"I like your confidence."

"You legit thought we were going to die here?"

"Yeah," I mumbled.

"And you didn't even think of an escape plan. What is wrong with you? Honestly."

"I don't know, but I'm starting to get worried."

"Maybe this place is freaking you out. When we're home, you'll be fine."

"I think it's the stress getting to me."

"Anyway, pick out comfortable clothes for tonight since we'll probably be running. Or die here, whichever you prefer."

"Die by running or die by wolf...both sound bad."

"Which is worse?"

It felt good to joke, almost surreal after everything we’d been through. "I mean, wolves are kind of cute, at least."

"Chill, girl—those wolves in there are demons."

" I'm going to go and pick out some clothes." I pushed myself up from the bed, but she reached out to stop me.

"Remember, Cal, keep your lips sealed and don't bring anything with you. It will only slow you down. Your card and phone are all you need."

"What about my charger and some food?"

"Fully charge your phone before!" she hissed, glaring at me. "You're bringing money; you can buy food and a charger at the airport."

"Fine," I huffed, rolling my eyes, not too pleased that my snacks were being left behind and going to waste.

She released my wrist and allowed me to leave the room, moving into the hallway. I heard the click of a door opening and almost cussed when Xavier emerged. I tried to rush into my room without being seen, but just when I shut the door, I heard him. "Caliana."

I let out a silent groan when he repeated my name followed by, "Open up."

"Don't you know what personal space is? I'm doing girl stuff in here," I lied, my eyes scanning the room, not even sure what I was looking for. Something to get me out of the situation, or some proof for the excuse I had just made.

"Like what?" He didn't sound curious, and I knew why. He didn't believe me. Who would, in all honesty? *I'm doing girl things*. What girl things, and why would I casually state it like that?

"*Stuff*, Xavier! Can you leave? I'm busy," I snapped, growing frustrated. I didn't hide my loud moan when the door handle began to wiggle slowly, only to be followed by the door pushing open.

The moan was to show my frustration and anger, but it wasn't like he was going to care. He peered around the corner, and his eyes examined the room before falling to me. "Liar."

"Pervert."

He seemed surprised at my response. "Me?"

"Yes, you! I told you I was doing personal lady stuff, and you walked in here."

"It was obvious you lied. You had just walked into the room yourself." He pointed to the door.

"No—you know what? Sure, I'm in the wrong. *My bad*, now can you go?" I decided it was better not to argue back. That way the conversation would end quicker. It was one-sided.

"Why?"

"What do you mean *why*? Because I don't want you in here."

"You're acting weird."

"Weird? Your brother almost ripped the hair from my scalp. He could have—"

"I stopped him."

"Wow, good boy. You stopped your brother from killing an innocent girl because you want to kill me instead. I appreciate it, really." I put on a fake smile.

He blinked, looking innocent. "I sense sarcasm—a lot of it, really. You're not exactly innocent, if we're being honest here."

"Really? Are you sure you're not Sherlock Holmes? How smart of you to detect some sarcasm." I decided not to get into his second statement, or we'd be here arguing all day, and like I said, I was in a rush. I needed to choose the things for tonight.

"Watch your tone, Caliana." He smiled.

"Why are you here? If you need something, get it already."

"I can just take it?"

"Yes, as long as it's not my food or my phone. Or something that belongs to me that I don't want you to take." This was his house—why was he even asking that? A small grin crept upon his lips, and he grabbed my wrist lightly.

His eyes lit up when I tried to pull it away, a stern look on my face. "What are you doing? Let me go," I snapped as he began pulling me from the room.

Xavier glanced back, a smile dancing on his lips. "Taking the thing I came for."

**Episode 28**

**Xavier**

"What's going on?" Colton watched me closely. "Don't lie, Xavier—I can see right through your lies."

"What do you mean?"

"With that girl, with Caliana," Colton responded, shooting me a frustrated look. He often acted like a child and played stupid, but he could get serious, and this was one of those times.

I cocked an eyebrow in response. "Explain what you mean by that."

"Why did she come back to you without a fight? Did you say something to her—promise her something?"

"Like what? What could I have said to her, and why would I have said it?" I watched him, bewildered at his sudden change.

"She was asking about mates, Xavier."

"Okay?"

"Is she..."

"No, *no*. You know she's not, Colton." I pushed myself up from the bed. "She's probably some weird girl who loves werewolf movies and is obsessed with the idea," I grumbled, my eyes trained to the bandage around my waist. "I can't tell what goes on in her mind."

"What do you mean by that?" Colton arched an eyebrow.

"One minute she wants to kill me, the next she's trying to help."

"Maybe she's insane."

"That's a high possibility."

"Should we ask her?"

"NO—she overreacts. She might panic or something."

"Are we killing them?"

My eyes met Colton’s, and I said nothing in return. "Are we sure they didn't manage to contact someone? I know she said she wouldn't, because of the whole virginity thing."

"I don't think so. I'll ask."

"I don't know if asking's the best way to go."

Colton responded with a small shrug. He turned on his heel and left the room. With a frustrated groan, I quickly followed him to stop an argument from breaking out. My eyes landed on Colton, who was stopped. "You're crying," he said.

"What?" My brow furrowed when I noticed Colton’s eyes were trained on someone. I walked around the corner to find Caliana and Lola sitting. "Caliana," Colton whispered to me.

She was crying?

She glanced back to look at us but found my eyes straight away. It was almost eerie how she stared at me—not blinking, not turning away. Her lips formed a straight line, and her nose and eyes were red.

I almost felt bad before pushing it back. Girls were so emotional for no reason. "Maybe she's on her period."

Lola muttered something, her eyes widening. Beside her, Caliana stood, and I got a proper look at her now. I almost smiled when I saw fury in her eyes; it was amusing.

In a flash, she was on top of me and had shoved me to the ground, catching me off guard. She stared down at me, her eyes on fire. "I will kill you! Right now!" She pulled off her shoe, and I noticed she was aiming for my stomach. My *injured* stomach.

I didn't even try to push her off but blinked in surprise when it didn't make contact. The shoe disappeared, and I realized it was in Colton’s hand.

"Wow, you're acting like a she-wolf in heat." I sighed when Colton said that, knowing it was only going to make her angrier. Although at the same time, I found this all humorous. Caliana got so worked up.

"Be careful what you say, Colton. I'm not messing around." She turned away to look up at him but didn't move from her spot. Her light body continued to use me as a seat. "Remember, wolves...they bite." My brow furrowed at her unusual sentence before she did something completely unexpected.

She bit his leg. She *bit* Colton's leg.

I watched in surprise. She purposely bit hard, not joking around. She pulled back, then turned to me, and I caught on. "You're next," she snapped and attempted to bite me, too. I curved my hand to cover her mouth, stopping her from biting me.

She struggled, mumbling something under my hand before she was pulled back. My eyes went to Colton, noting how he had her hair in his grip. Her face scrunched up, and she let out a pained cry.

"Colton," I made eye contact with him, "don't."

"Don't?! Did you not see what she did? Listen, just because you're a girl doesn't mean I won't hurt or kill you," Colton snarled, not releasing her hair from his grip, but instead tugging it harder.

"Now, Colton." My jaw tightened, commanding him to let go. He made eye contact with me and narrowed his gaze into an almost-judgmental look. "Lola." I stopped her when I noticed her hold something over Colton's head, about to smash it down.

She hesitated for a second before finally dropping the item with a roll of her eyes. Colton turned to look at her, confused about what was happening. When Lola said nothing, he looked back to Caliana panting on the ground.

"Listen and listen well, Caliana. If you ever try something like that again, I will not hesitate to kill you. No one will stop me, do you understand?"

"You're disgusting." She didn't seem fazed by his threat. "Keeping two girls captive. How many people do you kidnap a year? How many innocent people have you killed? Go to hell!"

"Lost count." Colton shrugged, a sinister smile on his face.

"What made you like this? Heartbreak? Mommy issues? Daddy issues? Rejection? Being—"

"Caliana." I reached out and squeezed her. I noticed Colton's eyes narrow, slowly becoming triggered. I needed to stop this before blood was shed. "I'd advise you to shut up. Right now."

She said nothing else, and Lola bent down, helping her friend off the ground. My eyes followed them as she pulled Caliana from the room while glaring at Colton. When they both disappeared into the room, I couldn't help but be surprised. I expected Lola to come back and attack for revenge.

"Colton," I turned my attention to my brother, "what was your end goal there? Did you even have one?"

"Yeah, to rip—"

"You can't let your anger get the best of you."

"The best of me? She bit me! She almost bit you."

"Key word is *almost*. You somehow let yourself get bitten by her. It's not like she has rabies—she's human."

He narrowed his eyes. "You're injured. I got bitten because I was helping your ungrateful ass."

I sighed, reaching down and untying the bandage. It revealed the wound I had received earlier. I pressed down on the closed cut, not even wincing. "See? Just a scratch."

His brow furrowed. "I thought it was serious. Why did you keep the bandage on?"

I hesitated before raising my shoulder, shrugging. "To shut her up."

Colton arched an eyebrow. "Not to make her happy?"

"Colton." I chuckled. "The only use she has right now is sex and teasing the people who want her dead. You know, the ones who tried to kill us because of her? Why would I want to make a human—no, an irrelevant —happy?"

Colton continued to study me, his expression not yet changing. "Okay. Thought I was losing you for a minute. Then again, she's been here a while, and you haven't done anything with her."

"Can you not see how nervous she gets around me?" I grinned. "I don't want the fun to end so quickly. Seeing her scared is…amusing."

I expected Colton to smile, but he only looked more concerned. "You're saying you enjoy making her nervous? Just like—"

"Colton," I stopped him, my tone changing. "Don't you dare continue; don't you dare compare me to *him*."

He eyed me for a second, his body tense. "I wasn't—I didn't mean it like that."

"Was there any other way to mean it?"

"Yes, there is. You know what I'm getting at, Xavier, so you know that you need to decide."

"What?! Decide to impregnate her?" My nostrils flared, and I grabbed him by the collar tightly. "That's the plan? To rap—"

"No! Jesus, *no*, Xavier." I was shoved off him, and he fixed his collar. "No. Get your mind out of the gutter. I'm not saying that—I would never say that—but…” Colton stopped. "You know what? Now's not the time to talk about this."

"There's never a time to talk about it, Colton. I just don't want to dea—" My sentence cut off when something ran through my mind. "Is that why you brought her here? Is that what you paid for?"

"Xa—"

"Colton." I glared at him, and he understood my fury immediately. "Tell me the truth. Why is she here? I knew you wouldn't pay that much just for sex."

"Bu—"

"NO BUTS, COLTON!" I balled my fists. "I'm not asking—I'm ordering you to tell me. *Now*."

I noted him grinding his teeth together in frustration before sighing. "Fine."

"Go on."

"She's here—"

"Hold on." My brow furrowed. I heard the click of a door, and a moment later Lola emerged without Caliana. I held a poker face, trying to figure out if she had been listening.

She narrowed her eyes when she neared us. "Why do you look so guilty?"

Colton opened his mouth to speak, but Lola cut him off. "It wasn't directed at you asswipe—you should be sorry. I'm asking the other dog." She came closer to me and pointed right in my face. "You."

"Me?"

"Keep your brother in check, Xavier. I will kill him, I'm warning you. I don't care if you kill me in revenge, but I'm not dying before that beast does." She lowered her voice, leaning closer so only I could hear. "And keep your promise."

Lola backed off and looked over at Colton. "If you ever pull anything like that again, I will torture you until you cry." No more words were exchanged until she finally disappeared, returning to wherever Caliana was, I assumed.

"Wonder if she'd actually try to kill me." Colton chuckled.

"It's not a joke. She would, and I'm not getting involved."

"Whatever you say. I need to call Lilac." He pulled his phone from his pocket. "He's probably confused after earlier, and I assume Violet's with him."

"Probably." My voice was hushed as I thought to myself. Colton hit dial and left the room without saying anything. I heard him begin to speak to the person on the other end. "Dammit, Colton!" I called after him, but he was gone. I hadn't gotten him to finish his sentence. He probably planned the whole thing.

I sat on the chair and shut my eyes. The light breeze reminded me of the smashed glass door; I needed to call someone to fix that.

I'd just wait for Colton to get back, and in the meantime, call someone to repair the broken door.

\*\*\*

It had been twenty minutes—I had been waiting twenty minutes. It was then that I had concluded Colton had gone off and was now avoiding me. After all, he wasn't even responding to phone calls now.

I got up from where I had been sitting and went to my room. I was only in there for a few seconds before hearing footsteps. Aimlessly, I made my way out just to catch Caliana sneak into her room. When I say *sneak*, I literally mean tiptoed. Bored and curious, I made my way over when she shut the door. "Caliana."

Nothing.

"Caliana, open up."

"Don't you know what personal space is? I'm doing girl stuff in here." Her voice shook slightly, causing me to sigh. She was a bad liar—someone who didn't even know the girl could see through it.

"Like what?"

"*Stuff*, Xavier! Can you leave? I'm busy." The aggression in her voice made me smile. Bored of this conversation, I grabbed the handle and pushed the door open slightly. I glanced around the corner, my eyes finding her face.

She wasn't amused.

"Liar," I commented, noticing she wasn't doing anything.

"Pervert."

Pervert? "Me?"

"Yes, you! I told you I was doing personal lady stuff, and you walked in here."

"It was obvious you lied. You had just walked into the room yourself."

"No—you know what? Sure, I'm in the wrong. *My bad*, now can you go?" She really wanted me gone. Was she that upset about earlier?

"Why?"

"What do you mean why? Because I don't want you in here."

"You're acting weird."

"Weird? Your brother almost ripped the hair from my scalp. He could have—"

"I stopped him."

"Wow, good boy. You stopped your brother from killing an innocent girl because you want to kill me instead. I appreciate it, really."

Her attitude had escalated incredibly. "I sense sarcasm—a lot of it, really. You're not exactly innocent, if we're being honest here."

"Really? Are you sure you're not Sherlock Holmes? How smart of you to detect some sarcasm."

"Watch your tone, Caliana."

"Why are you here? If you need something, get it already."

"I can just take it?"

I debated on leaving now, but I had confirmed how bored I was when I came to her room. Not only that, but she seemed to be up to something; she was acting strange. I wanted to find out if it was because she was upset over what happened, or if something else was going on.

"Yes, as long as it's not my food or my phone. Or something that belongs to me that I don't want you to take."

In an instant, I grabbed her petite wrist.

"What are you doing? Let me go."

I looked back to her, a smirk playing on my lips. "Taking what I came for."

Surely enough, her face flushed—the thing I had been expecting.

"Xavier, stop. Where are you taking me?" She argued as I pulled her along behind me. Where was I taking her? "I'll scream for Lola," she threatened, but it didn't worry me in the slightest.

I stopped when a man appeared in front of me. Caliana's hand tightened around mine. My brow furrowed, and I turned back to look at her, confused by the sudden change. She was…taking off her shoe?

Suddenly, it was flung at the man in front of us with great force…well, what was great force for her. Then she jumped forward. My eyes widened when she opened her mouth, aiming for his finger. Just in time, I pulled her back roughly, causing her to crash into me. I barely moved but watched her in confusion. What was up with this girl? She struggled for a moment, but I kept her in place. "Phil...meet Caliana."

She tilted her head. "Phil?"

"Yes—the guy who came to repair the door."

"Did she smash it?" Phil wore an unamused expression.

"Surprisingly, no." I shook my head. I had to keep my innocent act up when this man was around. "Can you fix it?"

"Obviously." Phil walked off without saying anything more.

"Wow, he's friendly," Caliana said sarcastically.

"You can't bite people. I'm done helping you."

She glanced back up at me, nibbling on her lip with an unusual look on her face. "You can let me go now. I'm not going to chase him down. I don't need protection."

She was mad because of that?

"With your attitude, you do."

"I have Lola."

"You think she can protect you?"

"Yes, we protect each other. Let me ask you something."

"I'd rather you didn't, but what?" I dropped my hands from her waist, arching an eyebrow in the meantime.

She sucked in a short breath and began playing with her fingers.

"What is it, Caliana?"

"Why were you arguing with Colton? Why did you shout at him?"

**Episode 29**

No reaction.

"What argument?" he asked.

"The one Lola interrupted."

"There was no argument."

"I heard someone shout."

"Probably the insane voice inside your head." He had a weird expression on his face mixed with boredom...although it also looked like he was frustrated.

"Rude, as usual. I don't know why I even bother asking."

"Did you hear anything?"

"Who knows?" I shrugged until he gripped my wrist tightly.

"This isn't a game, Caliana."

"I'm aware my life isn't a game. You're the one who needs to understand that, Xavier. What do you want me for?"

He cocked his head slightly, curious. "What do you think I want you for? Why are you here again?"

"For you to kill me?"

"Caliana."

"Wait." I chuckled. "Are you getting at what I think you're getting at? Because I remember telling you that I'm not giving it to you."

"Hm?"

"You didn't think I was serious?"

"That's fine, then," he said with a small smile, turning away and beginning to walk off.

"It is?" My brow furrowed, having expected him to argue or something. This was *Xavier,* after all.

"Yeah." He nodded. "I’ll just take the money back."

"Fine." My eyes suddenly widened as the words sank in. "Wait—now?!" I needed it now. That money was one of the most important things for our escape plan tonight. We needed it for our plane ticket, the taxi, or whatever else.

He glanced over his shoulder. "Is there a problem?"

"How is that a threat? If I die, you'll take the money back anyway."

"I suppose I could do that," he hummed. "But I paid for your virginity, and I'm not getting it, so I'm receiving a refund. Easy logic, Caliana."

My nostrils flared—he was really getting under my skin, and I was slowly losing my temper. I was frustrated by his carefree attitude. "Fine!"

He stopped walking and turned back to look at me, a grin spreading across his face. "What was that?"

"I said *fine*!"

"*Fine* as in you're okay with me taking the money back?"

"No, you know what I mean."

"I'm not sure I do."

"That I'll...do it with you." My cheeks were turning red hot, not enjoying his teasing.

"Do what with me, Caliana?"

"You know…"

"Refund—"

"SEX, XAVIER! I'LL HAVE SEX WITH YO—"

"Am I interrupting something?" I almost screamed when Phil's deep voice appeared out of nowhere from behind me. My heart was basically beating in my throat as I turned back to him, surprise clear on my face.

Xavier's glance passed me, and he shook his head. "No. What about the glass?"

"I can fix it, obviously, but the new glass won’t match the rest. It has some designs on it."

"Doesn't matter—just use that. It'll probably break again soon."

"Fine," Phil grumbled, his eyes focused on me. "Is she—"

"Phil."

"Yeah, yeah." He turned and left us alone, taking my dignity with him.

"Did you plan that?"

"What?"

"Nothing, never mind."

He didn't question me any further but changed the direction of the conversation. "What made you change your mind?"

"Money."

"But you said if you die here—"

"If I die here, the money gets sent to my parents. It's my money if we go through with it, so I get to do what I want with it."

"Okay."

"Okay?" Why had he agreed so easily?

"So we have to do it now? Today? Here?"

"Not right...here." Xavier rolled his eyes.

"Okay, but…now?"

"You want money? Be a good girl," he murmured, coming closer to me. His hand slowly climbed my body, and I sucked in a deep breath.

My chest rose up and down quickly while I tried to keep my cool. His hand slowly wrapped around my throat, not tight enough to actually choke me but enough to make me clueless and almost drive me to insanity.

"I think the real question, Caliana, is how you want it. Rough?" His grip tightened only for a second before he dropped his hand. "Or gentle?"

"I'm going to die," I hissed, feeling myself overheat. Was this going to be my death? He didn't even need to murder me properly.

He grinned in response to my reaction.

"Can we just get this over with...p-please." I tried to scowl, but I stumbled over my words. I was nervous—really nervous. The moment the words left my lips, Xavier's stance suddenly changed.

His eyes widened, and he almost looked...scared? I couldn't exactly place it. His eyes fell to my face, and his tan complexion seemed to pale. "No."

"No?" My brow furrowed, concerned at how he was reacting now. I reached out. "Just com—"

"NO." He pulled his hand away roughly like I was on fire. "No, I'm not going to make you."

"Make me?" I stared at him in absolute confusion. His demanding manner was suddenly gone. He almost looked like a lost puppy, but I couldn't pinpoint his expression.

It scared me, though. Even though I wasn't friends with this man, and we had both threatened to kill each other, I felt bad. "Xavier..."

"Leave him be." My eyes snapped up to Colton.

"*Leave him be*? What's wrong with him?"

"Nothing," Xavier said.

"Go back to your room." Colton sighed.

"Shut up," I snapped before returning my gaze to Xavier. My eyebrows knitted together. "Are you alright?"

"Fi—"

"Fine," I mimicked. "You sound like a girl. What happened?" I reached out and grabbed his hand. Xavier watched me closely when I began tugging him away; I didn’t like Colton lurking near, so I brought Xavier into my room.

"I said I'm not going to—"

"Hush," I silenced him and got onto the bed. He watched me in silence, obeying my word and not speaking.

"What happened?"

"I'm not going to force you to do something."

"You've forced me to do stuff before."

"This is different."

"Okay, but you freaked out over this." With all my effort, I pulled him down onto the bed after me. Of course I hadn’t thought of the outcome, so when he landed on me, I let out a small *oof* sound. I rolled out from under him, then straddled him so he couldn't escape.

"What are you doing?" He arched an eyebrow.

"I want to know."

"Know what?"

"About you."

"Too bad."

"I'm not just being nosy—I'm genuinely interested. How about we start with you telling me what's wrong?"

"I— What's wrong with you?" He glared.

"I don't know." I climbed off him when I noticed he wasn't trying to escape. "I guess—like you say—I'm insane. Why are you and Colton alone?"

"We like it that way."

"Why does he have all the girls and you don't?"

"Sorry?"

"You keep putting off us having sex. You stop every time we almost get started."

"Yeah—to tease you."

"Is that what you said to Colton?"

"You're nosy."

"I'm interested," I corrected, placing a hand on his chest. "I want to understand you before you kill me"

"Cal—"

"Xavier, please. Since you don't plan to use my body, use me as a therapist."

"Yeah…you're insane."

"Was she your mate?"

His whole body tensed, and my eyes widened. Was I heading in the right direction?

"Did you—"

"I didn't force her to do anything."

"I didn't say that." I wasn't even going that direction. "You're fo— Oh my god, Xavier, were you..."

"Was I wha— Jesus, no! No, Caliana, I wasn't molested."

"Then why is this whole thing sensitive for you, and what does it have to do with your...girlfriend?"

"You jump to conclusions."

"Did she leave you? Mates are real?"

"Why are you so obsessed with mates?"

"Why are you avoiding the answer?"

"You're annoying," he grumbled. I felt his body move, and assuming he was going to get up and try to leave, I kept my hand firm on his chest. "I'll bite you if you leave."

"Don't threaten me with a good time."

I rolled my eyes. "Then tell me, and I'll do it." I leaned in, my lips close to his own. I thoroughly enjoyed the look of surprise on his face. I pressed my lips against his before nibbling on his lower one. "Tell me...did you have a mate?"

"Yeah," he mumbled weakly, his hand sliding around the back of my neck.

So mates…were real, *are* real.

"Did she leave?"

"No..." He stopped the kiss. "Why?"

"Like I said, I'm interested."

"Are you jealous?"

"I hate you, why would I be jealous?"

"Who knows?"

"You know, I like you like this."

"What?"

"When you're calm...behaving," I murmured. "It's cute." I lowered my hand a bit but stopped it at his stomach. "What about your parents?"

"Don't." The word came out sharp, and he shook his head.

I decided to respect his wishes—it was obviously a sensitive topic. "Sorry."

He watched the ceiling; he was so different like this. I grabbed the hand that was around my neck and lowered it down my body.

"I assume you and your mate aren't together. Were you like this with her?"

"Like what?"

I placed his hand on my ass, and he didn't move it. "Like this...cute, cuddly. Not acting like a monster who threatened to kill or sacrifice me."

"I'm not cuddly."

"If you practice...see? Your arm is around me."

"Only to touch your ass." I felt his hand tighten, and I yelped in surprise.

"Way to ruin it."

"Ruin what?"

*Ruin what,* indeed. Did I think something was happening? God, I was so dumb sometimes.

"Nothing," I murmured, and he didn't react. I began lowering my hand again, only pausing for a moment.

Over or under? Be brave, Caliana. Under.

Chewing my lip nervously, I brushed my hand down and under his trousers. He flinched and looked at me. "What are you doing?"

I TOUCHED IT! THIS WAS THE FIRST TIME I FELT A REAL ONE! I HAD SEEN THEM BEFORE, BUT NEVER HAD I TOUCHED ONE!

Why was it semi hard already...and big?

"I want to do it, even though I might make it awkward...really awkward. I'm a very awkward person, if you didn't notice."

He eyed me, his breathing hitched. Interested in the reaction I got from him, I made my grip proper, holding him in my hand. I couldn't help but grin when his body jerked, and he muttered a curse.

Wow...guys were easy to control.

Just before I could start doing anything more to him like I planned, he grabbed my hand. "Caliana."

"It's okay," I whispered. "Like I said, I want to."

He watched me closely, and the look he wore began making me nervous.

And I was right to be nervous. "Caliana, I killed my mate."

**Episode 30**

Everything stopped when he said that. My grip loosened, his words replaying in my mind, trying to figure out if I had actually heard him correctly.

"That's not funny, Xavier," I said slowly, my eyes focused on his own. "Don't ruin the mood."

"I know it's not funny."

"Then don't joke about that." A lump was forming in my throat, and it felt like my breath had been stolen from me.

"It's not a joke."

"Yes, it is," I tried to persuade him.

"Caliana," he snapped, which caused me to jump. "I killed my own mate. She is dead, and I did it. Do you understand?"

My hand retracted from his pants, and I pushed myself up slightly, getting a better view of his face. I searched for any sign of joking, any sign of sarcasm, but nothing. Nothing except a grim look—one that told me this was no joke.

"Okay but..." I took a small breath, "but when you say you killed her, *you* didn't kill her. You, like, blame yourself for her death. Didn't save her in time or—"

"I took her life."

"By accident."

"On purpose, Caliana. I purposely ripped her apart."

My heart was in my throat, and I felt dizzy. "Okay, but…at the time, you didn't know she was your mate…"

"I knew what she was. I knew she was my mate, and guess what? I murdered her—no mistaken identity, no accident. I killed her."

I studied him, desperate to find out this was all a big joke. Why would he kill his own mate? This made everything real. If he could kill his own mate, he could kill me. "She was your mate—she had a life."

"You are correct. HAD a life."

"Was she...?"

"Human? No. And before you try to justify my actions, I didn't kill her in self-defense. My main goal from the start was her death." His jaw tightened, and it almost looked like someone was choking him.

All I could do was stare in horror. He actually did it; he actually killed his own mate.

"W-Why? Didn't you love her?" I was trying to understand, trying to find a loophole, but nothing was coming up.

"Maybe my wolf did." He seemed to think. "Who knows? As for me, did I love her myself? No."

His wolf? They weren't the same person? Wait...so he *could* change?

"How could you? Killing someone is one thing, but killing an innocent person—someone who's meant to be the one you love? What's wrong with you?!"

"A few things." He shrugged.

"You're a monster."

"I suppose I am. You look rather pale."

"Pale? I look *pale*?! I'm in the same room as someone who murdered his own girlfriend!!"

"Mate," he corrected. "Don't complain to me about it. You asked, and I answered two of your questions."

"What?"

"You asked if I had a mate."

"And question two?"

"You also asked why I don't change like Colton."

My brow furrowed. "I don't follow."

"Let's say you have a best friend, right? And that best friend has a boyfriend she loves."

As much as I wanted to scream and run, I also wanted to understand what was going on and where he was going with all of this. "Okay…"

"So with your best friend—you guys are so close, you're basically one person. You're always with each other. But your best friend also loves her boyfriend."

"Okay..."

"Then you kill her boyfriend. You just...kill him because you're angry. Do you think your friend would be okay with that?"

"No."

"Your friend would leave you, and rightfully so."

I watched him in shock. "Your wolf...left you because you killed your mate? You aren't the wolf?"

"Yes and no," he said. "Did you not hear me, though? I just told you I killed my mate. Aren't you scared?"

The smile on his face sent shivers down my spine—I wanted to throw up.

"I don't regret it. In fact, I enjoyed it. Maybe even want to relive it, squeezing the life out of—"

"What did she do?"

"What?"

"How did she hurt you?"

The sadistic look on his face was suddenly gone as he stared at me. I could see how surprised he was by my words—wide eyes, his lips slightly parted. "What did you just say?"

"Did she hurt you?”

He blinked, and I could easily read his expression. Disbelief. His eyes narrowed suddenly. "Were you dropped on your head at birth? Are you an idiot? I tell you I killed my mate, that I *enjoyed* it, and you continue to question me."

"You can't turn into a wolf anymore and rip me apart."

In an instant, my breath was cut off. Xavier's hand was wrapped around my neck, tight. I gasped for air while he glared at me.

"A tiny bit tighter and you die, just the tiniest bit and your throat is *crushed*," He growled. My hands weakly clawed at his arms, desperate for him to allow me to catch my breath, and finally he dropped me.

I coughed and spluttered. The air was heaven to my lungs, but at the same time it burned. The dizzy feeling returned like the crash of a wave.

He arched any eyebrow when I raised my eyes to look at him. They watered, but I didn’t know if it was from the tightness or if I was just...crying.

"Caliana, I could kill you in a heartbeat without batting an eye. Remember that and stop acting dumb." Xavier pulled himself off the bed with a sigh, and without any other words, he left the room. Just before the door shut, I spotted Colton also standing there. I didn't question it—I was too terrified to even look in their direction right now.

What the hell just happened?

After replaying the scene in my mind once more, I weakly pushed myself off the bed, tears running down my cheeks. I opened the door a tiny bit and peeked out until I was certain the coast was clear. I quickly pushed it open and sprinted to Lola's room.

I burst through the doorway, slamming her door shut behind me like something was chasing me. Her eyes snapped to me as I fell through, the surprised look she had on her face suddenly changed to concern. "Your neck...your neck, Cali. What happened?"

"We need to go."

"Yes, tonight. What happened?"

"No! No. We need to go right now. He killed...he's a murderer!"

"Xavier did that to you?" She pointed to her own neck, imitating where I assumed a mark was on my own skin.

"Yes! We have to go now!" It hurt to talk, but I was pushing that aside for now.

Lola was up in an instant. "I'm going to kill him. I'll KILL HIM!"

"NO! No no no no! Please," I begged. "Please don't."

She stopped and looked me over, and it was obvious how furious she was. Beyond furious. It was going to be hard to admit to her that it was consensual. And that I kinda liked it... "Lola, please. It'll make things worse—believe me. Let's just go!"

"Okay...okay, I won’t." She groaned. "Calm down, babes."

She reached out and touched my cheek. "I won't say anything, but we can't go now. They'll be expecting it and catch us instantly. We have to go with how we planned it, okay?"

I nodded, wiping my tears away. "Okay." I sounded like a child the way I was crying.

"What happened?"

"I don't know. Things got hot, then suddenly he told me he murdered someone, and...I don't really want to talk about it right now. I still have to pick out my clothes—"

"Cal..."

"I'll tell you everything when we're safe, Lola, I promise. Just not now."

"Well, if you want me to kill him, please let me know. I'll thoroughly enjoy it."

I left the room without another word, not exactly in the joking mood. I knew if I stayed, she'd only question me more, and at the moment, I wasn't in the mood to answer anything. For some reason, I almost didn't even want to tell her what went down.

What was wrong with me?

I felt like I was questioning my sanity more and more every day. My main focus right now, though, was getting ready for tonight: aka the great escape.

\*\*\*

I had everything. I thought I did anyway. Phone—fully charged—credit card, passport, comfy clothes. I had also eaten some of my food, so it wasn't going to waste. My eyes stayed focused on the clock. Soon.

As expected, Xavier and I hadn't crossed paths since the incident. I expected Colton to maybe check on me to make sure I hadn't run off or broken stuff, but nothing. I didn't know whether to be relieved or nervous because of it.

The house was dead silent. “Everyone” had gone to sleep.

To make it worse and better at the same time, Lola had slipped Rescue Remedy into their drinks. It was this medicine type of thing she used when she wasn't able to sleep. I said it was a bad idea, but she went rogue and did it anyway.

It had been an hour and a half—maybe even two since they had gone to bed. We decided to wait it out, just to be certain they had fallen asleep. Better to be safe than sorry.

When my phone buzzed in my hand, I almost had a heart attack. I had been waiting in silence for so goddamn long, it came as a surprise. My stomach turned over when I saw the text was from Lola

It was time to go.

I left my door slightly open so when I was leaving, there wouldn't be a click. Quickly but quietly, I left my room and made my way down the hallway, my footsteps silent. My eyes flew to Lola's door—it was closed, so I assumed she was already gone and waiting for me.

My heart was thumping in my ears as I made my way to the exit point. My eyes landed on the female figure, and with a relaxed sigh, I walked over. I had been nervous that Xavier or Colton would appear out of nowhere like they usually did.

"Is the window still open?"

"It is."

My heart skipped a thousand beats. That voice didn't belong to Lola. But it belonged to a girl...

I heard footsteps behind me and turned around to see Lola. She looked up to me with an encouraging smile before immediately looking past me, her face falling.

"Why are you here?"

**Episode 31**

"No," the girl in the shadows responded. "What are you doing here?" She said it with an accusing tone.

"Are you their guard dog?"

"You're trying to escape," she commented, ignoring Lola's question. This was the girl who had been with Lilac earlier. I believe her name was Violet.

"You going to try to stop us? Wolf or not, there are two of us and only one of you." Lola narrowed her eyes, not even slightly scared of this girl.

Violet tilted her head slightly. "No, no. I'm not going to stop you."

"Kill us?" I questioned.

"No, I'm telling you to go—to leave this place now. You aren't healthy for Xavier and Colton, and you're making trouble for them. I don't know why you're here. You're human, and the longer you stay, the more dangerous it is for them."

"So you're...letting us go?" My brow furrowed.

Violet turned away and grabbed the poker from the fireplace. "Yes, but they'll know I was here when they wake up. You need to stab me to make it look like I fought you to stop you from going."

"What? No way!"

Violet rolled her eyes. "Humans," she muttered. She brought the poker up and with a deep breath stabbed her own foot. I almost puked.

It was literally *inside* her foot.

She let out a small, pained whimper, shutting her eyes for a second. When they opened, they were watering slightly, and she let out a deep breath. "Leave before I stab you," she growled.

"No! We can't leave you like this! Hold on—I'll get a first aid kit. Lie down." I turned to run to the bathroom to retrieve the kit, but Lola stopped me.

I turned back around and saw Violet staring at me. There was shock written on her face, and her eyes studied me. Finally, she zoned back in, clearing her throat. When she noticed me watching her, her cheeks flushed. "Uh…"

"She's fine, Cal. She heals faster than us—like Xavier did."

"Now, knock me out."

Lola locked eyes with Violet and before I could stop her, she pulled the poker from her foot and whacked her across the head.

My jaw dropped as I stared at Violet, her eyes going hazy before her small body fell to the ground.

"Lola!" I hissed. "Oh my god, is she dead? You could have killed her. You're insane!"

"I didn't kill her." She grabbed my hand. "Look, the door is unlocked now. That makes it easier."

With one last concerned glance at Violet, I raced out the door with Lola. "I'm worried about her."

"She'll be fine."

"You're mean." It was getting harder to talk as we raced into the night, the cool wind snapping against me, causing me to lose my breath now and again. Leaves crunched under our feet as we sprinted through the dark, eerie woods instead of using the clear path.

The trees cloaked us well, hiding us from any predators. Then again, if they could smell us out…

"I hate running on a full stomach, I'm going to vomit," I groaned.

"Why would you just eat?" Lola snapped, and I scowled.

"You told me not to bring the food, and I wasn't going to waste it."

"You're an idiot." She groaned, her eyes examined our surroundings. "No sign of anything—I guess I was right."

"I'd rather you didn't jinx us, Lola."

"Technically, you jinxed us by pointing it out.”

"This was your idea. You cannot blame me if anything goes wrong," I pointed out.

"I won't." She smiled. "Because if anything goes wrong, we'll probably end up dead."

"Can you not?" I narrowed my eyes. "No more talking; I can't run and speak at the same time without having a heart attack." I was panting, and although it was cold out, my body was on fire. My lungs burned, making it hard to catch my breath, but I pushed on, the memory of what Xavier said earlier giving me that last boost.

If mates were as important as they were in the movies, how could he kill her? He didn't even seem to care when he spoke of her.

I didn't even know the girl and it made me sick. How could he just kill someone without being affected? "Cal, *focus*." Lola glanced over to me. "Don't zone out."

I nodded quietly, setting my attention back on our mission. "Why...did…Violet let us... go?" The words came out choppy due to the running.

"She's either worried about them or she's jealous. She probably has a crush on one of them and doesn't appreciate two girls being in the house."

"She looks seventeen. Xavier's, like, twenty-something."

"But she *could* be older. Anyway, age is just a number...unless it's a kid. Then age is a jail cell."

I said nothing else on the matter because I literally couldn’t. My lungs were upset with me and refused to let me catch my breath. I slowed to a jog, grabbing Lola's arm. "Slow down."

"We're so close," Lola whined, but when she saw I was on the verge of an asthma attack, she sighed and slowed down. "Fine. I told you not to eat, though."

"I'm sorry," I groaned. My lungs were stinging as we slowed to a stop. I was relieved as the air pleasantly returned to my body. "That feels *sooo* good."

Lola arched an eyebrow. "Having an orgasm over breathing? That's new. Your future man won't have trouble pleasing you, at least."

"Shut up." I picked up a small pebble and threw it at her, but she only responded with a small grin.

"This place is actually kind of pretty," I commented. "Terrifying, but pretty."

"Okay...you're really weird."

"*You're* really weird."

"Wait! The main road!" Lola cried out as we climbed. Of course, there were no cars at this time of night. It was quite a dead road anyway, so it made sense that there weren't cars.

Lola pulled her phone from her pocket and began dialing a number for a taxi. I sat down, my legs tingling from the small marathon, while she spoke to the person on the other end.

"There's a big sign that shows a deer on it, then one that warns about bumps…" Her voice was shaky.

Silence.

"Please! Ask your drivers and see if they know. We really need a taxi!"

More silence.

"Fine! Screw you, useless piece of—ugh he hung up!" Lola ground her teeth in frustration. That call sounded like it didn't go as planned.

"Now what?" I was beginning to panic.

Lola looked past me, squinting. "That's what."

I followed her gaze, shielding my eyes from the two bright lights heading toward us. Lola jumped onto the road, waving her hands frantically.

"Maybe we can just walk—I don't like the idea of hitching rides with strangers."

The car slowed as it neared us before coming to a complete stop. My head began racing. What if it was a serial killer?

Lola ran around to the front window, not even a bit scared. "Help! Please. My friend needs help—we'll pay you!"

The person, who I couldn't see due to the bright headlights, responded in a low voice. Lola turned back to look at me. "She fell. I think her ankle is sprained, please!" A few more seconds of talking, and a bright smile appeared on Lola's face. "Thank you!"

She ran over to me, holding out her hand before whispering. "Limp...your ankle is sprained."

I rolled my eyes but purposefully winced as she pulled me up. "Don't overdo it." I ignored her comment and limped to the car, leaning on Lola who “helped” me there. She pulled open the back door for me and got into the front.

"The hospital?"

"No, the airport."

"I thought she was injured?"

"She is. It's a sprain, not a broken leg. Our friends are waiting for us."

"This late? I really think—"

"It doesn't matter what you think. Our friends have already been waiting an hour.”

"Lola!" I kicked her seat to stop her from being so rude.

"Okay, okay." He raised his eyes to the mirror and caught my gaze. His were a nice dark brown color, but I quickly looked away, not wanting to make eye contact.

The car was warm, and compared to outside, it felt like heaven. It smelled kind of smoky.

"May I ask what two young ladies are doing out so late in the middle of nowhere?"

"We decided to walk, but we didn't know how far the airport is, and no taxi would come collect us. What about yourself?" Lola asked without hesitating.

"Nighttime drive." He chuckled. "I drive when I can't sleep."

"That's dangerous." I frowned. "Especially with the heat in this car. It could make you drowsy, and you could crash. It's fine if you want to go home—we can find another way to get there."

His eyes looked at mine through the mirror, his brow furrowed slightly as if confused. Finally, he offered me a small smile. "It's fine. It won't affect me, although I do appreciate the concern."

"Okay..." I paused. "If you're sure. Thank you so much."

"You're too friendly for your own good." The man shook his head. "If only there were more people like you…"

"And you! You helped us—we were stuck back there."

"Why are you blushing?" Lola asked, but the man ignored her.

"Are you guys on a trip? You obviously aren't from around here."

"How do you know?" Lola asked, like it was an interrogation.

The man noticed this and gave her a sideways glance. "You’re headed to the airport and clearly lost,” he said slowly. “Why not just call a car?”

"You have to be careful these days," Lola responded. "But, yes, we took a trip. Wasn't the smartest idea to go out in the middle of the night like this…you never know what's out there."

She was watching him like a hawk, and it made me nervous. "Please excuse Lola, she gets…nervous." I tried to apologize for her behavior. "Are you sure you're okay to drive us? You aren't tired?"

"Fine." He smiled. "Believe me, I'm used to it."

"I don't think everything’s fine," Lola commented.

"What?" My brow furrowed.

"The turn for the airport was back there..."

The man's grip tightened on the wheel as Lola turned back to me. She seemed to study me before nodding. "Good, your seatbelt is on. Get ready and hold tight—this might be rough," she whispered.

Before I could stop her, she lunged out and grabbed the steering wheel. With a strong pull, she turned the car, spinning us off the road...directly toward a huge tree.

**Episode 32**

When I saw what she was doing, I silently thanked my parents for always telling me to put on a seatbelt. My eyes went up to the handle above my head—you know, the one that no one ever uses? Now I understood its purpose. It was the *how the hell did I get into this mess?* handle.

I gripped onto it tight and cried out. Even though I had been expecting it, the impact was insane. It felt like things went in slow motion, and I couldn't properly hear. My head spun, my ears were ringing, and as I pushed myself back up, I knew what the damp, sticky feeling on my forehead was. Blood. So much blood. I weakly pushed myself back against the seat. My body ached, and I tried to rest my head on the seat.

"Come on, Cali!" I felt a strong tug on my arm, and Lola's voice filled my ears. How had she gotten out so fast?

"Don't pass out. We have to go!" She was frantic as she leaned over me and undid my seatbelt before pulling me from the car. "My wrist and head hurts." I frowned. "Why would you— The man! We need to help him!"

"No, Caliana! We'll fix you up at the airport. Look, it's not that far. We can climb over the gate."

"The man, Lola! He helped us."

"He was not there to *help* us. It was far from coincidence that he was out there. We have to go, now."

"Bu—"

"Cal, trust me like I trusted you," she pleaded, and with one last desperate look, I nodded and chased after Lola while she dragged me behind her.

"How did you know he was bad?" I winced as my finger touched my forehead, the blood painting the skin.

"How did—" Her words paused at the sound behind us. The front of the car was on fire, to my surprise, but I didn't need to be concerned about the man. For the man was…well, no longer a human. The familiar cracking of bones was enough proof of that.

Now a dark brown wolf stood—smaller than Colton but bigger than your average wolf. It wasn’t injured, and when I made eye contact with those brown eyes, my heart sped up.

He was locked onto me, like I was the only prey here even though it was Lola who almost killed him. His eyes were so human—it was scary.

"Run!" I winced when Lola pulled me by my injured wrist. I expected the wolf to chase after us, but with one last glance, he turned on his heel and sprinted off into the trees.

"Why did he leave?" My brow furrowed. "He's not chasing us—why?"

"Maybe he's scared of planes or doesn't want to be seen by humans. That’s not really important right now, though, is it?" She was panicking, and rightfully so.

"Do you think—"

"No." She shook her head, knowing where my head was at. "Xavier and Colton didn't send him, so I assume he was from the other pack that tried to attack them."

"They're a pack?"

"Probably." She boosted me up over the fence. I hopped down slowly, then Lola followed suit. The runway wasn't too far from us, lit up with a bunch of small lights.

Lola pointed to the large building in the distance. "Don't get caught by security. We shouldn't be out here, so let's go." She grabbed my wrist again and ran toward the large building.

My free hand went to my head once more where the sticky blood was slowly drying. "Give me a proper warning next time—I could have died."

"You had your seatbelt on. I obviously checked before I did anything."

"How sweet." I rolled my eyes. Soon enough we arrived at the building, sneaking in through the staff-only door and up the stairs. Inside, the airport was nice and warm. The only problem was the booking desk was far away, down the other end.

We crept through the area before finally coming out to the common area where most people were. They sat in seats, mostly waiting for their flights, but some were already in line ready for boarding.

How had we not gotten caught?

"What I would do to be them," Lola groaned.

"Be them? What?"

"To be clueless about everything, to not be chased by wolves—something we thought were mythical creatures."

"Oh...yeah, that would be nice," I commented. "Although, it's interesting to know that humans aren't the only species. I wonder if there are mermaids and vampires. Everything seems so different now."

"Animals, bugs, plants. They're technically species, too."

"You know what I mean!" I responded. "Hey, when's the last time your dad messaged you?" I messaged my own parents before we left in case anything went wrong. They thought I was still on holiday with Lola. If they knew what was going on, I'd be done. I'd rather die than tell them—literally.

"Which one?" I couldn't help but smile when Lola made her usual joke. Lola had two fathers. She was adopted, yes, but she didn't like thinking of her family like that. They were basically blood.

"I texted them yesterday."

"You told them you were coming home?"

She hesitated. "Something like that."

I didn't question her further as we continued our journey. Even this late at night, it was funny to see how many people were up and ready to travel. The night...well, it seemed like a time for sleeping, but *someone* was always awake, no matter what.

"Stop dawdling." Lola sighed, turning back to me. "We need to go find first aid before anything else," she said, now focused on the cut on my head.

"I can get tissue—it's not even that bad."

"Yes, it is. How did you even manage that? You were in the back, and I warned you. And look at your wrist, Cal!" My gaze dropped, and to my surprise, my wrist was already bruised. It was a light bruise, but it was there, and it was swollen. My other wrist was tiny compared to the now bloated one.

"We'll deal with it—"

"Now," Lola stopped my sentence. "We'll deal with it now."

My teeth grit together in frustration, but I said nothing else on the matter. Lola asked someone for directions, so I followed her as we made our way to the small room where all the medical supplies were.

A small woman appeared when we knocked on the door. "What happened? Were you running on the escalator?" She sighed as she began gathering supplies.

"She's not a child, she just slipped," Lola snapped in a protective manner.

"That's a nasty injury," the woman commented, pulling out a bandage. She passed me an ice pack and after wincing, I held it to my wrist. She got a disinfectant wipe and began treating my head injury. I almost cried out at the stinging sensation.

"Deep...not deep enough for stitches, though." She whistled. After she placed a large cotton patch over my injury, she secured it with tape.

"Are you hurt, Lola?" I asked as the woman took the ice pack from me, then sprayed something on my wrist.

"Only a small cut…I had time to prepare for the impact," she teased, a smirk on her face.

I turned away and rolled my eyes, the crash scene playing in my mind. So...he was actually a wolf. We had been seconds away from dying, and if Lola hadn't done that, he could have driven us into his pack, and we'd be ripped to shreds.

And none of these humans were aware of them...

I winced when the woman wrapped the bandage around my wrist tightly. I watched her closely. I hadn't expected the other man to be a wolf in the slightest. Anyone could be one. This woman…even *she* could be fooling us.

"Okay," she said after finishing the bandage. "Your turn, love." She glanced to Lola, who returned the stare with a shake of her head.

Usually, I would demand her to be checked, but this time was different. "We have to go." I stood from the seat and without saying thank you, grabbed Lola's hand with my available one and walked out of the room. I couldn’t bring myself to trust anyone anymore, not even if they’d offered to help us. Anybody could be one of *them*, and they were hunting us down. We couldn’t take any chances.

Lola stopped me the moment we were outside. "What's going on? You didn't force me to get checked, and you didn't even say thank you to that woman. Which, in my opinion, was extremely rude."

"Wolf," I hissed. "That guy in the car seemed so normal, then *boom,* he was a wolf!"

"Uh..."

"Anyone here could be one! Following, stalking…she could have been one," I exclaimed, and Lola’s brow furrowed. "Maybe everyone here is a wolf. Maybe it's a wolf-bear airport."

"You couldn't tell that guy was creepy? He constantly stared at you like fresh meat, and when you looked back, his grip tightened on the wheel," she explained. "He also had a wild look in his eyes."

"I didn't notice."

"Yes, because you were in the back seat, and you're oblivious to everything around you. That’s why I sat in the front."

"That's rude."

"It's *true*. If I wasn't here, you'd probably be dead."

"I wouldn't be in this place at all if it wasn't for you!"

"You agreed to this," she argued, even though we both knew I was right. For once.

"Look, we'll be home soon." She shrugged, studying my bandaged wrist. "Not bad for someone you thought was a werewolf."

"After what I went through, I’m allowed to be paranoid." I yelped in surprise when a kid crashed into me.

His mom ran up behind him with an apologetic look. "I'm so sorry!" she said. “Ben, apologize to the lady."

The kid wore an adorable frown. "I'm sorry—I was flying my own plane! I want to be a pilot."

I offered him a small smile. "No worries. Just don't crash when you're a real pilot or you'll kill everyo—"

"EXCUSE HER!" Lola said loudly and pulled me away. "You're freaking out!"

"No, I'm not."

"You talk about death or say weird things when you're freaking out...and what you said to that kid—he's probably going to change his career goal!"

"Good! If he crashed already, I basically saved lives. No doubt he would have crash—"

"He's a child! Your ass was in the way!” Lola paused, studying me closely. “Now what's wrong?"

"What's *wrong*? We have two different reasons wolves are chasing us. Not only one! You almost killed one, and he's going to alert the others and be very angry! What if one of them is our pilot?"

Her brow furrowed, trying to figure out if I was joking. When I held the same serious expression, her lower lip quivered before a snorted laugh escaped her throat. I scowled when I noticed she wasn't taking me seriously.

"Did you just say a wolf…as our pilot?" I rolled my eyes at her laughing hiccups.

"Lola, that driver—"

"*Smelled* us because we were running through what they believe is their territory."

"He was human when we were running—he couldn't smell us! What if the airport is—"

"The airport does not belong to wolves, Cali. They'd stand out."

"Stand out? I couldn't tell that our driver was one."

"No offense, because I love you, Cali, but you're kind of...not super aware of things around you."

"You’re basically calling me stupid." I scowled, but she only shook her head.

"Listen, I'll keep an eye out. You try to relax." She was going into mama mode. I decided to drop the whole thing for her sake, knowing I was likely getting on her nerves. She was right. I was being paranoid. It would be better to trust Lola's instinct, so if we died, I could blame it on her.

"Fine." I sighed as we neared the booking desk. I pulled out my card and handed it to Lola.

She shared a look with me. "Don't worry, I'm pretty sure the girl at the desk isn't a wolf."

"I wasn't worried. The pin is 8451. Hurry."

Lola nodded and made her way to the desk. I stayed where I was, glancing around, looking for the man from earlier to make sure we weren't being followed. Although he had run the other way, it could have been a distraction. Maybe he was following us the whole time.

Lola was mumbling instructions to the woman at the desk when my eyes landed on someone who looked my way. Immediately, I panicked until a woman came up behind him and curled her arms around his waist. A huge smile grew on his face, and he turned back to the girl with a wide hug. Of course, I was being paranoid again. We were fine...everything was fine.

"Cali!" I jumped when Lola called me. I turned to her, and my stomach flipped when I noticed the distressed look on her face. I hurried over, and both the woman and Lola looked to me. The phone behind the desk rang, causing the woman to leave us alone.

"What is it?"

"The card," Lola groaned. "Insufficient funds."

I stared at her, trying to see if she was messing with me. "Insufficient funds? Lola, how much is the flight? There are thousands in there!"

"Not anymore." She spoke in a dull voice.

"Ho—"

"Excuse me," the woman at the desk interrupted me, and I wanted to slap her. "There's a Mr. Smith on the phone for you, Calania."

"It's Caliana," I snapped. "I don't know a Mr. Smith."

"Excuse me, sir, she said she doesn't know you." She nodded. "No worries at all!" She hung up the phone, and Lola and I exchanged a nervous look. I groaned loudly when my phone began buzzing.

"Don't answer it." Lola sighed.

I arched an eyebrow. "Why?" But she was no longer looking at me. Lola raised her hand, pointing a finger beyond me, a frustrated expression written on her face.

I spun around with a fast-beating heart and almost wanted to cry. Xavier and Colton stood there, a sly grin on Colton's face as he held up his mobile phone, wiggling it between his fingers.

Great.

**Episode 33**

"How?" I asked Lola quietly as they walked over to us. How had they found us? They were like...superhuman. Then again, they literally were wolf-bears.

"Hello, ladies," Colton said with a big grin. I expected him to be angrier—not only because we tried to run, but because we disturbed his sleeping time.

"Why are you so happy?" Lola asked the question I wanted to know.

"I can't tell you how hilarious you r—"

"What happened to you?" Xavier interrupted his brother. I turned and found his eyes focused on my wrist. Colton only now seemed to notice this, and his eyebrows raised in surprise.

"Nothing important." I shrugged.

"Your head and wrist are bandaged. How is that nothing?"

"My bet is she fell downstairs," Colton said.

"Where's the money?" Lola changed the subject.

"The money you planned to escape with?"

"Oh no." She laughed. "We knew you would charge it back, but not until after we landed."

"Well, seeing as Caliana has not fulfilled her end of the deal, she has yet to be paid."

"It was already in the account, though."

"Not really. Good thing Xavier noticed Caliana acting weird. We didn't go to sleep, idiots."

I suddenly recalled everything Xavier told me and involuntarily took a step back without realizing what I was doing. "How's Violet?"

"Violet..."

"I didn't—"

"You didn't hurt her. We know." Colton rolled his eyes. "You couldn't hurt a fly."

"I could."

"Don't worry, the pain she caused is going to be her only punishment. As for you—"

"Punishment? Being dragged back to your house is already a punishment," I snapped. "Why can't you let us go? Especially after what *you* told me!" I glared at Xavier, hoping my hatred was clear. I was beyond mad at them, and I felt like I was losing my sanity.

"What did he tell you?" This was news to Colton. I hated Xavier; I wanted to kill him, but I was also a girl who stayed true to her word, so I wasn't going to say anything on the matter. I promised I was Xavier’s “therapist,” and therapists don't repeat stuff.

Instead, I simply glared.

"What happened to you?" The question came from Xavier and caught me off guard.

My brow furrowed in confusion. "What?"

He brought his hand up to his forehead—the same place I had been injured. I watched him like he had three heads. "Did you not just hear me?"

"I did, but I'm asking what happened."

"It doesn't matter! What matters is you forcing us back there!"

"You have no money to go home." Colton's grin made my stomach flip. "It's fine...we'll leave, then."

"No!" Lola stopped him, which was honestly more surprising than the car crash.

"No?" I asked in surprise, answering for Colton. "Where did this suddenly come from? What happened to us *running*?" I glared at her. "What happened to our plan?"

"They're here." She had a serious face, but she wasn't looking at me—she was watching Colton. "Aren't they?"

"Clever girl."

"Fill me in, please," I said, not liking being left in the dark. She pointed to my head, and in a second, I understood.

My eyes widened. "He led them here."

"No, we didn't," Colton intervened.

"She's not talking about you." Lola sighed.

"Wh—" Colton cut off his own sentence. "You two were attacked?"

"By her." I pointed to Lola.

"Were you bitten?"

"Explain," Xavier spoke up.

"On one condition."

"What's that condition?" Colton played along.

"We don't get *punished*."

Colton shook his head. "No deal."

"Colton." Xavier sighed, turning to us. "We won't punish you."

I narrowed my eyes. "Promise?" Xavier nodded, and although I hated him more than anything, a deal was a deal, so I kept talking. "We were...we got a ride with a wolf."

"You rode a wolf?" Xavier cocked an eyebrow.

Colton grinned and nudged his brother. "I know what wolf she'll be riding."

No one paid attention to his immature remark, and for once, I didn't even blush. Any hope I had for Xavier was gone; he was a sick psycho—that was all I saw him as now.

"No, he picked us up in a car." Lola rolled her eyes.

"Oh, so—"

"We didn't know he was a wolf," I said. "He seemed innoce—"

Lola sighed. "After one minute in that car, it was obvious something was wrong. He was looking at Cal a lot and refused to take his eyes off her."

"Basically, Lola almost got us killed," I announced. "That's how I got the scars."

"Okay, Joker, calm down. I *saved* us. I told you to hold on."

"Care to explain?" Colton stopped our bickering.

"I crashed the car into a tree."

"With us in it!"

"He was a wolf—his reflexes are on point. If I gave you proper warning—"

"Then what?" I asked.

Lola ignored me and finished the story for the guys. "We ran here, got Cal patched up, and here we are."

"A decent plan." Colton shrugged. "But not smart enough. Caliana gave it away—Xavier caught her acting strange."

"Strange?" I scoffed. "Maybe I acted strange because of what you said."

"What he said?" Colton asked, returning to our conversation from earlier.

"He didn't tell you he told me?"

"Told you *what*?"

I wanted to blurt it out like before, but I couldn't. Whether it was because I was so loyal I would keep his secret, or because I was too scared to say it, I didn’t know.

"Cal?" Lola asked before stopping and slowly turning toward Xavier. "You..."

"You really think I'd drink hot chocolate you made for me? That confirmed something was up. What did you slip—"

"Shut up!" Lola finally cut Colton off. "Xavier."

"What?" he grumbled, looking over at her.

"Don't you dare! I know what you did to Cal." She pulled out a penknife from her pocket, and my jaw dropped.

"Where did you get that?"

"The real question is how you snuck it into an airport,” Colton commented. “That's kind of impressive."

She pulled the scarf from my neck. "That mark—you did that."

"He did?" Colton was clueless right now.

"It's not going to bruise." Xavier shrugged before sucking in a quick breath.

My eyes grew when I noticed the small bloody cut on his arm. "Lola!"

"I'm not messing around, Xavier. I'm not afraid of you. You know you're nothing now, so stop acting tough," she snarled. I couldn't see any fear in her—in fact, if I weren’t her friend, I'd honestly be scared of her.

"Lola, it's fine."

"FINE? HE CHOKED YOU."

"It's a common practice in bed," Colton added. "I could show you—"

"This wasn't in bed."

"We were on a bed," Xavier pointed out.

"I'm not stupid. I'll make you regret—"

"Now, now." Colton reached out for the knife before quickly retracting his hand when Lola tried to jab it toward him. A frown formed on Colton's face. "Xavier, what did you do to upset them so much?" It was obvious he was genuinely interested now.

"I don't know. I thought girls were into that choking stuff." Xavier shrugged, keeping up the innocent act. Now, I wanted to be the one choking him. And not in the kinky way.

Colton gave his brother a look, and it was clear he didn't believe Xavier.

"You can't do this, Xavier." I pushed past Lola, making her lower the knife. "You can't threaten me, then when I run, decide to kidnap me. You paid me to have sex with you, yet every time we do anything, *you* make an excuse to stop it. I was jerking you off, then boom—you threaten me! When I try to escape, you won't let me! If you plan to kill me, just do it already."

Lola and Colton both stared at me in shock.

"You jerked him off?"

"He threatened you?"

Both Lola and Colton spoke in unison.

Then Lola swiped with the blade again. It was well-hidden up her arm sleeve, although I knew security was getting suspicious. Xavier jumped back just in time, like he expected it from her. "You guys are insane," Lola almost yelled.

"Maybe, probably not," Colton said. "The question is…are you insane, Lola?"

"No."

"Then be a good girl and come with us." Colton smiled. "I'm sure the other wolves are thinking you look very tasty, you know."

"Like hell we'll—"

"Fine," Lola cut me off.

I turned to her in shock. "What?!" She literally tried to stab them seconds ago, and now she was agreeing with them.

"We don't have the money, Cali."

"We'll borrow some. I'll get a transfer."

"Transfer?"

"Yeah, I'll borrow money from people."

"Cal, we don't know how long that could take, and I'm pretty sure that driver-guy is mad. He probably told his pack about how we tried to kill him."

"Your goal was to kill him?! Lola, there is no *we*. You crashed the car—I didn't try to kill him."

"You were in it."

"So?"

"This isn't what we should be doing. We need to go."

"No." I shook my head. "I'm not going back with them."

"Cal..."

"Need I remind you?" I pointed to my throat. "They plan to kill us."

"B—"

"I'd rather die from some random—" I paused, my eyes landing on one security guard in the distance, talking to another one. In a swift action, I pulled the knife from Lola's sleeve and without thinking, I sliced my arm. I let out a small whimper as the three people surrounding me stared in shock.

"Caliana!" Lola tried to grab the knife, but I threw it to Xavier. As expected, he caught it easily.

He made eye contact with me, a curious expression on his face. He almost looked interested. I let a smirk creep on my face before sucking in a breath. "HELP!! HELP! SOMEONE, HE'S GOT A KNIFE!" The moment I screamed, both security guards came racing over. I held my bleeding arm, making sure they could see Xavier. "I'm feeling faint…please...stop him before he hurts anyone else."

The look of shock on Xavier's face right before he was tackled to the ground satisfied me, and honestly, I found it hilarious.

"Stay down!" the man shouted, and Xavier obeyed.

Lola stared at me, obviously surprised at what went down. "What the— Cal!" She stared between me and Xavier, who was now pinned on the ground.

My eyes flew to Colton. "Okay, let's go."

"Excuse me?"

"I plan for Lola to survive, and I think two of you against us is unfair." I shrugged. "One of you is down—it's safe to go."

"Safe to go? You think I'll bring—"

"Go, Colton." Xavier sighed as he was tugged off the ground, somehow overhearing our quiet conversation.

"Xavier..."

"Get me out later." He shrugged. When his eyes flashed in my direction, I immediately glanced away. Even though he was restrained, I was still nervous. What I had done probably made him very mad.

"Fine, but she should be thrown to the wolves…literally," Colton grumbled. "Are you sure, man?"

"I'm sure—just go." Xavier sighed again. Colton turned on his heel and walked toward the exit.

Knowing we were going now, I decided to use this as my chance to sneak one last glance at Xavier before we left. To my surprise, his reaction wasn’t what I imagined. I expected some rage-induced expression on his face, but no…

When I looked back and made eye contact, his lips twitched, and an amused smirk was written on his face before sending me a small wink. My eyes widened, and I quickly looked away, my cheeks heating.

What was wrong with him?

What was wrong with *me*?

**Episode 34**

I was surprised Xavier hadn't put up more of a fight. He basically accepted his fate of—most likely—being arrested. Having a knife in an airport is extremely serious.

The three of us—Colton, Lola and I—made our way toward the exit. Without Colton looking, it was the perfect time for an escape. We could easily run right now, but instead Lola just followed him silently.

She really believed we couldn't escape...

I was going to die, and I hadn't even been able to give my parents one last hug. This trip should have been over by now. This was hell, and this hell was driving me insane. Was it bad that I just wanted to end it?

Maybe I was overreacting, but waking up every morning to worry if it was the day they were going to kill me was a horrible thing.

"No," I announced, and I knew they were watching me now. Lola stood out because her eyes suddenly widened when they made contact with mine. "No, Lola!" I jumped back when she reached out to me. "No! I'm not dying because of them. I'm sick of this."

"She's panicking." Lola frowned, concern clear in her voice.

Colton rolled his eyes and began walking toward me. "Can you—"

"DON'T TOUCH ME!" I snapped and surprisingly, he flinched back. I pushed past him, almost throwing him to the ground.

"Colton, get her!" I blocked out whoever was shouting as I sprinted out the door. There were trolleys to carry luggage and three taxis outside. It was a small airport after all.

"Cal, stop!" I heard Lola scream after me. I glanced back and noticed she was chasing, but surprisingly, I was faster. Adrenaline was an amazing thing. Usually at this point, my tongue would be hanging from my mouth, and I would be out of breath.

I was almost at the end of the airport parking lot. My eyes landed on the barrier that stopped cars from leaving unless they paid their parking ticket. I slowed my run and ducked under the barricade, making sure not to hit my head.

An angry passenger blew the horn on the vehicle, but I paid no attention. My eyes searched the area—where could I go?

It was basically roads with shoulders trailing the side. I had two options: run along the road for ages until I reached the nearest town. No doubt they could easily catch up. I couldn't throw them off my tail like that. Or I could go for the woods. I could easily lose them…but as for the other things hunting me, I wasn't so sure.

I only needed to think about it for a few seconds.

I was going to die here anyway, but I wasn't going to give Xavier the satisfaction. I wasn't going to die by him.

With that, I raced toward the woods. I heard Lola's begging screams far behind me—she was obviously becoming breathless. I felt like I could run forever. I put that energy into forcing my legs to speed up. My calves and thighs were on fire as I made my way up the hill. I was panting when I finally made it to the edge of the woods, but knowing Lola was far behind me, I stopped and took a breather.

I almost screamed when my arm was pulled. I brought my leg up but was quickly caught and trapped. I aimed for his hand with my teeth, to bite him, but he released me from the tight grasp, causing me to drop to the ground.

"Colton, leave me—" I paused. "Not Colton." Xavier looked down at me, and I stared up at him, bewildered. "What? How the hell did you get out of handcuffs?"

"They're security guards in a tiny airport. Not cops—they didn't handcuff me."

"They let you go? Even though you had a knife?"

"They let me go against their will."

"Oh, violence."

I suddenly realized the position I was in. "You're fast." I pushed myself up—I couldn't stay on the ground. No doubt Lola was almost here, and I always had trouble going against her. I turned and tried to make my escape, but again my wrist was grabbed.

"Let me go, Xavier!" I snapped, trying to free my arm.

"Cal—"

"Don't you dare say my name. Let me go. Now." He studied me when I snarled at him, but to my dismay, he didn't say anything, nor did he let me go. "Find someone else to tease and play…sorry, I mean *kidnap*. I'm tired of being here. I'm tired of you treating me like an animal."

"You're as stupid as ever." He chuckled. "The moment you go in the woods alone, you're dead."

"Stupid?" I rolled my eyes. "I'm aware I'll die if I run in there."

His eyebrows raised, surprised by my response. "You're...aware?"

"Yes."

"And you're running in there...even though you know?"

"Wow! Congratulations, Xavier, you can think." I would have applauded to add more sarcasm, but my wrist was still trapped. I scowled and pulled until I tugged it free.

"I don't think you realize. If you run in there, it's suicide."

"That's the plan."

"What?" Lola panted, coming up from behind Xavier.

"It's either death by those two or by—"

"Calm down. You aren't thinking this through, Caliana," Lola begged.

But I was.

It felt like the two of them were only out for me, like Lola was irrelevant to them. If anything happened to me, they'd have no use for her, and they’d most likely let her go. Even if I died, it wasn’t like I’d miss out on anything important.

My mother was sick, and each day it hurt more and more seeing her like that. No guys ever really wanted me, and Lola was my only friend. There was nothing drastic I would miss, so if this could save Lola and end this whole thing, I was okay with it.

"You realize if you run in there, we aren't chasing after you. It's death if you decide to go that way."

"You realize," I mimicked again, "that's the plan." I turned and began heading off. "You have no need for Lola now—you can send her home."

"Cal, don't be stupid...please."

"No," Colton spoke. I turned back to see him stopping Lola from chasing me. She scowled up at him, but for once I actually appreciated what he did.

"Lola, I'm tired of this cat and mouse game." I sighed while shaking my head. "Go home." I felt her fingers brush my wrist, trying to stop me, and it pained my heart. I almost wanted to cry.

Why was I accepting death so casually with no problem at all? I had never been suicidal, yet I realized now how I had never really cared about myself.

I heard punches and shouting. I assumed it was all coming from an angry and panicking Lola, but I blocked it out as I went deeper into the woods. The sound of Lola slowly faded away as did the sound of any cars. The crunch of the leaves was almost relaxing; my eyes were studying all parts of the area. It kind of felt like I was in a dream. Like none of this was real.

Was that why I wasn't crying?

I stopped, my breath hitching when I heard a sound to my right. My eyes scoured the area, but there was nothing. I was being watched or I was insane…either one. I felt clueless. I sucked in a breath and stopped. It didn't feel like I had been walking long, but when I looked back, I could barely see the airport lights through the trees.

After a moment of silence, straining my ears to hear anything more, I moved on. Where was I going? I had to run to the woods to get away from Xavier and Colton, but now that the mission was successful, what was I to do?

Maybe call out for the wolves to eat me? If I handed myself over, maybe they wouldn't torture me.

"Is this your stop?"

I screamed louder than I ever had before when a voice came out of nowhere. My heart literally felt like it was trying to escape my chest. "Xavier, what the hell?!"

He looked down at me. "Did I scare you?"

"Why are you here? To watch me get eaten?"

"It was either follow you or stay and listen to Lola cry."

My heart sank at his words. "Do you want me to be scared?" I asked.

He shrugged slightly. "It *is* kind of funny when you are."

"Is it? Just as funny as when you killed your mate? Was she petrified too?" The grin on his face faded, his expression transformed into something else. "I had hope, you know. I thought maybe you blamed yourself for her death, or she was evil and attacked you before, so it was self-defense."

"She didn't attack me. It wasn't self-defense, nor was her death an accident."

My eyes widened, and I slowly came to the realization. He was here to kill me before the other wolves had the chance. He still wanted to get his own way.

"No," I said, feeling like my breath had just been stolen from me.

"No?"

"You're not killing me. You're not allowed." I slowly began backing away before turning on my heel and sprinting off. "ROGUES! WOLVES! OTHER PACK! HELP ME! AND BY HELP, I MEAN KILL ME." I screamed, making sure not to fall as I ran deeper into the woods. My scream was cut off and muffled when Xavier’s hand clasped over my mouth, his arm tight around my waist. I thrashed violently; my screams blocked by his hand. I couldn't hold back any longer.

I was crying now, but why? Out of frustration? I couldn't shake this monster off my back. No matter how fast I ran, he was faster.

I had never actually been terrified of Xavier until now. I always hoped there was a good side of him—that it was an act. Even now. But I could tell what he said was true. He had killed his mate for no reason.

I whined when I was spun around, causing my head to spin, but I took the chance. I raised my knee with all the force I could muster and hit his groin dead on. As I imagined, he let go of me, and I took advantage of the situation and sprinted off. I stumbled once over a tree root but quickly caught myself so I didn't fall all the way. Suddenly, a snap came from in front of me, followed by a low growl, but when I raised my eyes there was nothing there.

The peace only lasted for a second.

A dark brown wolf emerged from the trees, its eyes locked onto my own. It was the one from earlier, the one who had given us a lift. Had he been waiting? I accepted I was going to die. I accepted I was going to be torn apart by a wolf to save Lola. Didn't people say you felt calm when you were about to die? When you accepted death?

I didn't anymore. My brave demeanor was gone. I couldn't outrun a beast like this. No human could.

Its brown eyes studied my own, and another low growl released from his throat.

A small sob broke from my throat. "Do you understand me?"

The wolf's ears suddenly perked up, and his head cocked to the side.

"Why do all of you kill innocent people? Why can't you just be nice?" I was screaming at him like he could answer me.

The wolf—like a wolf would do—said nothing. Instead, he continued to watch me, his right ear flicking for a moment. This only made me angrier, when I didn't get a response even though I expected nothing different. "Be normal!"

When I said that, a growl broke through his throat. His ears fell back, and his muscles tensed as he edged toward me.

I couldn't run, and although I knew I had no chance of survival against him, I could at least try to hurt him. I picked up the large stick next to me and swiped; he hadn't expected it, so when it made contact with his head, he snorted and fell back slightly.

I tried to aim for his eye next, but he was aware and easily dodged it. "Go to hell" I snarled, continuously swinging it in hopes of hitting him. He opened his large mouth, catching the branch. With one bite, he snapped it in half.

All I could do was watch. "You know," I laughed, "if you stopped baring your teeth and snarling, you'd almost be cute."

His ears raised when I spoke, his eyes adjusting as an unusual but absent whine came from his throat. Then, a millisecond after his ears fell back, another growl came, but this time his eyes went past me.

I turned back to follow his glare, and my eyes landed on Xavier. He wasn't looking at me either—he was making eye contact with the wolf. I scowled; I got no attention.

The brown wolf slowly began backing away before turning around. "No!" I called after him. "Kill me. Kill me before you go, or he will!" The wolf's large head turned back, and his eyes filled with confusion, like he was actually listening to me.

"Don't run," I begged before chasing after him. His eyes widened, and with an easy bound, he sprinted off. It wasn't long before I lost sight of him. I fell to my knees, tears streaming down my face. What was happening? I couldn't even *die* when I wanted.

What was going on with me?

I flinched when Xavier's hand landed on my shoulder. "Don't kill Lola," I begged.

"What about you? Aren't you going to ask me to spare your life?"

"If you let Lola go, then no. As long as she lives, I won’t fight."

"You're giving up?" He cocked an eyebrow. "Do you think she'll enjoy living if she knows you're the reason she's alive? If she knows you're dead because you thought it would save her?"

I blinked through the tears as the words sank in. "You think Lola and I can take down you and Colton? We'll probably be arrested even if we manage to do that."

"Giving up?" he asked again.

"Being logical." I wiped the tears from my face before standing and turning to face him. He grabbed my wrist, and I was waiting for him to break it, but surprisingly, he didn't.

"Let's go." He looked around the place as if searching for something. "Before more come back." Without saying anything else, he began leading me back the way we came.

"You think you can kill them all alone? They'll probably rip us both apart before you can kidnap me again."

"Calm down, Cali." He sighed before glancing back to me. "I won't let them hurt you."

Just like that, my heart sped up, skipping beats it shouldn't.

**Episode 35**

Lola's eyes met mine, and it broke my heart when I saw how puffy and red she looked. It was obvious she had been sobbing. I instantly felt guilty about the choice I made, but at the same time, I still believed what I did was right.

What I did was to protect her. That was what I thought I was doing anyway. I'd do it a thousand times over if it meant protecting her.

She ran to me and dove into my arms, hugging me like she hadn't seen me in years. "I hate you so much!" She cried to me, and a sad smile appeared on my face.

"The way you're acting says otherwise, Lola."

She pulled back, glaring at me through her puffed up eyes. "Why are you so stupid sometimes?"

"You didn't have to come to this place, Lola. I came here so I could get money—you came for moral support. I'm not going to let you die under my watch."

"Okay, so your plan was to kamikaze? You think I'd be able to live with myself knowing you were dead because your plan was to *save* me?"

I tried to argue my point, but I knew if the roles were reversed, I wouldn't be happy either. I was also sure as hell I couldn't live with myself knowing the reason she was dead was because of me, even if it was because she was trying to protect me.

"I'm sorry." It was the only thing I could say at the moment. At least while Xavier and Colton stood there.

"This truly is heart-warming, but I'd rather not be sitting ducks—wait," Colton cut off his sentence. "You came into contact with one." He wasn't looking at me, his focus on his brother. Xavier nodded, and I noticed the shock on Colton's face.

"That scent..."

"Why do you look so surprised? You're the one who warned us they were here," I pointed out.

Colton didn't take his eyes off Xavier when I spoke up. It honestly began to creep me out. Why was he acting so worked up?

"We should get going," Xavier broke the eerie silence. I didn't like how they were acting so secretive.

"Can you sense a lot of them?" I asked, hoping to get some idea of what was wrong. I only met one in there, but were there more? The thought sent shivers running down my spine.

Yet Xavier didn't seem scared, so maybe that wasn't it. All I knew was I was now curious about what was going on, and if I investigated, I would end up in trouble. That was how it always happened, and I wasn’t sure if I was ready for that yet.

We began walking back toward the airport. For a moment, I had thought Colton and Xavier got here by running in their wolf-bear forms before reminding myself of Xavier's story.

My eyes dropped down when I felt Lola's warm hand reach out for mine. I offered her a smile and took her hand in my own, squeezing to reassure her.

She was usually the one who reassured me, that made me feel better when I was nervous, but now wasn't the time. After what I caused her to go through, it was understandable why she was acting so fragile. She was the one who needed me right now.

I let go of her hand and instead wrapped my arm around her in a secure, protective manner.

She leaned into me, letting out a small sigh. "I'm sorry for getting mad at you."

"It was my fault. I shouldn't have charged in without thinking."

"You were protecting me, except your dumb ass didn't think it through." I let out a small laugh as we entered the parking garage. She slowly glanced to me. "Was there a..."

"Wolf-bear? Yes."

Colton turned back with a scowl plastered on his face. "Stop using the term wolf-bear—it's weird."

"But it makes sense." I shrugged. "Stop listening to conversations you aren't involved in."

He rolled his eyes and turned away from me. "Xavier, keep your head down."

"Why?"

"They're looking for you."

My eyes raised to see the security guards talking to men in uniform. I yelped as my arm was tugged, and I crashed into Xavier. He pushed me behind him.

"What the hell?" I scowled and noticed Lola dropping her head and covering her face with her hair.

"They might recognize the person who framed him, too," Colton spoke.

"I didn't frame him; he did physically hurt me before." I pointed to my throat. "I just needed some proof." I noticed Xavier tense up, and I couldn't help but smile. He actually got taken down by security guards…because of me. He must be still embarrassed.

The cocky smile stayed on my face as we slowly made our way to their car. I knew it was weird, but the moment we were inside, I felt safe. I always hated being outside at night—it freaked me out. Even though I was now in a car with two very dangerous men, I felt safer.

I joined hands with Lola as we both got into the back seat. I offered her a smile, but honestly, I was currently petrified. I couldn't show her that, though.

What if they weren't bringing us back to their home? Instead, they planned to kill and bury us somewhere. Then again, my mind was always in panic mode, especially recently. I couldn't be sure of anything anymore. Lola scooted over to the middle seat so she could be closer to me. I frowned, seeing how much my dumb idea affected her. She was acting differently than usual.

"I'm sorry," I whispered absentmindedly.

She glanced at me and blinked through watery eyes before shrugging, a small smile forming. "I forgive you as long as you promise to never do that again."

"I told you, I promise." I returned the smile, but it was a fake one. That was my only escape plan, and Lola's plan had obviously failed as well.

They had taken the money back, so we couldn't use that. Was another plan even possible at this point?

"Lola…"

"Huh?" Her voice was weak, and when I heard the word come out as a whimper, I stopped my sentence. I was going to ask her what we were going to do, but obviously now wasn't the time. I'd drop it for tonight.

I shook my head. "I'll tell you later."

She wanted to press the matter, but I nodded toward the two brothers in the front, pretending I couldn't talk because of them. She slowly nodded, believing my lie. With a quiet groan, I lay back in my seat.

Had I really planned to end my life back there? Why didn't I care about it? I had gone through depression in my life, but I had never been suicidal. Did I not even care about myself in the slightest?

"Did you hear me?" Lola pinched my arm, and my eyes flashed toward her.

My lips formed a straight line as I rubbed the place she had pinched. "No, sorry. What did you say?"

She studied me before shaking her head. "Never mind."

Usually, this was the point where I'd tell her to stop being dumb and tell me, but I wasn't even in the mood for that. I nodded in agreement.

She grabbed my head. "Are you going into shock?"

"What? No." I chuckled at her jumpiness, patting her head. "Calm yourself."

She only responded with a scowl. "Don't zone out and go into a different world. Not at a time like this." Lola was basically begging, so I simply nodded again, leaving the teasing for another time.

"You guys are quiet," Colton announced. "If you're trying to plan something again—"

"Shut up for once," I stopped him from talking. "You're so annoying."

Lola offered me a puzzling glance. For some reason—and I didn't bother to question why—he shut his mouth.

When the car came to a halt, I realized how terrified I was. We were going back into this nightmare. Without a care in the world. No arguing, no fighting.

The guys left the car first. I couldn't leave. I was glued to my seat. Lola squeezed my hand. "It's going to be okay."

How could she be so calm? I looked at her and offered a thankful smile. I was about to open my door, but I let out a whimper and jumped in surprise when Colton knocked on my window. "Hurry." I gritted my teeth but forced myself to leave the safety of the car.

Lola already stood outside, looking over the car and obviously waiting for me. "Are you guys into each other? Because *goddamn* these gazes…" Colton clicked his tongue. I rolled my eyes, and after a quiet argument with my legs, I managed to make my way toward the door.

The door flew open, and Violet jumped out. "Co—"

"Don't." Xavier glanced at her, and she immediately stopped and shut her mouth.

"Are you alright?" I walked past Xavier, purposely shoving him out of the way.

"What?"

"Your foot…" I got down on my hunkers, noting the bandage. "You can walk on it?"

When she said nothing, I raised my eyes. She stared down at me in shock, her cheeks a bright red. It looked like her eyes were sparkling, too.

I pushed myself back up and brought my hand to her forehead, but she had no temperature. "You're red—you should sit down."

"She's fine."

"Shut it." I ignored Xavier. "You want to boast about how you heal quicker? Good for you, but she's still a teenager, even if she is...one of your kind." I gave her back a light tap, indicating for her to go in the house.

She stared back up at me, her lips parted slightly. "Are you going to be—"

"Violet." Colton spun her around and brought her inside. "You heard her. Go lie down."

I stared at him in confusion.

"In." Xavier nudged me.

I turned back to him in surprise. "You're the dog here—don't command me. You go in." He studied me, and when I folded my arms, he understood I wasn't kidding. He rolled his eyes and made his way inside.

I turned back to Lola. "You oka— What's wrong?" I cut off my sentence at the unusual expression on her face.

She nibbled her lip and shook her head. "I don't know..." She walked on in past me, and honestly it was creeping me out. I glanced around outside, taking in my surroundings. The darkness made everything a hundred times more terrifying.

I balled my fists up. "Hello?" I shouted, feeling as if eyes were on me.

*Crack.* A twig?

My eyes darted to where the sound was, but I couldn't see anything as the trees loomed over, making it even darker. "Who's out there?"

Were they honestly not scared to come near Xavier's territory? It was making me nervous. If they didn't care about getting this close, there was no doubt they'd attack again. I almost vomited up my heart when my eyes found another pair staring right back at me through the trees. My body felt numb as I stared at the creature that obviously wasn't human.

Wait....

"You..." I said slowly. "You're back." It was the wolf from earlier. The man who had given us a lift, the wolf who had run from Xavier. He followed us back here. I went to walk forward, my feet automatically leading me that way before a strong hand gripped my arm.

I turned back up to find Xavier staring down at me with a warning glare. "Inside. Now."

"But the—" My words cut off when I turned back and the wolf was gone. No way I imagined it. He had really been here. Could Xavier not sense him? Not smell him?

Without being able to get one more glance of the strange wolf, I was pulled inside, only left to wonder why it was following us.

**Episode 36**

"He was there again." I shook Lola. "That wolf is officially stalking us."

"Are you sure your eyes aren't playing tricks?"

"After everything that’s happened, why can't you believe something like that?"

"I'm not saying I don't believe you, I'm asking if you’re sure.”

"I'm sure! My eyes are perfectly fine."

She pursed her lips. "But is your head?" I scowled in response to her question, but she kept going. "Besides, wouldn't Xavier have caught his scent or sensed him?"

"He can do that?"

"I'm assuming so—they're like wolves, right?"

I shrugged and got up out of the bed, walking over to the window. My eyes searched every area, almost hoping to see the wolf.

Sure, he had growled viciously at me and was probably moments away from ripping me apart. Maybe he was here to finish the job, yet for some reason I was so curious. He wasn't scared like the others—he was going all the way, trying to find me.

"Are you seriously searching for him?"

"I'm not searching. Just…seeing if he's stalking us out there, you know?"

She rolled her eyes, and I noticed she wore a defeated expression. Turning my attention from the scenery, I returned to my friend. "Hey, Lola?"

"Hmm?"

"It's okay. We'll get out of here, I promise."

Her whole body seemed to tense, and she glanced up at me from where she lay on the bed. Her brow furrowed, and she stared at me in disbelief. "Get out of here? Are you serious?" The tone in her voice surprised me.

"I know our plans didn't work but—"

"This isn't about getting out, Cal. You think that's what I'm worried about? I'm worried your dumb ass will go suicidal again to save me because I can't get through to you. If you die, I'm not going to be safe. I'm not going to feel better. If you die, *everything* gets worse for me." Her nostrils flared. "And now...now you're entranced by the wolf that wanted to *eat you* earlier! Are you planning to jump into his mouth to try to kill yourself all over again?"

My mouth fell open, staring at my best friend. Her cheeks were red, and her nose was doing the cute crinkle because she was mad. I didn't even know what to say.

"Well? Aren't you going to respond?! Lie and tell me you won't do it again when you will?"

"Lola," I breathed out. Had she been bottling this up the whole time? "I'm sorry."

"You're sorry?"

"I'm *sorry*! I'm serious—I'm not going to do it again. I didn't know it would affect you like this, but I promise."

"Affect me? What did you think…did you think I'd be fine—"

"Stop it, Lola! Look at me. I promise you I will never jump out and go suicidal to save your life. I won't do it for any reason as long as you're around, do you understand?"

The angry expression faded as she made eye contact with me.

"Sorry." She sniffled.

"Why are you apologizing?"

"I overreacted. I'm scared—I'm scared you'll hurt yourself to save me."

"I'm not going to. If we're getting out of this, we'll do it together." I wrapped my arms around her tight. "I swear on it." It took a moment, but finally her arms did the same as mine and curled around me. I had never seen her like that before. Usually, she was one to keep her cool—she'd never spun off the rails.

My stomach flipped with guilt because of her reaction. "I'm going to go get you some tea, okay?" She loved tea and warm milk. She was like a baby; it always seemed to soothe her.

"You don't need to."

"But I will." I smiled, pulling back. "Relax, I'll be back in a few minutes."

She eyed me as I left the room, as if she was expecting me to run away again. I grunted when I turned the corner and slammed into a body. My eyes flew upward, and my smile faded immediately, replaced with a scowl. "Xavier."

"Caliana."

"Move," I said, side stepping him and continuing on my journey. I was slightly surprised when I heard his footsteps follow me. I glanced over my shoulder to look at him.

"She sounded mad."

"Can you not listen to private conversations?" I snapped.

"Was it a lie? About you not going crazy again to save her."

"Of course it's not a lie. I wouldn't put her through that again." My body stopped moving when he grabbed my arm and spun me around to face him. He lowered his head so he was near mine, his eyes narrowed as he stared at me.

I quickly averted my gaze so I wouldn't get distracted and pulled my hands away. "You can't stare at me and know if I'm lying. You're a dog, not a psychic." Turning back around, I made my way into the kitchen. I turned on the kettle after filling it with fresh water.

"What was that earlier? With Violet."

"What was what?" I turned around to look at Xavier. He was leaning against the wall with his arms crossed, and I suddenly realized what was different. He hadn't snapped at me once. His tone had changed slightly; it wasn't the gruff, annoyed one like usual. Instead, it was just…normal.

"Violet told me how she threatened you earlier."

"She's like...a kid."

"She's seventeen."

"A kid." I shrugged once more.

"She's also not human, as you're aware, but you weren't even scared of her."

"Her voice was shaking—she was obviously nervous, even through her anger."

"She could have snapped."

"But she didn't."

"She basically chased you out of here."

"I was leaving even if she hadn't."

"You asked how she was after we got back."

"She stabbed her foot—of course I did."

He said nothing else after that, and I nibbled the inside of my cheek. I waited for him to leave, but he stayed planted in the spot, staring at me. "Why are you keeping us here, Xavier?"

He blinked. "Why do you think?"

"That's why I'm asking. I have no clue."

"We went through this before."

"Go over it with me again, then."

"You’re so dumb you forgot?"

I sucked in a small breath. "Tell me why."

"If they attack, I can use you."

"You can handle them without me. They're only attacking because I'm here. If you let me go, they won't have a reason."

"You'll die if you go."

"Then take me to the airport. Safely. I got there once before without your help."

"They could overrun us one day, and you're my get-out-free card."

I decided to ask the question I really wanted the answer to. "Why is that wolf following me?"

"What?" He seemed surprised our conversation had gone elsewhere.

"That wolf. The one Lola almost killed, the one you scared off in the woods."

"I didn't know he was. I guess I'll have to go kill him." He sighed, like killing would bother him, even when it was obvious he wasn't affected by blood on his hands.

"I'm going to see him."

"What?"

"Don't lie—you had to know he's here."

"I think you're in over your head. You think I have some superhuman powers and know if there's someone here? I don't have a wolf, remember?"

"You still have instincts."

"N—"

"It's my mate." I cut him off and for once, I got more than a blank reaction.

His eyes widened a tiny bit as he stared at me. After a moment, he blinked, and his usual expression came back, except with a smile this time. "You're insane."

"I'll prove it."

"How?"

"I'll go to him, and he won't attack me."

"Did you not see him snarling at you earlier? He was going to rip you to shreds. Did you not promise Lola you wouldn't be dumb?"

"Then capture him and bring him to me."

"I'm not going through the effort to ease your insane thoughts."

"I don't care—I'm going out."

"No, you're not."

"You can't stop me."

"You know I can."

"You have no right. This wolf is following me for a reason—it would have attacked by now otherwise."

"It's not your mate, Caliana. I don't know if you have some fantasy about becoming some wolf’s mate, or why the hell you'd want something like that, but you're wrong."

"You don't know that."

"I do."

"Maybe the white one is, then."

"The white one?"

"The other wolf next to him."

"You're one hundred percent insane. There's only one here—you're seeing things."

"So you *do* know he's here."

Silence.

The shocked expression on his face confirmed it. I had outsmarted and tricked Xavier. Neither of us said anything for a beat, then he shut his eyes. He brought his forefinger and thumb to the bridge of his nose.

I used this chance to try to walk past him, but he stopped me. His grip on me was tight, and it hurt when I moved. "Don't you dare walk out that door, Caliana."

"Why not?"

"Unless you want to see a wolf get ripped apart and have nightmares about it for the rest of your life, then go ahead. Colton's out there right now killing him. Is that something you want to see?"

A lump formed in my throat as I stared at Xavier, but there was no sign of humor. Why was I sad? I was aware Colton killed the other ones, but this time I was worried for the wolf.

I jumped when the kettle screeched. Xavier let go of my arm, and I turned around and began making Lola's tea. I swirled the spoon around in the cup, watching the pitch-black tea twirl into a small whirlpool. "There was no need to kill him."

"He was on our property."

"He wasn't attacking."

"He would have."

"You really are a monster."

"You're defending a creature that wanted to kill you and your best friend?" He chuckled, and his laugh made anger boil through me.

I turned back around to him. "When are you going to kill me?"

He cocked an eyebrow but said nothing.

"How far did your mate go? How far did she push you until you snapped? I'm not even your mate, and I'm still not dead, so please inform me what the hell could have made your temper spike."

"I was bored." Xavier shrugged.

"I don't believe you."

"You don't have to—it's none of your business."

I put the tea bag in the trash before gliding past Xavier. I stopped for a moment, turning back to him. I was expecting him to say something else, anything else, but he stayed silent. With a small sigh, I turned on my heel and returned to the bedroom. All I could wonder was why I felt so upset about a wolf that tried to kill me, and why Xavier was acting differently.

**Episode 37**

My hand stroked Lola's hair as I watched her drift off. The house was silent when I stood, picking up the mug with me. It had taken me an hour to calm her down and finally get her to fall asleep.

I didn't feel tired yet, so instead of heading to bed, I decided going down to wash the cup was the best option. It would keep my hands occupied rather than lying in bed and allowing my mind to wander. I shut Lola’s door behind me as quietly as possible before heading downstairs. I turned on the tap, cleaning out the mug. I raised my eyes to stare out the window, and suddenly a shiver ran down my spine.

It was pitch-black outside—I could only make out the silhouette of trees. I bit the inside of my cheek, not able to pull my eyes away. Someone could be watching me, and I couldn't even see them. The thought made the hairs on my neck stand, so I quickly reached up and closed the blinds.

I glanced over to the glass doors that had recently been repaired, but the curtains hadn't been put back on yet, so it was still open. My palms grew sweaty at the thought of someone waiting outside for me. It was always a fear of mine—being watched and not being able to see the person, not even knowing.

Lately, I had been extremely paranoid, so that didn't help. I dried my hands on the tea towel before folding it and placing it back on the counter. I wiped down my leggings before heading back to my room. Just when I was about to climb the stairs, my eyes landed on the front door. This side of the house was where I had seen the wolf earlier—the wolf Xavier told me Colton killed.

Colton had gone to his room about ten minutes after I returned to Lola's room, so I knew he was asleep. I’d peeked out, but I had seen no blood on him. Had he really killed the wolf?

*Only one way to find out.* My body involuntarily walked toward the door, my eyes set dead ahead. *Stop walking. You made a promise to Lola. Don't you dare even open that door, Caliana.*

I tried to stop myself, but I couldn't. Why was curiosity getting the best of me? Why couldn't I stop myself? I reached for the handle of the door, attempting to pull it open, but it didn't budge.

Locked.

"What are you doing?"

My whole body jerked at the sound of Xavier’s voice. "Why are you following me?"

"This is my house. Why do you always try to wander off?"

"Because this is your house," I responded sharply, dropping my hand from the handle in defeat. I looked back at him, and he had his arms folded across his chest.

He nodded, accepting my reason. "Let me rephrase that: why do you always break promises to your best friend?"

All I could do was glare. I bit my tongue from saying any rude words to him, because for once I had no come back.

"That's what I thought."

"Why do I want to see that wolf?" I asked instead.

"What?"

"Why am I attracted to that wolf?"

He scrunched up his nose. "Maybe bestiali—"

"NOT LIKE THAT!" I snapped, cutting his sentence off. I saw the edge of his lip slowly turn up and realized he was joking. I was always so tense around Xavier. "I just—I want to see if he's okay."

"Get over him—he tried to kill you." He walked over to me. "Go back to bed."

"I'm not tired."

"I don't care if you're tired or not. My house, my rules."

"I didn't ask to be in your house."

"You sure about that? You came here willingly."

"And I want to leave, but you won't let me," I retorted but saw nothing else I could do here. The door was locked, and part of me was glad I hadn't broken my promise to Lola. Instead, I trudged back to my bedroom.

I couldn't think of a proper reason why I was still here. If this were some book, no doubt some idiot would think *oh, he's in love with me*. That was what girls tended to do—probably even hoped it was real. It was clear Xavier wasn't interested…he had threatened to kill me. A lot.

Maybe it was a test...

Maybe if I actually had sex with Xavier, it was my ticket out of here. He wouldn’t have a solid reason to keep me prisoner then. I glanced back at him, but he was no longer looking at me. Of course, when I wanted him to look, he wouldn't.

My eyes examined the area, and I picked up the cushion that lay on the back of the couch. I raised it and threw it at his face, which caused him to turn to me in confusion when it fell into his hands. I quickened my pace and climbed the stairs two by two—all I could hope was that he would take the bait. Just when I got to the door of my room, he grabbed me by the scruff of my collar to stop me.

I struggled, but there was no chance of me escaping his grip. Yet this was my plan. His room was too close to Colton's, mine was at the perfect distance, and Lola was knocked out.

"Don't go in there," I told him breathlessly.

He raised his eyebrows before looking at my room. "Why?"

"None of your business."

Xavier pushed open the door. He really didn't understand privacy, but once again, this was bait. When he walked into the room and let me go, I followed him, shutting the door behind me. He glanced back, immediately hearing the click. His lips pressed into a straight line. "What? You think you can kidnap me in my own house?"

"That's a good idea, but that's not the plan."

"You're not very smart," he said, not at all bothered by my sneaky attitude.

"You can't keep leading me on."

"Leading you on? I've never—"

"I'm here to sell my freaking virginity to you, Xavier. I'm only here for money—not for any other dumb reason. Not to find out wolf-bears are real—"

"We're not wolf-b—"

"Shut up," I stopped him. "You brought me here to take my virginity, and I'm sick of pushing it off. I want this dumb thing to be over. I'm getting that money—I don't care."

He blinked once but said nothing else. He watched me.

I wanted to take off my clothes, but I couldn't. I froze on the spot. I had been so confident about it— OH. I was caught by surprise when he kissed me first. I didn't respond immediately. I had expected rejection, or for him to leave the room, not...this.

He didn't even give me time to think—he picked me up and threw me on the bed. I almost yelped in surprise but bit my lip to stop any sounds from escaping, knowing we weren't alone in the house.

I stared up at him in surprise.

"What are you doing? I thought you'd say no."

"I was only waiting for you to say yes," he said, his voice husky.

My heart jumped. Not because this gorgeous human was about to kiss me again—and do more—but because of what he said. He was this rough, tough, scary monster in my mind that cared about nothing and no one. Someone who would murder anyone without thinking twice about it. Yet…he had been waiting for me to say yes.

He could have taken me when I was terrified, or without consent, and I couldn't have stopped him. He hadn't even asked or pressured me into it—he had been waiting.

And for some reason that made my heart melt. Even if it was something as small as that...

"What? Why are you zoned out?" I only noticed he was now above me, and my eyes widened.

"Hello," I whispered.

"Are you okay?" He was asking if I was okay...

I nodded slowly. *No, no no. Why is my heart racing?* He said one nice thing, and I was crushing like a high school girl. Maybe it was just spur of the moment or something.

"A—" I stopped him from speaking by pulling him down so I could connect my lips to his. My arms wrapped around his neck, my body involuntarily trying to raise up, wanting to touch him, to feel him.

His lips turned upwards while I scowled and broke the kiss. "If you laugh, I'm leaving you with blue balls."

"Oh, please. You think you can turn me on that easily?" The jerk was back, apparently.

"Wanna bet?"

"Maybe..."

"What do I get if I win?" My voice was breathless. The last time we bet, it was on my life, but I'd be lying if I said I wasn't turned on right now. His warm breath was against me as I tried to speak, and the teasing tone in his voice made me melt.

"Mmm, what do you want?"

"Freedom."

"Freedom..." he said slowly. "What do I get if I win?"

"What do you want?" I responded with his question, acutely aware that my body was on fire.

"To keep you."

**Episode 38**

"Wait, what? *Keep* me?" I had been so in the moment I had almost agreed to what he said. "What does that mean?"

"You don’t understand what the word *keep* means?" Goddamn, I hated the sarcastic attitude he threw around. He noticed me glaring at him, which caused the corner of his lip to twitch.

"I'm serious. Keep me as... WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?"

He blinked, a small smile spreading across his lips. "What do you think it means?"

"I'm not answering that." I scowled. Honestly, he had no clue what I was thinking, and I was glad. In a heated moment, everything was sexual. *Everything*.

The first thing that came to mind was—

"You complain a lot," he commented, interrupting my train of thought. I couldn't tell if he wanted me to punch him, because he knew everything was making me annoyed right now. "A lot."

"I'm not complaining now, I'm asking," I pushed on, ignoring his comment, deciding not to get mad. After getting into this heated argument, I honestly forgot what we had been in the middle of doing.

My eyes roamed down his body as he held himself above me. Did all wolf-bears have abs?

"My eyes are up here." He cleared his throat, and my gaze quickly flashed upward. My cheeks reddened. I had been studying him obviously, but you know…I forgot he was watching, too.

"I'm not agreeing to this bet if you don't explain your terms properly."

"Okay, I have you in this house. Right now, you constantly complain, you constantly act up and try to escape—even going against your friend’s word—you just want to argue non-stop because of it and constantly bring up escaping."

"I have reasons."

"Let me finish, Caliana," he shushed me, and once again my lips formed a straight line.

"You cannot complain, you cannot give up. You stay silent and behave yourself, you don't try to run away, and you don't make things difficult."

"For how long?"

"How long?"

"How long do you get to keep me?" THAT SOUNDED WEIRD!

"As long as I want. I mean, it's only fair. If you win, you get freedom forever," he pointed out. I thought about it for a moment. Any guy could easily be turned on—it was like a magic stick down there.

"Okay."

"Okay?" He arched an eyebrow, obviously not thinking I would agree to the bet.

"Only one question, though."

"What?"

"Are you gay?"

He blinked once, twice, before narrowing his eyes to gauge if I was serious. "Wh—"

"Yes or no?"

"No." He sighed. "How does that have anything to do with this?"

"If you're gay, that's cheating. Obviously, I wouldn’t turn you on," I pointed out the obvious.

"Well, now you know I'm not. Do we have a deal?"

"Deal."

He pushed himself off me so he was sitting on the bed. I cocked my head slightly—what was I supposed to do now?

"Well…" He brushed down his pants as he stood. "This has been fun, I'll see you tomorr—"

"What?!"

"What? We didn't say I had to stay, and I'm leaving, so if you can't turn me on by morning, you lose. I'm going to bed now." The evil glint in his eyes made my blood boil. Had he planned this the whole time? Not only was he trying to get out of this again, but he actually made this bet, planning that from the start. I couldn't help but think the whole stunt was smart—it seemed like something I would do.

Except I was actually ready to have sex.

I pushed myself from the bed, flying under his arm so I reached the door first. I pressed my back to the door, glaring up at him, shaking my head. "No."

"Move."

"You can't chicken out again!"

"I'm not."

"Don't lie to me. You were totally into it a few minutes ago—that wasn't an act, I'm not dumb. Then, like every other time, you make some dumb excuse and leave."

"That's not—"

"That's not what happened? I call bullshit. It's not a coincidence you do it every time. You flew me all the way out here to take my virginity. I'm here for the money—I'm here to get this over with."

He cocked his right eyebrow. "So what? You're brave now? You suddenly want to do this?"

"Suddenly? I've wanted to do this for a long time. Well, to get it over with, at least. I'm tired of this game."

A drawn-out sigh arose from him. My body stiffened when I felt his hand rest on my waist. His other one rose to the door, locking me between his arms.

I didn't break my gaze with him, raising my eyebrows.

"This doesn't affect you?"

"No, it doesn't."

His eyes made their way down my body after dropping from my face, and even though I was fully clothed, I felt myself grow hot. It didn't help when his eyes flicked back up to mine, and he leaned in closer.

When his lips stopped inches from mine, my whole body froze up.

"Don't forget to breathe, Caliana." His voice was smooth, and I let out a wavering breath. I hadn't even realized I held it in. My chest felt tight, like a cornered animal.

"What's wrong? You said this didn't bother you," he said softly before leaning down so his warm lips landed on my neck. My legs were shaking. My right arm fell limp to the side, my other grabbed his shirt lightly to balance myself.

The kisses he trailed down my neck sent shivers through my body—something I had never felt before.

He pulled back slowly, tilting his head and studying me. "You seem slightly affected."

I was. A lot.

His hand reached down, and I noticed it was going toward the door handle. My reactions were quick, and my free hand struck out in time, stopping him.

"No."

"No?"

"Stop playing. Please."

He paused and for a moment, the teasing went away. He studied me, waiting for me to do something or trick him, before quickly returning to how he was before. "What? You want to beg now?"

"If it makes you stay, then yes."

Seeing him thrown off his game made me happy. The surprised reaction I got from him was probably my main goal after everything he had done to me tonight.

He dropped his eyes from my face. "Move, Caliana. I'm tired and need to go to sleep."

I kept hold of his hand but moved out of the way from the door. He looked down to his hand then back to me, arching his eyebrow now in question.

"Okay, you're tired." I shrugged. "Sleep with me then." Once again, he was taken aback by my comment. He didn't leave, though, and as I tugged him with me, he followed, zoned out. I nodded to the bed. "Come on."

He didn't move, he didn't say anything—he just stared at me. As if he were deep in thought, he looked confused.

"I didn't say we had to do anything." I reached for his belt and slowly unbuckled it. "We're just sleeping in my bed." Xavier didn't stop me when I removed the belt and dropped it to the floor; he only stared at me like I had two heads.

"Are you going to take them off or do I have to?" I tugged at his trousers, and he quickly seemed to zone back in.

"Caliana—"

"Choose. Me or you?"

His jaw tightened, but he hesitantly took them off so he was only in his boxers.

I mimicked his action and pulled down my own trousers. I was honestly in shock—I wasn't even blushing or shy when I did it. He was filling that role for me. The moment I began tugging off my top, he averted his eyes and looked away. "I don't want to sleep here."

"I don't care." I dropped my top on the ground, standing in my black boy-shorts and plain black bra. I walked around behind him and pushed him forward onto the bed. He looked up and offered me an unamused glare, but I only responded with a smile.

I was winning this bet.

I climbed over him and onto my side. I noticed him trying to get up once I was down, and I quickly lunged on top of him. "No means no."

"You can't order me around." He shrugged me off, so I did the only thing I could think of. My hand flew down to his…lower area. Over his boxers.

His eyes raised back up to me. "Caliana."

"Xavier," I responded in the same tone.

His glare only made me smile. He wasn't moving, he wasn't leaving, so I knew somehow, I was beginning to make him want to stay.

I could win this.

**Episode 39**

Xavier was glaring at me, but he was not moving. He was frustrated, but the main point was that he wasn’t leaving. He stayed right in place. Right in my bed.

I had to admit that the sight of him there was… something. How did this suddenly feel ten times more intimate than all the times I’d seen him without a shirt? He looked like a Greek god or something, lazily waiting to be carved into a statue. And his thighs… What would one of them feel like pressed between my legs?

*No, Cali, stay strong!* It didn’t matter how hot the homicidal guy was. I had a goal here.

Refocused, I arched an eyebrow, challenging him. Usually, I would be cringing from this and blushing bright red, but I was so entertained by him that it distracted me from everything else.

“What’s wrong?” I asked, and my hand played with him slightly over his boxers. My stomach twisted. I’d never done this before, but I could feel… *him* and his *you know* searing beneath my touch. I was feeling warm myself…

*Focus, Cali! Seduce him. Then get the hell out of here.*

His eyes bore into mine, and I couldn’t tell if it was from anger or just sexual frustration. “Stop this, Caliana. I don’t know what your goal is here, but it won’t end well for you.”

“What my goal is? Okay, stop and think about what my *goal* is here,” I said. It was pretty obvious, but clearly, he wanted me to spell it out. “Why am I here?”

He had no response—his lips formed a thin line, letting me see how unamused he was by my comebacks. They’d brought me here for *this* reason—the reason my hand was on his dick—so he had no right to question me now.

“Won’t end well for me?” I asked as I rested my head on the pillow. Did I look sexy? Was I even capable of that? I ignored the thought, and I made sure to keep my hand in place so he wouldn't move.

“Yes, it won’t end well for you.”

“How come?” I challenged, trying to find out what this threat was.

His gaze met mine. “You’re a virgin, right?”

“Obviously.” Wasn’t that the whole point?

“You do know sex hurts the first time, right?”

“I’m aware.” It was something I’d always heard, but it was confusing sometimes. Would it hurt if I wasn’t turned on enough? Would it hurt regardless of whether I was turned on? I didn’t really know…

“You should have someone you trust take it—someone who’ll be gentle.”

Did Xavier just… say something *thoughtful*? I was trying to wrap my head around that. I stayed silent, watching him.

“I can guarantee you right now, Caliana, I am not gentle in any way.” His voice was low and almost threatening. A shiver went down my spine at the rumble in his tone. He was trying to fluster me. His eyes watched my own, waiting for my reaction, waiting for me to remove my hand.

*Nice try.*

“That’s kind of hot,” I said.

He blinked… Once. Twice. Three times.

“That’s not how you’re supposed to react,” he said.

Sure enough, what he said sent another wave of shivers down my spine. Was it fear? Or was I turned on just by the sound of his voice? And what was with *that* response? Was he totally thrown off by what I’d said? I was surprised by my reaction, but at the same time, I didn’t really care. It wasn’t like I was going to die from it.

Hopefully.

I pushed myself up on the bed, angling to look down at him, ignoring how fast my heart was beating. “Aren’t you tired of talking?”

“I’m tired of everything,” he grumbled.

“Can’t we just do this? We always get interrupted,” I said. “Are you putting it off so Colton can barge in here and stop us?”

He rolled his eyes. Except I knew the answer to my own question—I’d locked the door earlier so Colton wouldn’t come and interrupt us… but you never knew. I didn’t think I’d put it past Colton to Kool-Aid Man himself into a room if it meant he could embarrass me. The guy was a maniac. Both of the brothers were.

“Caliana,” Xavier said. His voice did that same rumbly thing again, and suddenly I snapped back to what was happening in front of me. Who was in front of me and the position he was in underneath me.

It was then that I realized my hand was still on Xavier over his boxers. I’d never removed it. What was I supposed to do now? It was kind of past the point of removing it. It was like walking in the same direction as someone after you said goodbye… I shifted on the bed, but that turned out to be a horrible idea.

When I shifted, my hand pressing down on him, I felt exactly what was *really* going on underneath his boxers.

*Oh.*

Oh fuck.

He was… His *member* was… I gulped, my mouth going completely dry. I literally hadn’t realized I had gotten him…

Turned on.

My body went up in flames. I wanted to sink into the bed and disappear. Even now, as I was actively trying to seduce him, I still felt awkward thinking of stuff like that. What was I supposed to do now? We’d made a bet, and I’d won, hadn’t I? That should’ve been enough… We didn’t need to go any further. But… I wanted to?

Xavier looked up at me and raised a defiant eyebrow as if to say, *your move*.

*Thanks, asshole.*

I’d take the bait. If he was amused by me and wanted to see how far I’d go, he didn’t know who he was dealing with. I’d finish this.

I’d blow his goddamn mind.

In one quick motion, as smoothly as I could, I grabbed the sheet, pulling it up over us. It was better to do it under the sheet, right? That was sexy. It had to be. But I didn’t really know. All I knew was that my cheeks were burning, and my entire body felt feverish.

I wasn’t built for this kind of thing—*seduction*. But I had to try to ignore how awkward I felt and probably how awkward I looked doing it… I said I’d win the bet, didn’t I?

Slowly, I leaned down toward him, my hair falling all over the place between us. I scooped it out of the way with my free hand before closing the distance between us. I planted a soft kiss on his lips. I didn’t try to make it any deeper—I just kept my lips pressed on his.

And Xavier… didn’t do anything. *Anything.* Clearly, he was still trying to resist the whole seduction thing, even though I could still feel him getting… more turned on. He still hadn’t conceded. His entire body was tense, rigid. But he hadn’t told me to stop. I knew he could make me stop, too. He was doing this deliberately. If anything, he was encouraging me to keep going.

My other hand went to the side of his face, brushing back into his hair. His eyes were dark, swirling pools of blue. It was unsettling. Addicting. “Come on, Xavier. I can’t do everything myself.”

When I said that, he finally gave in to the temptation.

I gasped when his hand curled around my back tightly, his other one going to the back of my head. He caught me off-guard. I hadn’t expected him to actually reciprocate my advances so quickly… I thought I’d have to put a hell of a lot more persuasion into it.

The kiss was something I’d never had before—it was deep, passionate, and hot. It caused my body to catch fire. His tongue parted my lips, searching my mouth. I was so surprised, it took all I had not to pull away. I’d never kissed like this before.

At one point, I thought French kissing would be gross, but it wasn’t. It was hot and wet, but… good. Really good. His fingers dug deeper into my hair, and I could feel his nails hard against my skin, keeping me in place.

I should’ve been afraid. I’d seen what he was. I knew what his hands could do—what they could become.

Then I felt him press his hips up into my hand. Oh my god. He was grinding into my hand. Grinding. Into. My. Hand.

He was trying to get off on me, and I… *liked it*? What did that mean? What was I *doing*? Why was I forgetting what the point of all this was? Why was I not wanting to stop any of this?

My brain was turning into a haze. I needed to get ahold of myself, didn’t I? All I needed to do was turn him on, and he was—clearly. But so was I. I felt weak, impossible to want to stop this…

Was I finally going to have sex?

**Episode 40**

He must have noticed my hesitation because he stopped. “Li—”

“Shut up,” I mumbled, pushing myself forward and connecting my lips to his again. He didn’t even hesitate this time—not for one second. He pulled the covers back, keeping his lips on mine before pulling me back on top of him.

I froze when I felt his hard member against my lower body. Okay, he was excited. Pretty goddamn excited.

His lips left mine but instead of fully pulling away, they trailed down my neck. His warm lips were slowly sending me over the edge, and I couldn’t help but grind into him. My body was doing it involuntarily, and I was beyond surprised at how I was reacting.

His hands went up behind my back and…

“Xavier!” I pulled back, glaring at him. He looked up at me innocently, but I could see the devilish glint in his eyes.

“Hmm?”

“Don’t *hmm* me. You could have just unclipped it; you didn’t have to rip it.” I looked down to my torn bra in his hand.

He blinked, not bothered at all. “You’ll get over it.”

I hadn’t even realized I was now naked in front of him—my panties the only article of clothing I wore. I wasn’t…*not proud* of my chest. C-cups weren’t necessarily bad. I did have a few stretch marks along my waist during my fat phase in school. I had lost a lot of weight, due to not eating as much, but they were still there to remind me.

That was why I was dreading removing my panties.

“You’re hesitating,” he commented.

“Overthinking,” I responded quickly, and he raised an eyebrow, asking a silent question.

I shook my head. “Doesn’t matter—I’m somewhere else right now. Can we continue because sitting here naked isn’t exactly comfortable…”

When he opened his mouth to respond, I took the chance. I wasn’t willing to risk him saying no. I leaned in and connected my lips to his, my body rubbing up against him.

His hands easily wrapped around my back; he had big hands.

One went up and knotted into my hair, tugging it lightly, spurring for a reaction. I bit my tongue to make sure no noises came out, and his lips turned up against mine, knowing it affected me.

“Stop playing,” I breathed against him.

He left my lips again, trailing down my neck, then my collarbone, and finally to my chest. My breath hitched when his lips came in contact with my exposed breasts, because it felt…good.

I squirmed on him, and his body tensed. I couldn’t help the whimper that left my throat when he finally took my nipple into his mouth.

*Keep it cool. Calm down. Don’t faint. Don’t pass out.*

I was going to pass out. Definitely.

My head spun as his tongue swirled, obviously not affected by how I was reacting to this. It probably came natural to him with all the girls he had—

His mate…

When the thought came into my mind, my stomach turned over, and I felt sick.

He pulled back and looked up at me. “You’re tense.”

“Never felt like this before,” I said honestly. It wasn’t a lie—I was just avoiding the main thing bothering me. I wasn’t sure if he could read minds or something because he seemed to stop and think about it.

I had to distract him. “My turn,” I mumbled quietly. I lowered myself and slowly pulled off his boxers. He didn’t seem nervous at all.

I understood why quick enough.

I had watched porn before—who hadn’t? Even if you didn’t like it, it was an experiment. But I could guarantee his was bigger than every guy’s I had seen in porn. Then again, it wasn’t like I was on PornHub all the time.

I glanced up to him, and he tilted his head slightly. Was he thinking I’d back out? I was intimidated, of course, but not so much that I was going to run and call it a day. I reached out and wrapped my hand around it firmly.

Now what?

NOW WHAT, CALIANA?!

My hand slowly started moving, but I felt so awkward. Not because I didn’t like it, but in case I was doing something wrong. It didn’t seem like it, though. Xavier seemed…somewhat pleased by my movements. His jaw tightened, and his eyes were locked on me the whole time.

“You look nervous,” he commented.

“Don’t talk to me when I’m doing this,” I snarled, causing the corner of his lip to twitch.

“Why not?”

I decided the only way to shut him up…well, more like shut myself up, was to put something in my mouth to stop me.

Xavier was just as surprised as I was when I put him in my mouth. I could literally see his muscles tense as I continued jerking him off, teasing him with my tongue.

“Now look who’s awkward?” I smiled up at him, almost treating it like a toy. He wasn’t expecting this from me, and neither was I. Wait…

WHAT WAS I DOING? WHY WAS I DRAGGING THIS OUT? I WAS HERE TO FUCK THEN LEAVE—NOT GIVE HIM A BLOWJOB.

My eyes widened, and I pushed myself up quickly. He noted my quick, panicked movement but didn’t do anything to stop me. He only watched and honestly, I hated that more than anything.

It felt like a stare off until I finally cleared my throat. Just as I was about to speak, he spoke himself.

“Why did you stop? You were doing okay.” I knew he said it to get a reaction from me, so I decided not to give him one. I kept a straight face, although inside, I felt a tinge of pride from the compliment. Well, as close as Xavier could get to a compliment.

“Foreplay wasn’t in the deal,” I stated. “The deal was just taking my virginity.”

“If you want it to go in dry, I’m fine with it, but this was for you. You’re the one who started it.”

I was quite the opposite of dry, and when I didn’t answer him, he understood. He almost looked victorious.

“Let’s get this over with.” I rolled my eyes. I tried to tell myself I wanted this moment to be over when I really didn’t. Something was wrong with me.

I slowly pulled off my underwear, feeling self-conscious of my stretch marks. I noticed his eyes drop downward, and my jaw tightened so much I thought I was going to pull a muscle in my face.

“Why are you so tense? I can’t even see anything.” I noticed he was talking about…something else. Not my stretch marks. He didn’t comment on them or anything, but I knew he could see them, and that made me feel bad enough.

I tried so many oils to help them, but nothing worked. Nothing.

He grabbed my waist and lifted me, causing my eyes to widen. It was actually going to happen. Like, right now. His member pressed against me for a moment, then it was gone. He sat me on his stomach.

I stared down at him in surprise. He cocked his head, a smile playing on his lips. He looked good with a smile.

“What are you doing?” I breathed.

“I’m not going to fuck you when you’re pale and look terrified.”

“Everyone looks like this their first time.”

“I can guarantee they don’t.”

“I want this.”

“No, you don’t.”

“I do!”

He hesitated before sitting up properly and throwing me onto my side of the bed.

“Whatever you say, Caliana. Just be happy you won.”

My eyes focused on Xavier, and it felt weird just watching each other. When I began feeling awkward, I averted my eyes. I quickly grabbed the covers, pulling them up to cover my exposed body. I noticed the door was still locked and let out a sigh. Grabbing the smaller blanket, I wrapped it around my body and walked to the door, pulling out the hidden key and unlocking it.

Xavier watched me from the bed but made no indication he was going to move. I didn't say anything—just walked back and got into the bed.

"Why are you covering yourself?"

"Common decency."

"I already saw you."

"It doesn't mean you can always see me."

"Are you insecure?" When he said that, my eyes flashed to him, glaring.

"You can't ask a girl that. Of course I'm not."

"Then why did you keep trying to cover your stretch marks when you were on top of me? You tensed up when I looked down, did you not?"

I honestly thought he hadn't noticed any of that, so when he spoke those words, I turned over in embarrassment, facing away from him.

"You are insecure," he said.

"You really do know how to make a girl feel special," I snapped. "I am not insecure."

"Are you mad at me?"

"Of course I'm mad at you! You tossed me off you, and now you're talking about something I hate about myself."

"You hate it? So…you are insecure."

"Can we stop talking about it? I unlocked the door, now get out," I grumbled, nuzzling into my pillow.

"I thought you would boast about winning."

"I'll boast tomorrow when I'm not tired."

"You said you weren't tired earlier."

"Well, now I am."

Why was he still in the bed? Why—

My whole body froze, and the grip on my pillow tightened when his hand trailed down my side and stopped at my hip. "Why are you insecure about them?"

"Don't ask me those questions," I hissed.

"I am curious."

I looked back over to him, frustrated, but only now noticed how close he was to me. It took me a minute to focus again and speak. I realized his hands were covering the marks, and it made my heart pound.

"Because they're gross, obviously. They aren't even white hidden ones—they're proper red ones that show. Lola has some, but hers are silvery and can barely be seen, so I don't get why mine are like this." I hesitated. "I don't know why I'm spilling this to a person like you."

"Person like me?" He paused. "Maybe because I asked you."

"I don't share this type of stuff."

"I like them."

"I— Wait, what?" My brow furrowed at the three words, confused.

"I said I like them. Are you listening?"

Yep, same attitude.

"What the hell do you mean you like them? Stop being weird." I slapped his hand away with a scowl.

"I'm not being weird, I'm being serious."

"You can't like stretch marks."

"Why not?" He lifted the hand I slapped and looked at them. "They are like…little stripes."

"That's not a compliment, Xavier."

"They suit you. A wild little tiger..."

My muscles tensed, and a lump slowly formed in my throat. "Shut up."

"I think you see them as a flaw for no reason. I think they're like your own little mark..."

Why was he making me feel better?

I pushed myself up and turned over, facing him. "What are you doing, Xavier?"

"Talking. What does it look like?" he said, the same attitude returning.

"You called me a slut not long ago. You said I was nothing because I was selling my virginity, and now, out of nowhere, you're complimenting me. Right after you threw me off your body!"

He seemed to think about it. In an instant, he slowly backed off me, staring at me like I was insane. His eyes studied me closely, searching for something, and it honestly scared me.

"No," he said the word slowly and pushed up from the bed.

"No?"

"I am not being nice to you."

"What?"

"It's not me—"

"Xavier, you're talking like a crazy person right now." He ignored me and pulled on his boxers. Why was he freaking out all of a sudden?

Why was I disappointed he was leaving? Had I made him leave?

Maybe I made him uncomfortable. I wanted to punch myself in the face. "What are you doing?" I reached out and grabbed his arm. His eyes roamed from my face down along my bare body, causing my cheeks to warm. "Xavier." I cleared my throat, and his eyes returned to mine.

"I need to go."

"You didn't need to go a moment ago."

"I was distracted."

"What's going on? Please fill me in. Are you alright?"

He didn't say anything. He just turned back around, ready to leave.

I lunged on top of him, clinging onto his back, wrapping my legs around him. "Don't go yet," I murmured into his neck.

His whole body went rigid before continuing to walk. "I'll go out the door with you on my back, I don't care."

I strangled him lightly, wrapping my legs tighter around him. "No! Turn around right now, Xavier. You can't just walk out after that."

"Yes, I can," he said, not bothered by my struggle. He pulled open the door and stopped when Colton walked past. His eyes were clouded; his hair was incredibly messy.

He blinked several times, obviously just getting up. "What's all the commot—" He stopped mid-way through his sentence. "Why is she naked on your back?"

I hopped down and hid behind Xavier's body. Xavier said nothing and shut the door in Colton's face.

"What the hell, Xavier?! Don't shut it on my face, open up." He banged on the door and attempted to open it, but Xavier locked it shut.

"Go back to bed, Colton."

"How can I go back to bed after seeing that?"

"You didn't even see her."

"Yeah, but she was naked...on your back. What happened? When did this all go down?"

"Go back to sleep." Xavier sighed.

"I'm waiting out here until you come out. I'm not leaving without information."

Xavier stared at the door for a minute before letting out a small sigh. He turned back to me. "Go to bed."

"No, I'm—"

"I'll stay, just get into bed," he hissed quietly.

"Stop whispering. It's rude!" Colton hit the door again. I didn't move from my spot. Instead, I narrowed my eyes. I didn't trust Xavier; I knew he'd run out the moment I turned.

When he noticed I wasn't moving, he sighed. He grabbed my shoulders and spun me in the direction of the bed. I jumped and practically squealed when he slapped me...

When I say *slapped*, I mean...spanked.

"Go back to bed like a good girl."

*Don't go...don't. Stop walking. Why am I walking? DON'T OBEY HIM!*

Before I knew it, I was sitting in bed, staring at him. Yep, I was insane. Crazy.

"Colton." Xavier sighed, knocking on the door. "Go back to bed."

"I told you, I'm not leaving until you come out," Colton argued. After a moment of hesitation, Xavier turned with a sigh and returned to the bed.

"Turn off the light," he huffed.

I couldn't help but be upset that he stayed as far from me as possible, but…at least he stayed. I smiled and reached over, turning off the bedside lamp so we were in full darkness. It was pure silence for a moment until another knock came at the door.

"Hey, you guys aren't actually going to sleep..." Colton's voice spoke up. "Why did you turn off the light? Open up!"

"COLTON, SHUT UP. JESUS!" I heard Lola scream from her room, and I bit back a smile.

I was surrounded by the strangest people.

**Episode 41**

A light tap on my face caused my eyes to crack open. The bright light shining through the window made my lazy hand reach up and shield myself from it. "Close the curtain," I whined.

Lola sat on top of me, staring. I thought it was Lola. I was partially blinded by the light and the sleep in my eyes. I brought my hands up and wiped my eyes, causing them to sting slightly.

"What happened?" Lola said.

"What?" Wait. I glanced to the right side of me and frowned, the memories from last night replaying in my head. Xavier was gone now, and Lola took his place. I looked back up to Lola. "What?" I repeated.

"Don't you dare *what* me. You didn't tell me what you were planning!"

"Planning? It wasn't a plan, it just happened."

Her eyes flew open. "You did the deed?"

"No." I frowned. "We made a bet, which I won—I got him hard and kind of...you know."

"You know?" She fished for more details.

"I put him in my mouth, okay? But only for a second before I realized what the hell I was doing."

"You didn't like it?"

"I did, but it was foreplay. I'm here for him to take my virginity, nothing else." I pushed her off me with a sigh.

"Hmm?"

"Something strange happened. He was so sweet to me and complimenting me, then he freaked out. He's like…bipolar." I frowned, reminding myself of the incident before freezing up. "But I won."

"You won?"

"I won! The bet—I made him hard, I turned him on."

"Don't repeat that to anyone else, like, ever."

"Lola, I won our *freedom*! That was the bet. We don't need to be here anymore!" I shook her viciously, and she scowled, slapping my hand off.

"You're making zero sense."

I groaned in frustration and pulled on a large top and shorts. I left the room, ignoring her questions, and I ran down the stairs. I stopped halfway when someone appeared at the bottom. Colton stared up at me for a moment before a small grin formed on his lips. My cheeks flushed, remembering he had partially seen what happened last night.

I narrowed my eyes, sending a glare his way before pushing past him. "Where's Xavier?"

"Going for round two?"

"Where's Xavier, Colton?"

"Kitchen," he huffed, seemingly annoyed I wasn't playing his game. I jogged to the kitchen and peeked around the door. Xavier stood in front of the sink, his gaze focused out the window.

He turned around, obviously hearing me. His eyes met mine for a second before he turned away, barely acknowledging me.

"Seriously? You're going to ignore me?"

"I'm not ignoring you."

"Not even a good morning?"

"I never say that to you."

That was true. Why was I here? Why was I looking for him?

"We need to talk." I cleared my throat. This made him turn around again, leaning against the counter and facing me.

He folded his arms across his chest. "Then talk."

"I won."

"I know."

"Which means I won my freedom. I can go, and you can't stop me—that was the bet."

"I know."

"Don't say— Wait. You know?"

"Yes, I know. You won the bet, so you can go."

"I…can?" My brow furrowed slightly. No way he would make it this easy.

He nodded, barely caring about the conversation.

"Why?"

"Because you won, and I'm a man of my word."

"Why did you make that bet, Xavier? You know if you wanted me gone, you could have let me leave. I've been wanting to go for ages."

He hesitated. "I didn't think you'd win, I guess."

"What do you mean you didn't think I'd win? I'm a girl with feminine features. Men get hard over nothing sometimes, so there was no doubt—"

"You're cocky."

"I'm not saying it's just me. Any girl can turn a man on—I'm telling you."

"Well, you won."

"Then why make that bet? If it was likely I was going to win?"

"I didn't think you would."

"You can't say that. How can someone be dumb enough to think I wouldn't be able to turn you on. Are you saying I'm unattractive?" I challenged him. I couldn't understand what he was thinking, and it bothered me. A lot.

He shut his eyes with a sigh. "I'm telling you: I made it because I didn't think you would win."

We were having the same argument; it was a cycle.

"What, so you haven't been hard in ages? Is that it?"

"Yes."

"Yes?" My eyes widened.

"I don't know."

"YOU CAN'T JUST SAY THAT!"

"I don't want to talk about it."

"I do. I'm confused, and I want it to make sense. Erectile dysfunction?"

"It doesn't make sense, and no, I don't have...whatever you said."

"Try and explain it," I demanded.

He hesitated before his lips pressed into a straight line. "Okay."

"Okay…"

"I can jerk off, obviously." When he said that, my cheeks heated immediately. Okay, maybe this was the wrong conversation to get into. "But girls don't attract me anymore."

"So…you're gay. You lied to me—"

"Can I finish?"

"Fine." I shut my mouth.

"I just— I couldn't. It was obviously because of my wolf. I haven’t been attracted to any girls since I murdered my mate."

"Oh." I paused. "Well, have you even tried with any other girls?"

"Yes, I have. You don't think Colton's repeatedly brought girls to me?" He arched an eyebrow.

"Your wolf basically rejected every girl because he was upset that his mate died?"

"I don't know." He shrugged. "My wolf's gone, so I don't complicate my life anymore thinking about that."

"Maybe he likes me."

"He's gone, Caliana."

"How do you know?"

"Because I murdered his mate."

"Who said he's gone? Was it you, someone completely uneducated in mates?"

He glared at me, obviously annoyed with my response. "I don't know, and I don't care."

"I think you care," I commented. "I think it's part of you, and you miss it."

"I couldn't give a damn about it—I can live my life normally now."

"You can't."

"You don't know anything."

"I know as much as you, Xavier."

"No, you don't." He glared at me. "You don't know anything that happened, and you won't know. Ever. Now drop it."

When I said nothing, he brushed a hand through his hair. "Go pack your things, and I'll get Colton to drop you off at the airport."

"No."

"Excuse me?"

"I want to stay."

The anger on his face disappeared. Instead, he looked down at me, clearly surprised by my response. My cheeks warmed, and I cleared my throat. "I mean…only for a while. Not for long."

"Xavier, open the door." Colton came into the kitchen quickly with a frantic look, followed closely by a panicked Lola. Xavier raised his head before his eyes widened as if realizing something.

Everything happened so fast.

Xavier slid the glass door open and in an instant, Colton was not Colton but a large wolf. He pounced out the door onto a wolf that was a bit smaller than him.

"They're back," I breathed as Xavier stared at his brother, not even worried.

The other wolf had no chance. Colton ripped into him viciously, not holding back one bit. This fight was easily his until...

A loud snarling sound came from the right, and a whitish-silver wolf came charging toward him. "Colton, watch out!" I yelled. His head snapped up to the newcomer.

The attacking wolf was mid-air, but the aggression was gone. The wolf's eyes widened, and as expected, it landed on Colton and rolled him off the smaller wolf.

It didn't attack. Instead, it had him pinned down. I could see now, by the posture and frame, it was female. The large wolf stared down at Colton, who was lying on his back, staring up at her.

The scary looks were suddenly gone as they stared at each other. Suddenly, the female wolf’s tail began wagging, and so did Colton's. The harsh look she had on her face a minute ago was gone. Her teeth had been bared, her eyes narrowed and ready for the kill, but there was change.

What was—

Oh. *Oh*. His mate...

The smaller male wolf jumped up and went to attack Colton, but in an instant, the she-wolf jumped, blocking his path, growling at her pack mate, then suddenly stopped. She was clearly confused as to what was happening.

Then…she bit herself.

She turned back and bit down hard, making herself bleed. She whined in pain before shaking her large head, and the puppy love look was gone. Was she trying to fight her wolf...? She turned back to a shocked Colton, baring her teeth once more.

"What's happening...?"

"I don't know," Lola whispered.

Colton knew in an instant, and he was up on his feet. He ducked out just in time as the female tried to bite his throat. She was really trying to kill him.

Maybe she wasn't his mate? I had no clue.

The smaller one dove onto Colton’s back, biting down. Colton attempted to buck him off, but with the female one about to attack him, he had no chance.

Then Xavier ran out.

"XAVIER! STOP!" I tried to grab him, but Lola pulled me back. "Lola, he can't fight like that! He can't change."

Xavier stopped just outside the door. He put his fingers in his mouth and whistled loudly. I winced at the sound of it, then stared dumbfounded. Why was he whistling? It wasn't going to distract two wolves that were focused on killing Colton.

What was the plan here?

Then a flash of brown.

The smaller wolf that was on Colton was tackled to the ground now, a loud whine coming from him. This caused the she-wolf to be distracted and in an instant, Colton took the advantage and pinned her down.

"Lola," I said in shock. My eyes focused on the brown wolf that had taken the smaller attacker down. "Lola, it's him!"

The wolf from the woods, the wolf that had followed us here, the one I thought was going to kill me…was now helping Colton. The scene in front of me made my stomach sick, watching them fight.

I had never been so confused...I couldn't watch this.

I backed off, bile rising in my throat. The sight of blood, the sight of Colton trying to kill his new-found mate—it was horrific. I could tell something clicked between them, but they didn't care, and it made goosebumps rise on my skin.

I needed air; my throat felt clogged. I turned and ran out the front door—the safe side of the house—or what I assumed was safe. My vision blurred—this was all too much to take in.

Then, what finished it all was what I found on the other side of the house. A larger wolf than both the she-wolf and other attacker now stood in front of the house. He glared down at me, growling lowly, but that was all that needed to be done.

I tried to scream, to warn the others, but before anything could come out, I collapsed.

**Episode 42**

**Xavier**

"What the hell was that about?" Lola grabbed me and shook me roughly. I didn't even glance toward her, instead kept my eyes narrowed, watching the enemy wolves retreat.

The female one...

She was strong compared to the others we fought—she must have been up in the high rank. My eyes returned to my brother, who was obviously embarrassed because of what happened. She played him.

She literally nuzzled into him as a distraction for her and her pack mate to get away. His wolf stared after her longingly, and I almost felt bad for him. His mate tried to kill him.

Déjà vu.

The brown wolf trotted toward me, letting out a small, concerned growl. I shifted my eyes up to him, my lips forming a straight line. "Thank you."

He raised his large head and glanced past me to Lola, his ears falling back slightly. A small whimper broke from his throat as he continued watching the girl. "You can shift, Jay."

Bones began cracking, from both the brown wolf and Colton. They didn't care about nudity, but Lola quickly raced off to get towels for them.

"Colton? Was she your mate?"

"Shut up, Xavier—you know she was." His voice shook a bit, something foreign to Colton. His eyes went up and fell on Jay wrapping a towel around himself.

He paused and glanced up at me when he noticed the silence. "Alpha."

"Don't call me that." I scowled.

"It's weird calling you Xavier."

"Well, I'm not your Alpha."

Jay arched an eyebrow then turned to Lola. "Hello. Did you have fun trying to kill me in that car crash?"

"I knew you wouldn't die." She shrugged casually.

"It's been a while," he said the words slowly, and she nodded. "How are you doing?"

"Where's Caliana?" My brow furrowed, noticing the missing girl.

"Probably packing her bags. Didn't she win a bet or something?" Colton suggested.

"She can't make up her mind. She wanted to leave, now she says she wants to stay. I don't understand the girl."

"Are you giving her the idea you want her to stay?"

"Not in the slightest," I grumbled. "Where is she?"

"Cal!" Lola called loudly. "We have a visitor!" I understood she was talking about Jay. "Cal, answer me."

When there was only silence, I felt my blood run cold. I knew Colton's eyes were on me, and he immediately assumed the same. "I smelled three different scents..."

"Yet there were only two fighting us," Jay commented, already coming to the same conclusion. Lola easily caught on to what we were hinting at. She turned on her heel and ran to the front door. "IT'S OPEN!"

In an instant, she was running out the door, but Jay sprinted after her. Colton pushed himself up onto the counter. "Now what?"

"What do you mean now what? Why aren't you more...crazy about your mate?"

"I'm hiding it—I don't want to talk about feelings. There's also a more serious matter at hand. What are we planning to do?"

I just shrugged.

"They're going to kill her."

"Probably torture her." I hesitated. "As revenge..."

"Usually, we don't help or rescue people. I don't think we've ever helped someone apart from Lilac."

"I'm aware."

"Do you care enough about her that you want to save her? There are four of us and a whole pack of them…it's risky."

"I guess Lola will force us to." I sighed.

"That wasn't the question, Xavier. I met my mate. I know what it feels like for my wolf to love someone. You murdered yours..."

"Where are you going with this?"

"You murdered her, and it's all on *you*. Caliana's going to die because of it—you're okay with that?"

"You sound like you care about her."

Colton chuckled. "I don't. But if you do, and she dies, I'm not listening to you whine."

"We'll go get her…for Lola's sake."

"You look stressed."

"Because we're going to run into a pack house and fight wolves."

"Then let's not do it. Lola can go by herself. Let Caliana die. Remember, she's not our conc—"

"Colton," I snapped, and a small smile played on his lips. "Don't question me."

"You got it, *Alpha*." He jumped off the desk, his eyes raising to Jay, who dragged in a screaming Lola. She struggled in his arms, thrashing about. "Let me go! Let me go!"

"We're going after her," Jay grumbled. "Calm down or you'll hurt yourself."

"Jay, you can't tell the others. They can't know what you're doing," Colton told him slowly. "Xavier and I aren't involved in any of this, got it?"

It was weird, Caliana not being here. If she was, I knew there would be questions everywhere. Who was Jay? Why was he following us? Was that girl Colton's mate?

"I know." He sighed.

"Colton." It was my turn to ask a question. "You do realize if we go retrieve her, one of us might have to kill your mate."

"I don't care if you do—she's a nuisance for me." Colton waved his hand.

"You know what happened to me when I did," I warned him. He studied me for a moment before a frustrated groan came from his throat.

"I hate this dumb mate crap with a passion. I'd rather have her dead and have to deal with what you deal with."

"It's not easy, Colton. You'll never be able to shift again."

"You killed your mate—that's why your wolf is gone. If I don't kill my own mate, and someone else does it for me, it shouldn’t matter." He was trying to persuade himself before he cocked an eyebrow. "You can show you're worried."

"I'm not worried."

"Yeah, say that to the cuts on your arm." Colton sighed and left the kitchen. My eyebrows knitted together, and when I glanced down, my body froze. There were scratches on my arms from my nails digging into them in frustration.

I hadn't even realized.

*Stay home, don't save her. Things will go back to normal.* Something inside me wasn't letting that happen, and I didn't like it.

"We need to go now!" Lola came in, tears flooding down her face. Jay was running behind her, grabbing her hand tightly. She glanced back at him and wiped her tear-stained face.

It had been a while since I had seen Jay, since I had seen my pack together. *Don't call them my pack...*

Jay had been third in command, almost as loyal to the Alpha as the Beta was. It wasn't time to remind me of my past now—it was time to shut up Lola and get Caliana.

"Why aren't you worried, Xavier?" She glared up at me. "I'm not dumb. You like her."

"No, I don't."

"Then you did something to her. She doesn't know what she wants anymore—you're confusing her. She's petrified of you, yet she sees something in you."

My jaw tightened.

"No reply? Exactly. She won her freedom, but I knew she wouldn't go. I knew it from the start, and you don't want her to go because—"

"Lola, calm down." Jay tugged her arm. "For me."

I couldn't help but be slightly sick when I didn't hear Caliana's confused questions. *What's going on? I'm so confused.* She’d always had something to say, something to ask.

"I told you, we're going to get her."

"Let's go now."

"There's a whole pack of them."

"And five of us. You two have Alpha genes—you can easily take them down even if it were you two alone."

"How do we know they won’t kill Caliana on the spot when they see us?"

"They want to make you suffer, Xavier. They want revenge."

\*\*\*

**Cali**

I heard a distant *wake up* in my mind, like I was floating, before a quick tap to my cheek. I wanted to keep my eyes shut and fall back asleep until I realized being tied up wasn't a comfy bed position.

My eyes flicked open as the memories came flooding back into my mind. The first thing I saw was a girl kneeling in front of me. My eyes turned left and right, examining the room, and my heart dropped to my stomach at the huge wolf that stood nearby. It seemed to be a basement or a cellar-type of area, causing me to panic.

I felt myself crying, but no sobs left my lips due to the tape across my mouth. Where were Lola and Xavier? Were they all right? Had they been caught? They were my main concern right then.

I thought I was going to throw up. I felt dizzy and weak, like the life was sucked from me.

"Behave and I won't hurt you," the girl spoke, and I met her eyes. She was blurry from my tears, but I could see she was beautiful. Her eyes were a brown yet green color, and she had midnight-black hair. Her fair-toned skin made her look like a goddess.

"I'm going to take off this tape, and you're going to tell me what your name is." She gripped one end of the duct tape over my lips. "And if you scream, see that big mutt? He'll tear arm number one off."

Okay…maybe not a goddess.

I nodded slowly, staring at her. I was terrified, but at the same time, at ease. Then she ripped it off, causing a stinging sensation around my lips, and I yelped.

"Name."

"Caliana."

"What a good girl." Her eyes lit up. "Who was that wolf?"

*Who was that wolf?*

I suddenly realized who this curious girl was. Colton's mate....

She had the same beautiful eyes of that silver wolf, but seeing as she had jet-black hair, I assumed her fur would be the same.

"I don't know mu—"

"Who was that wolf?" She smiled a fake smile and gripped my chin roughly.

"He's someone I met recently. I only know his name is Colton."

She hesitated and thought about what I said before clearing her throat. "What is he like?"

"He's your mate." It was the first thing I thought of, and her lips formed a thin line as she studied me. "You remind me of him. Scary, tough…but cute."

She seemed surprised for only a second before scowling. "Sweet-talking doesn't work with me, girl."

"I'm being honest." I shrugged, and yet again she looked slightly surprised. If she wasn't terrifying, it would be cute.

"Are you the brother's mate?"

"No."

"No? Then why do you know about us? About mates?"

"Long story short: I'm selling my virginity to him for money. Because I need money. Badly. Well, not now that I'm going to die, I guess."

She blinked once. "Why are you not crying anymore? If you are aware you will die."

"I'm over it at this point." I almost laughed at how casual and accepting I was.

"Does the brother love you?"

"Xavier?" I snorted. "Nope. Probably the opposite, actually."

"He won't come for you?"

"Of course not."

"You are being honest..."

I nodded.

She stared at me, frustrated and confused. Her fists balled up, and I expected her to hit me, but the sound of footsteps made us both freeze. I glanced past her and saw a large wolf slowly making his way down the stairs.

She turned back to me and slapped the tape over my mouth again, then left. The new wolf took a quick glance at me before a grunt came from him, and he sat next to the other wolf.

It felt like I sat there with my own thoughts for hours when I knew it was only a few minutes before more footsteps appeared. I couldn't see the person, but it made my whole body tense.

A horrible feeling came over me.

"Hello, Caliana," a deep voice greeted me in a friendly tone. When he came closer, I caught a glance at his face. He didn't look like a monster or anything—no scars, no messed-up face, just an average extremely-built man.

He leaned down and ripped off the tape roughly. Luckily, the girl hadn't put it on tight enough that it hurt. The two wolves in the room barely looked in my direction.

The stranger went behind me and untied my hands before standing me up without saying anything.

"You are beautiful…I can see why he likes you. Of course, a girl like you would make Xavier grow fond."

"He's not fon—" I cried out when he slapped me across the face, causing my eyes to water.

"I didn't tell you to speak." He cleared his throat before walking in front of me and studying my face. "Ugh, now your face is red. Apologies, my darling. I will reward you with one question—you can ask me anything you want."

This man was *terrifying*. He was playing the friendly act when it was obvious he was a devil. When I didn't speak, he nodded. "Go on, I give you permission."

"Why am I here?"

His eyes lit up when I spoke the words. "As expected." He chuckled before gripping my face roughly, his nails digging into my skin. "You are here because your little boyfriend killed my sister."

**Episode 43**

My right eye was half-closed from the hard smack I received from the man seconds ago, but it didn't stop me staring at him in shock.

"What?"

"You heard me." He was mad now; his eyes were basically on fire.

"He...why would he do that?"

"Because he's a monster that deserves to die." He glared at me then gripped my throat. "But, no…that's not what I'm going to do. I'm going to kill something he loves so he understands the pain."

I continued watching the man for a moment before I burst out laughing. I didn’t know why, but I continued to laugh—in hysterics—tears forming in my eyes. The shock on his face only made me laugh more. "Are you serious?"

He was taken aback by how I acted. "Excuse me?" I could see my laughing was starting to annoy him, and I wouldn't be surprised if he killed me any second now.

"He *hates* me! Xavier was going to kill me himself. Like you said, he's a monster who killed your sister. You think he's capable of loving someone else?"

The man stared at me now, his whole body freezing.

"Your sister was his mate, correct?"

"How do you know that?"

"Because he's proud he killed her? If he killed his own mate, what makes you think he'd fall for someone else? Especially a human. This whole plan of yours is useless."

"No. No, it's not…"

"Yes, it is." I wiped my eyes on my shoulder since my hands were tied=. "But seeing as you're going to kill me...tell me more about your sister."

"You don't have a right to speak about her..." He grabbed my throat, stealing the breath from my body. "DON'T TALK ABOUT HER!"

I stared at him, my breaths ragged as I tried to get even a tiny bit of air. One of the wolves glanced back to look at me then looked away, as if he had seen this type of thing a million times over. Then he let go and threw me back.

This man was evil.

I didn't care if his sister died. If he was willing to kill someone innocent to get back at someone, he was evil. And I was going to die anyway.

"Xavier told me about her," I said, and he stared down at me. "He told me how weak and pathetic she was. How good it felt to rip int—" My words were cut off, and I coughed and gagged loudly when his foot made contact with my stomach. It took me a moment to be able to speak, winded. I stared up at the man. "Don't worry...he caused her more pain...than this."

"SHUT UP!" he roared before bending down and grabbing me by the neck. The hard punch landed at the side of my face and caused me to taste blood in my mouth. He picked me up by the neck with one hand before slamming me into the mirror, making it shatter. "I'll kill you! I'll break your bones! I'll destroy y—" As he was about to snap my finger, the large wolf growled loudly.

The man stopped and let go of me, causing me to fall again.

Yes! How could he be so stupid?

"Why isn't Frank here?" he asked, completely zoning out. "You're right...I can't hurt her too much yet." He fixed his messy hair, then ran his hands over his clothes.

The mirror that had smashed caused shards of sharp glass everywhere. I struggled to reach out to the closest and longest piece, pulling a muscle in my shoulder as I did.

The new wolf growled—I think the girl called him Leon or Leroy—again. "Pick her up, put her up straight," the man said before leaving the room with Leroy at his heels.

*No, don't pick me up yet!*

With a final struggle, I wobbled myself enough for my chair to fall over, putting me in reach of the sharp object just in time, curling it in my hand. The large wolf walked over and bit the chair, pulling it up straight with ease.

I swapped the shard to my dominant hand and began sawing into the duct tape that held my hands together. I often saw this stuff in movies, but surprisingly it was harder than it actually looked, and it took me a few minutes to rip it free.

The wolf glanced at me the moment the tape ripped—his hearing was excellent. I stared back at him before spitting blood toward him. He let out a small growl but turned away; his orders were probably to not touch me.

I had to do the next bit quickly. If he caught me...it was over.

I moved my hand around the front and brought the sharp glass down to my ankle where the duct tape tied me to the chair. The moment I ripped the first one, I'd have barely any time to get the next one.

My eyes stayed locked onto the large wolf, who had his eyes set forward where the stairs led up to the door. Okay...

Three...Two...One...

With all my might, I sent the shard so deep into the tape, a bit dug into my ankle.

And as I guessed, the wolf glanced my way. His eyes widened when he saw I was free except for one leg. As expected, he jumped up and charged at me with bared teeth. With a small cry, I jabbed the shard into his open mouth and through his tongue.

He whined and shook his head, trying to get it out. I used the time to grab another shard—not as big, but just as sharp—and began cutting at the tape on my leg.

"COME ON, COME ON!" I cried in frustration, and right when he went to jump on me, I bent forward so he bit down onto the wooden chair, giving me the chance to free myself.

A loud bang upstairs caused both the wolf and I to freeze before I remembered what my situation was.

Focus.

There was so much adrenaline rushing through my body that I forgot about my sore face, stomach, and cut ankles. The wolf was angry now. Very angry.

He spat out the wooden chair, and this was my chance to run, but I knew I couldn't. He would catch up straight away. With a deep breath, I charged at him and shoved the shard as deep as I could into his eye before pulling it back out, then digging it in again.

There was a pop when I pulled it out the second time, causing my stomach to turn over—I could have sworn I was about to vomit.

My hand was caked in his warm blood, but now was my only chance. With all my effort, I ran up the stairs, pushing through the door. To my utter relief, no one was there.

I turned right, going with my instincts, pushing forward. It felt like all my senses were heightened from the adrenaline, and I could hear the wolf running up the stairs behind me. This place was like a maze. I had to choose now: should I run straight on or take the next right? Which way was *out*?!

I let out a cry when I whacked into something, stopping my path. Well, some*one*. Standing back a bit, my heart dropped to my stomach when my eyes landed on the girl from earlier—Colton's mate.

"Watch it," she snapped, then noticed who I was. Her eyes widened, and she stared down at me in surprise. I couldn't hesitate. Just…*do it*.

I brought the shard up and attempted to stab her with it, but it was weaker than my jab with the wolf. Unlike him, though, she was expecting it. She caught my hand just in time and grabbed the shard, not even flinching when it dug into her hand.

She twisted my hand behind my back, making me yelp in pain.

I felt like I was going to throw up everywhere when the door crashed open. Her brow furrowed as she glanced up before pulling a face. I followed her view and literally gagged when I saw the wolf's eye hanging out.

That's what the pop was....

His eyes...or *eye…*was set on me now, and he no longer cared about what the man wanted. His goal was to kill me; that was the only thing he wanted at this moment in time.

In an instant, he was running toward us, and I was waiting for death. All I could do was hope that it would be quick, that he wouldn't drag it out.

Then I was free.

My arm dropped behind me, the strain of my hand bending behind my back gone.

"Damn it," the girl huffed before glancing down at me. "Stay."

I was too shocked to even move or run, but she moved.

Not away from the wolf...not to safety, but toward him.

It was amazing how easily she shifted, and how quick. I didn't even realize what was going on until the silvery white wolf had pinned down the male. She snarled at him, baring her teeth, and I was glad not to be under her.

She was terrifying, to say the least.

They glared at each other and had a hidden conversation, and after a moment, he gave up struggling and stopped growling.

Wait, why was I standing there...

*STOP CHILLING LIKE THIS IS YOUR EVERYDAY THING TO SEE!*

Colton’s mate was extremely distracted with the male wolf, so I took this moment to slowly back off before turning on my heel and running, praying I wouldn't be caught.

**Episode 44**

*Run, Caliana! Run and don't look back.*

Where was I going?

Why was no one here? I expected to run into at least one person, but no one was here. In the distance, I could hear shouting, so I assumed maybe they were all watching a football game or something. Anything to explain the creepy emptiness.

A flash of white zoomed past me, and I came to a halt when she glared at me, clearly not happy I tried to escape. Who was I kidding? Did I actually expect I could outrun a wolf or hide from one?

She bared her white teeth, a growl erupting from her throat, and I raised my hands, signaling my defeat. Her eyes seemed to study the place before nudging me forward.

I didn't fight back; I allowed her to guide me to wherever she wanted to go, aware that at any moment she could kill me. She led us to a door, and I pushed it open and went inside, assuming that was what she wanted.

She crouched through the doorframe and let the door shut behind us. I turned the light on, expecting to be in some torture room, but it just had a television and two couches. I studied the room, searching for any weapon she planned to kill me with before turning back to her. I jumped and let out a small scream when I saw a naked girl standing in front of me.

I made sure my eyes stayed up, not looking at her exposed body, even though she didn't seem shy. I understood why; from the quick glimpse I got, she was very fit.

"Give me your clothes," she said.

"Sorry?"

"You made me rip my clothes out there, so give me yours."

I stared at the girl wide-eyed but understood she wasn't the joking type. When I didn't move, she narrowed her eyes. "Now, before I rip them off you."

She didn't need to say any more. In an instant, I pulled off my clothes and passed them to her. "Do you need..."

"No, keep your bra and underwear." She shook her head before pulling on the clothes that, luckily, were a good fit for her. She studied me before her eyes returned to my face. "Did the Alpha do that?"

I nodded, assuming that man from before was the Alpha.

"I see," she said before leaning back. "And you popped out Tyson's eye?"

I winced. "I didn't mean to."

She didn't say anything after that but instead pushed away from the wall. "Stay here," she said. "I'm serious this time. If you run, I will snap your neck in a second."

"Where are you going?"

"None of your business."

"Will you be back?" I asked. "Can you bring me clothes?"

She turned back, narrowing her eyes. "You have no right to ask about clothes. I'm getting the Alpha—I'm not on your side, girl."

My heart dropped. She stood up on her tiptoes and grabbed a key from the top of the doorframe. "Just to make sure." She wiggled the key before leaving the room and locking it behind her.

Goosebumps rose on my arms, and I knew it wasn't from the cold. I was scared now. I had accepted death down there, then I thought I had a chance of freedom, and now I was trapped again. I sat on the soft couch and laid back into it, wiping the tears from my eyes.

My only concerns were my parents and Lola right now. Would the guys kill her now that I was gone? Would my parents get to lay my body to rest? I knew they were the type that would search for answers...

What if they got caught in this mess and were murdered? I should have written some sort of note. No…if Lola made it out alive, I knew she would cover for me. My dying wish. And if she didn't, I'd haunt her forever. A small smile formed on my face as Lola popped into my mind.

She had come into school later than other kids had; she had moved there with her parents. Her parents... Would she make it back to her dads in one piece? Please.

All I could do was wish Xavier and Colton had the decency to free her. Would she fight them back and get herself murdered?

My adrenaline was fading, and I registered the pain now. I couldn’t even touch the right side of my face, or it felt like another punch; I was also aware my stomach was going to bruise badly from the kicks. My ankles weren't as bad, but they stung slightly from where I accidentally cut myself. My eyes fell to the palms of my hands, the cuts in them from the shard of glass. A slow smile formed on my face, and I chuckled.

I had taken down a wolf...I momentarily escaped all on my own.

I clapped my hands, proud of myself, before freezing and whining out at the pain of the cuts. Only I'd be so stupid to forget about them. I spat on my hands and wiped them together, then rubbed my hands on the couch.

I froze when I saw the blood soak into the fabric couch before pausing. I was going to die anyway—it wouldn't matter. At least I left my mark.

I glanced down and winced at the sight of the red bruise that was already appearing on my stomach. I tried to joke to myself about the whole matter, but I didn't even realize I had been crying the whole time.

Or was I laughing?

I was going insane. Great. My final moments were spent alone with my insane thoughts.

I pushed myself up, wincing at the pain, and walked over, shutting off the light before steadily making my way back to the couch and lying down. I curled up into a ball, like a child in the womb, and cuddled myself. Maybe if I shut my eyes and fell asleep now, they would spare me just enough to kill me in my sleep?

I knew it was highly unlikely, but it was all I could hope for. I nestled my sore stomach and allowed my eyes to close, trying to push all thoughts away so I could sleep.

My brow furrowed at the noise of a crash, and I partially smiled. It was weird…

Were the other people in this house even aware they had me here? They seemed to be celebrating something in another room while I was dying here. It was kind of creepy thinking about it. I hated being alone—it was when my thoughts came out at the strongest point. When they reminded me of all the regrets I had, reminded me of mistakes I made, or of people I loved.

My parents came into my mind…Lola, my old dog, and—

My heart dropped at the thought of Xavier, and I shook my head, trying to get him out of my brain, but it only caused a strong pain to wash over me. "Damn," I groaned, bringing my hand up before stopping. Touching it would only make it worse.

Things would have turned out differently if I had gotten up a tiny bit earlier this morning.

Xavier had given me permission to go. If I said yes, I could have gotten away with Lola, and we'd be safe. We'd be on a flight back home.

But no. I slept in late *and* denied his request to let me go.

Why did I do that? Why did I say I wanted to stay?

That man terrified me—he killed his own mate for no reason. He said horrible things and didn't seem to care about anyone, but that night in my room...it changed something.

I wanted to run before, but now I had seen his soft side. He had called the ugly things about me beautiful. He called me a little tiger, and I would be lying if I said my heart hadn't sped up at that point.

Maybe something was wrong with him...

Xavier could have some type of mental disorder. One moment he was terrifying, the next sweet, and then nervous. As if he didn't know what was going on…maybe he needed help.

Like a therapist or something. I couldn't even put that idea in his head now—I couldn't help him. Why was I worrying about him at a time like this? When my life was on the line, when I was about to die?

I shrugged it off and shut my eyes tighter like that would help. I didn’t know how long I spent there trying to sleep, but when the door opened after some time, my whole body flinched, and my eyes flew open.

*Should I shut my eyes? Should I pretend I'm asleep and maybe they'll put me out of my misery this way? Or maybe they'll shake me awake even more and hurt me...*

No. I wasn't going out like a coward.

With all my effort, I forced myself up into a sitting position, ignoring the pain that struck through my whole body. It was as if I were being pricked with so many needles at one time.

I expected to see the man come in, but instead it was the girl again. She walked in, holding something in her hand that I couldn't make it out without the light on.

Just the click of the light turning on made me jump before letting out a relieved sigh when I saw she held clothes in her hands. She had a different expression now.

It was...blank.

Her tan face seemed paler, and her eyes literally looked dead. She blinked once and glanced down to me, throwing the clothes. "Get dressed," she said in the most monotone voice ever.

I couldn't tell what was wrong with her. I tried to study her to see if the man known as Alpha had hit or hurt her in any way to make her act like this, but she looked the same.

Nothing seemed out of place. Her clothes…well, my clothes didn't even seem messed up or like they had been pulled. She was in perfect condition except her mood totally changed.

"Is he...here?" I said, pulling on the clothes that seemed to fit me, if not a tiny bit longer than they should be. I was glad I wasn't going to die in my bra and underwear—that would be kind of shameful.

"No," she said the word slowly like she was thinking about it.

"Are you taking me to him?"

"No." She said it in the same tone, her eyes focused on me.

I limped over to her, and she studied me. "You can't run."

"I know, I don't plan t—"

"No—you physically can't run, can you?"

"I mean, I haven't tried. I probably could, but it'll hurt. Why?"

"You'll need to be fast if you want to get away."

My brow furrowed. "What? You're letting me go?"

"I didn't let you go."

"Then what—"

"Look at me." She grabbed me roughly. "I *didn't* let you go. You stabbed that wolf, you got away from him, you didn't see me. Do you understand?"

I stared at her in shock. What changed her mind? I should have run at that exact moment, but I knew something was wrong.

"Are you okay? What's wrong?"

She was confused now, and she stared at me in shock. "You need to go, now. Alpha's on the left hand side; run to the right. You'll find him there."

Were her eyes...watering? I honestly couldn't tell. She wore no emotion, but there was so *much* at the same time.

"Him?"

"Your boyfriend, Xavier."

**Episode 45**

When she said Xavier was here, and I could go, my heart flipped before I narrowed my eyes. This girl clearly had fun playing with people, so the belief I had for a second faded instantly, and instead I sighed. "I'm not dumb."

"What?"

"You're a pretty good actress. I almost believed something was wrong with you for a moment."

"Excuse me?" She was shocked by my attitude now.

"The moment I go out that door, there's going to be, like, twenty wolves waiting to chase me down and kill me. I'm not falling for your trick. I've accepted death already. Several times." I folded my arms.

"You think I have time to play dumb games? I'm giving you this chance to escape, but if you don't want to, then I'll kill you right here on the spot."

Such a serious tone… She couldn't be serious, though.

"You're not the type of person to back down from a fight. You'd be out there fighting Xavier if he were here."

She didn't say anything.

"What, you're not going to defend your pack? Yourself? You almost killed Colton earlier!" This is how nosy me would die. I could be running right now—even if she was lying—but I wanted to solve the mystery of this girl.

"If my pack dies, it's their fault. They aren't strong enough to live in this world, then."

"You're avoiding the question. Also, that's a very negative way to think."

"What is wrong with you? Are you insane? I'm giving you a chance to go, get out of here! Leave now before I change my mind and kill you, because you're testing my patience, girl."

I couldn't understand her, but I wasn't going to argue any further if she was serious about this. I stared at her, and she stared back with the same blank expression before backing away from the door.

Without any further comments, I raced out, trying to ignore the pain rushing through my body. My body was not okay right now and disagreed with even the smallest movements.

The crash...the shouts...

Realization hit me.

They were here. That was all them. The thought had popped in my head earlier before I quickly dismissed it, but it could be true. Had they actually come for me?

I continued running toward the sounds before being pulled to a halt. I turned back to see the girl again, but she shook her head, bringing her finger to her lips.

She was fast. Or maybe I was slow. Surprisingly, I didn't scream or fight her off. I glanced to the open door she nodded at and froze when I saw a man lying there with a bandage around his head. Well, his eye...

Tyson.

She pointed in a different direction before a snarl caught us both off guard. I immediately assumed it was Tyson, but when her grip on me tightened to the point it was cutting off circulation, I realized who it had to be.

Colton.

He stood at the end of the hallway, blood dripping from his mouth. He wasn't even looking at me—instead staring at the girl next to me. "He woke Tyson up," she whispered to me. "I'm not helping you any further. If you die, you die." She shoved me forward then took off in the opposite direction.

A growl ripped through Colton’s throat, and he raced forward, his sight set on the girl, but I jumped in front of him. "Don't hurt her!" I begged. I knew what happened to Xavier when his mate was killed. Not only that, but the girl had partially saved me…twice.

This brought him to a sharp stop, and he stared down at me as if being pulled from a trance. "She helped me," I begged him. He watched me before throwing his head back and letting out a howl, racing past me, following the direction of the girl.

"CALIANA!" Lola's screech caught my attention. My eyes widened, and tears began pouring down my cheeks. "YOU'RE ALIVE!" She ran toward me and was about to dive into my arms before noticing my injuries.

"Why are you here? You'll die. You can't...this is dangerous. You can't—" A vicious growl cut off my sentence, and I mentally face-palmed myself as Tyson made himself noticed, back in his wolf form again.

"Oh my god, your eye is disgusting." Lola grimaced.

"I did that," I whispered.

"I'm so proud of you."

These words didn't seem to please him one bit, and he lunged forward, aiming for Lola, but she quickly moved back with wide eyes.

"Run, Cal."

"No, you run!" I shoved her forward, and she seemed to hesitate, deep in thought, before pushing me behind her, causing me to stumble and fall.

She turned back to me, her brow furrowed. "I'm sorry..." There was a pain in her eyes. She was not protecting me—not again. I was always the baby that had to be taken care of, and I hated it.

"Sorry? LOLA, WATCH OUT!" I screamed when Tyson lunged at her. Everything moved in slow motion, and I was shocked I hadn't vomited. I reached forward, trying to push myself up at the same time, and reached for her. She cried out, a scream of pain that made my heart beat faster when I heard the cracking of bones.

I fell back, unable to hold myself up at the sight in front of me, my whole body felt weak.

Lola was gone.

And now there was a small wolf—smaller than all the others I had seen. Just barely above the size of a normal one. She had light sandy fur and was attacking Tyson now, taking advantage of his injured eye, ripping out the other one to blind him.

I didn't know what to say.

This was definitely a dream. Lola was *not* a wolf. It made no sense. Was I already dead? Had they killed me in my sleep? This wouldn't even happen in a story.

I knew Lola. I’ve known her for a long time.

She was my friend who told me everything. She wasn't— No. There was no chance...

Lola stumbled a lot in this form, almost like she was dizzy. She turned back to me, growling, telling me to run, but I couldn't.

She lied to me...how could she lie to me like this? But she was *Lola*. She was still Lola, which was why I pushed myself up and jumped onto the large wolf. I grabbed his hind leg, and with all my might, pulled until I heard a crack, and he fell to the ground.

I screamed when he nearly bit into my arm, but Lola grabbed his neck just in time to pull him off me.

He held his broken or sprained hind leg up now from the ground. We could do this, we could—

"Lola..." I breathed when the wolf from earlier, Leroy, appeared.

The wolf glanced at us, and when he realized we were taking down his pack mate, he charged. "LOLA, RUN!" I shouted at her, but her ear just flicked, and her eyes narrowed. She seemed to move to the side a bit, and only then did I hear the sounds of running feet.

I turned back, and my eyes widened when they caught sight of the brown wolf that had been stalking us earlier. He dove over Tyson's injured body and straight onto Leroy with no hesitation. This confirmed he was on our side, but who was he?

I turned away when I heard the crack and squelch sound as Lola bit down deep into the wolf's neck, and I felt myself waver, believing I was about to pass out at any moment. I quickly grabbed the nearby wall to steady myself as I saw the wolf's body stop twitching, his life taken away. I raised my eyes, and to my surprise, the brown wolf had already taken down Leroy with no effort.

My legs gave out, and I fell to the ground. It was so silent except for ringing in my ears, and everything blurred. What just happened? What was happening?

I weakly brought my hand up to slap myself to try to wake up but yelped out at the pain, forgetting about my injuries. It brought me back to my senses, and I glanced up at a panting sound. I turned back to see Lola on the ground, curled up and panting as if she were in pain. She began shifting back to her human form.

I quickly pulled off my jacket and wrapped it around Lola. Thankfully, she was smaller than me, so it covered all the important parts.

The brown wolf trotted over and nuzzled into Lola, whimpering loudly. I didn't know what to do—I hadn't even seen her get too injured. Had that wolf even bitten her?

"What's happening? Help her!" I shouted at the wolf. He glanced at me then ran off to the room Tyson originally came from, and moments later came back...as a human. Thankfully, he had a towel wrapped around his lower waist.

"Lola, can you hear me?" He completely ignored me and went to Lola's side, kneeling.

"Who...what the hell are you?"

"Jay, but that doesn't matter. Can't you see that your friend needs help?" he snapped.

"Help? I didn't see her get hurt."

"She's…" He cut off his sentence and picked her up, and she winced in pain. "We have to go. I'm going to shift, and you need to help get her on my back. Xavier, over here!"

At his name alone, my heart flipped. My eyes raised, and I spotted Xavier, blood gushing from the side of his arm. His eyes landed on me for a moment, and time stopped.

"She shifted!" I jumped when Jay shouted, taking me from my trance.

Xavier's brow furrowed, and he quickly jogged over to us. "Is she alive?"

"Yes, but she's injured. I need to get her back."

"Go." Xavier nodded. "Cillian and Len are here."

Who the hell were all these people and what the hell was happening right now?

In an instant, Jay was shifting, and Xavier placed Lola onto his back. She was partially awake, and her hands weakly grabbed onto his fur, and then he bounded off without a moment’s hesitation.

"You came for me?"

"Lola made us." He knelt. "Your face..."

"Let's just say these people aren't the friendliest." I smiled, lifting my top to show him my bruised stomach. "But I did partially escape on my own...I'm pretty proud of it."

"Who did that?"

"I don't know—the Alpha, or something—but did you not hear me—"

"Where is he?"

"What?" My brow furrowed. "I don't know, but enough with the small talk. We need to go. How did you get here? Aren't there lots of others here? Also, did you not hear me? I took down a *wolf*. Aren't you proud?"

"Where is he?"

"Xavier?" I stared at him, and he seemed to be in a trance. I reached out and shook him. "No, you can't black out. We need to go. Like now. *Right* now."

"You go." He stood and pulled me up with him. "Where's Colton?"

"He chased his mate."

"Go down the hall, okay? You should find two wolves that will help you. Let them know you're Caliana." His voice was so low that it sent shivers down my spine.

"Why? Come with me!" I pulled at his arm, wincing slightly at the quick movement.

He caught on to this. "Caliana, go."

"No, I'm not just lea—"

"GO!" I jumped at his loud voice, but for once I didn't back down.

For once, I didn't nod and obey. Instead, I glared at him, grabbing his arm roughly. "No."

He came here—even if it was because Lola made him—to get me, and obviously I couldn't leave without him. That would be a horrible move on my part.

He calmed down slightly and turned to look at me properly now. He hesitated before lifting me and hauling me over his shoulder, placing his hand on my ass to hold me in place.

"XAVIER—OW." I whined when my stomach hit his shoulder.

In an instant, he dropped me into a bridal cradle. "My bad."

"Put me down," I whined as he easily carried me toward the direction he had come. My stomach turned over at the sight of three dead wolf bodies and one human one.

"Xavier." His movements ceased when someone called his name. My whole body froze, and I squeezed my eyes shut, hoping it would make the voice go away.

"That's the Alpha?" Xavier whispered lowly to me, and I nodded.

"You saw what I did to your little whore?" The deep voice chuckled from far behind us, obviously talking about me. I didn't realize how terrified I was of that man until now. I knew I had a chance of freedom now, so my hopes were up that we would have made it out.

Xavier's face was emotionless, and he glanced down at me before turning around so he was facing the Alpha. It felt like Xavier was using me as some sort of weird human shield with the way he was carrying me.

"Xavier!" I hissed.

He leaned down, and my heart stopped when he planted a soft kiss on my lips. "Calm down. Didn't I already tell your dumb ass I'd protect you?" he whispered against my lips, so softly I could barely feel them, before his eyes raised back to the man.

"What you did to her? That's *nothing* compared to what I did to your sister..." Xavier said, and at that moment in time, I knew bad stuff was about to go down. Xavier was taunting him.

And I was right in the middle.

**Episode 46**

This was World War Wolf, and I did *not* like it—mainly because I was right in the middle of two very dangerous males.

"You can put me down now," I squeaked, the tension too much for me to handle.

"You came to rescue her?"

"Rescue? She defeated one of your wolves that was guarding her."

"That wasn't the question, Xavier, was it? What—my sister wasn't good enough for you, so you get a human whore to please you?"

Xavier's grip tightened on me, and I whimpered lightly. He glanced down before quickly letting go of me, offering me a sheepish smile. I tilted my head at him, this man who tried to comfort me at such a terrifying time.

He glanced away from my gaze, looking back to the man. "Your sister deserved to die the way she did."

"SHE WAS YOUR MATE!" the man roared, spit flying from his mouth. "And you killed her. You murdered my sister!"

"Don't play innocent. You forced your pack to attack." Xavier shrugged casually. "Blame yourself for your sister's death. She deserved it."

Once again, I was confused. Typical Caliana.

"SHE WAS YOUR MATE; HOW COULD YOU KILL YOUR MATE?!" the man continued to yell.

"You're insane." Xavier sighed. "We're leaving before I kill you." I could see the anger in his eyes, so I was somewhat proud he was resisting.

"Is it because of your whore mother?" The Alpha glared at Xavier with a look I had never seen before. That was until I looked at Xavier. When I saw his face, my heart sped up way too quick—I was literally waiting for it to pop out of my chest.

He wore an expression that would forever send a chill through my bones. I was terrified and glad when he gently set me down. "Go, Caliana…" His voice was ice.

I didn't know what was going on, and although I did back off, I didn't leave. I wasn't going to leave him here with this mad man.

"Oh..." The Alpha chuckled. "Did I upset you?"

"Don't speak of her ever again."

"I heard the rumors about what happens in your pack…is it true? The rape?"

"SHUT UP!" Xavier's yell made my eyes water. He was scary—he wasn't really Xavier right now. He was a man ready to murder anything in his path, and it made me back away slightly.

Wait. His *pack*?

At the thought, my brow furrowed. Rape? Was his pack...were they monsters like this one? I looked at Xavier, and with the way he was right then, I could see it. He was scary. He didn't care about anything but death in this moment.

"Even your girl's terrified of you. How could someone love you?"

"I'll kill you," Xavier whispered the words, but they were clear. He wasn't only angry, he was...scared? Upset? I couldn't read his expression, but there was definitely more than anger under the surface.

"You're foolish. You don't even have your wolf, do you? I know what happens." The Alpha chuckled. "It'll be cute—you and her dying together." He nodded toward me.

"I'll kill you," Xavier repeated the words in that same menacing tone. I wanted to tell him to run; we didn't have a chance with this man, especially if he was the Alpha. He was terrifying. Absolutely terrifying.

I walked over and grabbed Xavier's arm. "We need to go." I yelped when he pushed me off him, keeping his gaze on the man.

"Don't touch me," he growled lowly, almost threatening.

"See?" The Alpha laughed. "He's broken, insane. He killed his mate! All because his feelings were hurt when his whore mo—"

"I'LL KILL YOU!!" Xavier sprinted at the man and tackled him to the floor. He brought his hand to the man’s throat, and almost immediately, the Alpha turned an inhuman color—a shade of purple I had never seen.

If he was human, no doubt his neck would’ve snapped instantly, but the Alpha shifted in time. It was weird, watching how he shifted before throwing Xavier off him with ease. Wolves were fascinating.

His wolf was large—a tiny bit bigger than Colton's. His eyes were set on Xavier, and he let out a vicious snarl before pouncing.

Xavier grabbed his front leg in one hand, pulling it roughly, and the wolf cried out in pain before biting into Xavier's arm. Xavier yelled and pushed off the wolf, jumping onto his back and wrapping his strong, beautiful arms around the wolf’s throat. He squeezed hard, and the wolf struggled, unable to throw Xavier off him.

Until he backed up and stood on his hind legs, slamming his back into the wall, causing Xavier to fall.

"You're weaker than your pathetic sister," Xavier snapped. "I'm going to hear your pained cries just like hers...so satisfying."

Xavier: a monster in a man's body.

I always hoped that him saying he killed his mate was a lie. It couldn't be at this point—it was confirmed. It scared me how he boasted about it, how proud he was. It was his *mate*.

Xavier’s words set the wolf on fire, and now he was done playing. He aimed to kill. He lunged for Xavier, aiming for his neck. With a struggle, Xavier managed to dodge and move his neck just in time before getting pinned down.

Although he was strong, Xavier struggled to keep the wolf's mouth at bay as he grabbed his neck and pushed him up. "If only you were half the man your sister was…" How could Xavier even talk? That wolf was snapping at his neck—if he let go even a bit, he was dead.

Why was he pushing the wolf so much? *Death*.

Xavier didn't care.

My eyes widened at the sudden realization. Xavier’s expression earlier...he wanted to kill, and he didn't care if he died in the process. He was out for blood, and he wouldn't settle until he had it, even if it meant his own death. He was taunting the wolf, making him angry—it was basically suicide.

Why was he acting like this?

*DON'T ACT LIKE ME! I'M STUPID! WHY IS HE PULLING A CALIANA? NEVER PULL A CALIANA!!*

"Xavier, stop it!" I screamed at him, causing him to glance over, and I realized it was a dumb move as he was momentarily distracted, allowing the wolf to get closer to his neck.

When the Alpha talked about his mother, it made him upset... When the Alpha spoke of his mother, that was when he suddenly turned.

I didn't know the story about his mother. Did he hate her? Love her? I couldn't use her to distract him, or I could make it worse.

"Is that how it happened? Is that how you killed his slutty sister?" I shouted, and the wolf suddenly stopped biting and turned to me. It was the first thing I could think of: pretend I knew the story of his sister's murder.

"Xavier told me everything." I laughed. "He told me how your sister was a pathetic, whimpering wolf. I bet she was begging for her brother…but you're just as pathetic. You couldn't even save your weakling sister."

The wolf slowly crawled off Xavier and turned toward me. The growls erupting from his throat made my blood run cold.

Okay I baited him…now what? I was injured; I couldn't run.

My eyes fell to Xavier, who pushed himself up before charging and tackling the huge wolf to the ground. He raised his fist, boxing the wolf right in the mouth, causing a crack. Just from that, Xavier's hand was bleeding, and I grimaced. He must be like me, the adrenaline rushing through his body so he could barely feel the pain. I was surprised he took the wolf to the ground so easily.

Another crack alerted me that he got in another hit, and sure enough, more blood was on his fist. When I caught a proper glance, his hands were wrapped around the wolf's neck. Tight.

The wolf struggled before a broken howl ripped from his throat—it was something from a horror movie. Just when I thought Xavier was going to kill him, the sound of footsteps distracted us.

My eyes widened at the sight of a large wolf, his eyes glaring at Xavier. They almost looked bored and tired, like he had seen this too many times. Then another wolf appeared behind him—not as large but still big.

"I'll kill you before they get me." Xavier smirked down at the Alpha, clearly not bothered by our new visitors.

Then the cracking of bones. I momentarily thought it was Xavier cracking the wolf's neck, but instead, the Alpha shifted back to his human form, smiling up at Xavier.

Naked.

"They aren't after you." The Alpha grinned before spitting blood in his face. "Kill me…right as they kill her."

Xavier's face contorted as realization hit him.

"That's right. Not even you can go up against two of them. My Beta is the strongest you'll meet." The man laughed. "REST IN PEACE, CALIANA!" His scream made me shiver until a loud growl distracted me.

My heart fell when I caught sight of the two wolves speeding toward me, teeth bared.

"RUN, CALIANA!" Xavier's yell didn't even get me to look at him.

I didn't run. I *couldn't* run. My ankles were injured, but that wasn't it. Fear held me in place, fear wasn't letting me move. I lay my head back against the wall, tears slipping down my face. How many times had I faced death head-on since I came here? This was it, finally.

It was fine. Lola was safe. That man—Jay—would protect her. At least I learned her secret before I died.

I was in too much of a panic that I never even thought much of her changing. She was in so much danger—it was better that she was a wolf. I just wanted to ask her what was going on. How was she a wolf? What the hell happened?

Had Xavier or Colton bitten her? No way was she always a wolf. I would have known, but she was still the same Lola. The same Lola who was now out of harm's way.

My eyes connected with one of the wolves about to attack me, and even though I knew I was crying, he didn't hesitate. They really were monsters—this pack was on a different level to anything I had seen.

Just when I was about to shut my eyes and accept death, hoping it wouldn't be as painful as expected, a flash of black caused them to flick open.

The wolf that was just at my throat, about to end me, was now...on the ground. Pinned on the ground, fighting for its life against another wolf. One bigger than both of them, scarier than the Alpha.

"Colton?" I breathed before pausing. My brow furrowed as I focused on the coat color. No…its fur was darker than Colton's. It was bigger than Colton, too.

My eyes flew open, an unfamiliar feeling rushing through me.

"Xavier."

**Episode 47**

I turned back to look at where the Alpha and Xavier had been fighting, and sure enough, Xavier was no longer there. Had he been lying about his wolf leaving him?

The man looked as shocked as me as he stared up at the fighting wolves. "LEVI! LEVI, HURRY!" My brow furrowed when he shouted those words until the large wolf ran past me and scooped the Alpha onto his back before running off.

"He's getting away," I tried to shout, but it came out as a whisper. I felt like I was going into shock as I turned back to Xavier, who was now almost done killing the wolf.

I stared at him killing the creature without blinking or without being freaked out. I mean, sure, I could barely breathe, and my chest was rising up and down too fast, but...why not?

Finally, the smaller wolf's body stopped moving. Another death.

I sucked in a breath when the large, black wolf turned to face me, and the blood coming from its mouth made my heart beat faster. I didn't flinch or try to run as it neared me, keeping its head low.

"Xavier?"

The wolf let out a small purr-like sound before resting its muzzle against the side of my face, closing its eyes.

I finally could move my body. The fear subsided, and I forced myself into a kneeling position. I wrapped my arm around the wolf's large neck. "Thank god," I breathed into his soft fur. "Thank god you're okay."

Another purr left his throat, and he slowly moved down into a crouch. "Colton...he chased after his mate." The wolf nodded to his back.

"Ride you? But…Colton."

The wolf let out a low growl, and I quickly climbed onto its large back. It was like a horse—a fluffy, terrifying horse. I screamed when he stood, glancing back. He huffed and began trotting the way Colton had gone.

"The exit is the other way."

Thumping. The ground was vibrating.

*Oh*.

"OKAY! OKAY, GO THE OTHER WAY—RUN!" I screamed and slapped his head when I looked back and saw three more wolves turn the corner and run toward us. Maybe there was a back door somewhere.

He was running. Fast. Toward a window.

I didn't hesitate. I bent down, hiding behind his head and clinging to his fur, screaming when he jumped and smashed through the glass.

"Run!" I hit his side, as if he were a horse, and the look he gave me made me avert my eyes.

I could hear the wolves behind us leap out the window and after us, but even with me on his back, Xavier was twice as fast, and he didn't seem bothered by the chase. I turned and saw them slowing down until they stopped, accepting that they wouldn't be able to catch up.

"You lied," I said. "You *can* shift."

His ears twisted and fell flat against his head, but he didn't make a noise. Instead, he kept his eyes straight forward, continuing his journey back to the house.

At this point, I could see through one eye while the other was a bit hazy. It was swollen from the punch I received, and I was kind of becoming insecure about it. Did I look like an ugly plum?

For some reason, relief flew through me when his house came into view. "Wait, Xavier, wait! There are more wolves there." I tried to pull his fur to stop him, but he just kept running. I debated hopping off, but knowing I'd definitely injure myself more, I decided against it. I decided to trust Xavier.

His sprinting moved to a slow trot as he arrived next to the wolves. I braced for an attack, but they just looked at us. When I say looked at us, their eyes were dead set on *me*.

Xavier crouched, and I slowly got off his back, staring at the strange wolves. "Are you going to kill me?" *Nice, Caliana*. The sandy wolf shook its head while the other kept its eyes locked onto me.

"No, don't—" I wanted to beg Xavier not to leave me alone with these two, but he went inside the house without saying anything. Well, making a sound.

"Uh..." I didn't know what to say. Maybe this was a dream.

Okay, I had been kidnapped. Lola turned into a wolf. Colton chased his mate. His mate saved me. Xavier turned into a wolf. Now, there were two strange wolves I had never seen before standing over me.

This *had* to be a dream. My left hand pinched the skin on my right arm, and I yelped in pain, causing one of the wolves to tilt his head slightly, confused by my action.

"Caliana."

On second thought, I was okay with staying with these scary wolves. I limped over to hide underneath them, crouching to avoid Xavier. To my dismay, the wolves stepped back before pushing me forward with their big heads. I wanted to insult them, but knowing they could kill me at any second, I decided against it.

Instead, I glanced toward Xavier. "Come here," he said.

I crept toward him obediently with my head slightly bowed. *Damn it, Cal, you're showing your nerves. He can smell fear.* I flinched when he grabbed my wrist and dragged me in behind him, limping as fast as I could. I practically screamed when he grabbed my waist and planted me on the counter.

He went to the freezer and pulled out an ice pack, then passed it to me before walking off. I let out a small sigh and whimpered when I brought the ice pack up to my sore face. I wiggled my dangling legs.

Immediately, the ice helped.

Xavier came back moments later with a first aid kit and silently began pulling out stuff. He knelt in front of me and quietly sprayed something on my cut ankles, causing me to yelp, but he ignored my pain. He then wrapped a bandage around each ankle. "Don't forget to put that ice pack against your stomach."

I nodded but froze when he held out his hands, revealing two pills.

"Anti-inflammatory. It will help with the swelling and pain."

"Oh…thank you." I took them as he retrieved a bottle of water and left it next to me. Why was he being so nice? It was making me nervous.

"Why do you have a first aid kit when you heal so quick?" I asked before gulping down the tablets.

"That's what you want to ask?" He leaned back against the counter.

"I don’t even know what to ask." I sighed.

"Here are a few good ones: Why did my best friend turn into a wolf? Why did you turn into a wolf when you said you couldn't? Who was that man? Why did you kill his sister? Why are you being so nice to me? Who are those two wolves standing outside? Who was that brown wolf that was following us?"

"I was getting to those," I said quietly. "I'm just scared to know the answers.”

"I'm not explaining anything to do with Lola." He shrugged.

"Okay," I said slowly. "Who are those two wolves?"

"They're from my old pack."

"Who was that brown wolf? The one that helped Lola."

"He was third in command in our old pack. Jay. I guess he stayed loyal and wanted to keep an eye on us."

I was leading up to the more nerve-wracking questions. "You changed into a wolf. Why did you lie?"

"I didn't."

So…he didn't want to open up about that one yet. Got it.

"I know who that man was. The Alpha. Why did you kill his sister? Why did you kill your mate?"

He kept his lips shut and looked away.

"Xavier, please." I reached out and grabbed his hand, tugging him to me. "I don't know if you hate me, I don't know if you want to kill me, but please tell me."

His jaw tightened, but he spoke no words.

"If not for me, then for you. Get this off your chest; I don't think I can judge you anymore than I already do." I offered him a small smile.

"There was a fight."

I nodded, urging him to continue.

"They were in the fight." Another long pause. "That pack was in the fight. They were starting fights with packs to prove they were the strongest. At the time, the pack I was in was the strongest, so they tried to destroy us."

He paused. "The Alpha of my pack left. He didn't want to get involved, so he left. He left the women, the children, all of us because he wanted to get away. He left his *Luna*."

“Luna?”

"The Luna was my mother..." He seemed to go into a trance. "My mother was amazing. She loved me and Colton so much; she loved us more than anything, even though we were horrible reminders of what my father did to her. We should be dead."

He seemed to have started one story about a fight, but now he was leaning more toward...his own past. I didn't stop him. Instead, I wrapped my hand tightly around his.

"In my old pack, if you were to be the Alpha, you had to have a Luna, and you had to have children. His mate died when he was younger, so he was going to have to step down." He blinked, pain filling his eyes. "Instead, he stole my mother from her mate—killed her mate. Then…he raped her. He abused her, hurt her. He forced her to be his mate, forced her to bear his children because he wanted to be Alpha. He wanted to prove a point. So my mother became the Luna and a victim...and she had to be reminded of that by giving birth to not one, but two."

He paused again, seeming to choose his words carefully.

"We were worthless. We shouldn't have been born. I don't know why she didn't run, but she loved us. She didn't resent us. I resented myself, I resented Colton, but most of all, I resented my father. I hated him, and I planned to kill and surpass him. I hated how my mother loved and adored me and Colton even though we were created from something that scarred her."

He was crying...the tear that rolled down his cheek made me feel sick to my stomach.

"She was *everything* to me. I wanted to give her everything. I was going to become Alpha, and I would treat her like royalty. I was going to send her to Hawaii—anywhere she wanted, anything she wanted."

His eyes flicked up to me. "Then that pack attacked. Our Alpha left us—he didn't want a chance to start this war, one he was afraid to lose. He left my mother alone. People in my pack died because they didn't understand. They weren't weak, but they were confused. They couldn't fight because the Alpha always told them what to do, but they didn't know where he was, so some of them were killed."

I wanted to take Xavier’s pain away, but I didn’t know how. Instead, I squeezed his hand, hoping he understood my intentions.

"Colton got as many as he could to safety and sent them off to a safe place, but I went to look for our mother. And I found her being murdered by my mate." He glanced down at our intertwined hands. "My *mate*. The girl I was supposed to love with all my heart was killing the woman I loved the most. She stopped when she saw me, but my mother was already dead..."

He swallowed. "So I killed her. I ripped her apart; I didn't let her die straight away, though. I ripped off each limb, killed her, but then...right when she died..." He narrowed his eyes. "I shifted back to me. I couldn't shift. My wolf left me. I was left with nothing. My mate was dead, and she deserved it. My mother was dead, but she didn't deserve it…she deserved the *world*. My pack, even though I didn't like it, was gone. My wolf was gone. I only had Colton."

Xavier shrugged. "We left. I couldn't stand being in that pack anymore—I was done. They didn't understand. They thought I went insane when I killed my mate. Some even thought I killed my mother...and now we've been Rogue for two years? Maybe…I can't tell anymore."

He wore a blank expression, and it looked like he was staring through me. He’d barely shed two tears, but I’d released the waterworks. At one point, I thought I had missed some of the story from my sobs.

"I'm not as tough as you think. More along the lines of pathe—"

"No." I wrapped my arms around his neck and pulled him toward me so he was resting against me. "No. You're not worthless—you deserve to be here. You're not pathetic."

"I killed—"

"You killed someone who deserved to die. I'd kill your mate for you…I can't imagine what that would feel like." I hugged him tighter. "I'm so sorry, Xavier."

He said nothing, but he did lean into me and wrap his arms around my waist. Seeing him so vulnerable made my heart hurt. "I'm sorry." His words were muffled.

"What?"

"I'm sorry for treating you like dirt. I couldn't let someone else get close to me. I couldn't—"

"I just came for you to take my vir—"

"No." Xavier pulled back. "You were here because Colton was trying to fix me. He'd brought two girls before now, but they were both thrown out. He wanted my wolf back. Or he was hoping I'd come out as an Alpha—I don't know what his plan was. I was horrible to you to scare you away, and then...I don't know what happened."

"You don't know what happened?" My brow furrowed.

"I didn't understand why I was feeling weird around you. Even though I knew you were leaving, even though I knew all about your airport plan...Lola told me. She told me you were leaving, and it was supposed to be like that. You were supposed to go, but I stopped you. We weren't supposed to stop you. That wasn't the plan, but I couldn’t help it."

I stared at him, swallowing the lump in my throat.

"Something was controlling me. Something was making me change, and then I started acting different around you. I realized what was happening, and I panicked."

"What was happening?"

"My wolf was back...because he chose you as his mate."

**Episode 48**

"Your wo—"

"CALIANA!" The scream made me jump and almost fall off the counter. Xavier dropped his head slightly, and I assumed it was because he didn't want them to see his red eyes.

Lola limped over, so I jumped off the counter, grabbing Xavier and pulling him to me, planting my lips on his so my hair covered Lola's view. I spun us so his back was toward Lola, hiding his face.

"Are you mad at me?" Lola shouted over, clearly upset.

I broke the kiss and glanced up to Xavier. "This conversation isn't over, Xavier," I whispered. "Go fix yourself up and wait for me." He stared down at me, surprised by my quick thinking before slowly nodding and walking off.

Lola came into view, and her eyes widened. "Why are you crying? Are you hurt? Apart from your face and…everywhere else?"

I shook my head, bringing the ice pack back to my eye. "I'm in shock and freaking out." I stopped and looked up to the man who walked in behind Lola. "You're the brown wolf."

"Jay..." he said slowly. "Hi."

"Lola tried to kill you."

"Well, not really. She knew I'd be fine."

"She knew?" My brow furrowed.

"Caliana..." Lola cleared her throat. "Jay is my mate."

I blinked once. "Sorry?"

"My mate. Jay."

"Did he just tell you?"

"No, I've known for a while. He was only following us because he wanted to watch out for my safety—he's not some creepy stalker."

"I'm going to pass out." I let them both know, and Jay quickly ran over and picked me up. Lola walked toward the living room, where Jay slowly and gently put me down.

"I'll...leave you two alone."

"Explain," I said, wiping my watery eyes when he left. "Who are you, Lola? How did you turn into a wolf? How do you know Jay? What's happening?"

She stared back at me with teary eyes. "I'm so sorry, Cal."

"*So sorry*?! You've always been a wolf? Were you faking our friendship?"

"No! No, Caliana!" She was crying now. "Please let me explain everything. It's not what you think."

"Really?"

"You might hate me after this, but I'll tell you everything. I want you to know I never faked anything, and I love you with all my life. I promise you."

"Okay." It was the only word I could manage.

"I am...a half-breed."

"What?"

"My mother was human, and my father was one of them. A wolf-bear." She offered me a small smile.

"You were fostered when you were a child, you said—you were in an orphanage."

She shook her head. "My father was part of Xavier's pack. He didn’t have a mate, and he was what you would call a player, I suppose. He flirted with all the girls."

I arched an eyebrow.

"He went to a strip club, met my mother, and knocked her up. He wanted to abort me, knowing what I was going to be, knowing my mother couldn't know. She couldn't know what he was, or that our type even existed. She didn't want me either, but she was against abortion, so she said she'd have me and put me up for adoption." Lola took a deep breath. "My father and his pack knew they couldn't put a half-breed up for adoption, but he pretended to agree with my mother. When I was born, my pack adopted me. They didn't know what to do with me—honestly, they were confused. Very confused. Half-breeds are usually killed."

She laughed and shrugged, like none of this was a big deal. Like she wasn’t flipping my entire idea of her upside down. "They kept me and raised me. One of the pack mothers who looked after the children raised me, but like I said, I was a half-breed and wasn’t useful. We can barely shift—only for a short amount of time, if even possible, and sometimes it can kill us. They wanted to give me away."

"But Jay....we were always close. We didn't know why we were attracted to each other, but his father knew. We were destined mates—blah blah blah. His father didn't want me thrown away; he knew how it would affect Jay."

My head was spinning. Lola was my best friend—how had I not known any of this about her? How could she have kept this from me?

"It was at a time when packs were fighting, and it was dangerous. *Severely* dangerous, especially for a half-breed, so Jay's father took me somewhere else and put me up for adoption. He told me he would keep an eye on me, and that I'd see Jay again. He'd come back for me when I was eighteen. I barely knew what was going on. I was only a kid, so I cried about leaving Jay; I didn't really hang out with Colton, Xavier, or any other children in the pack, anyway."

Lola glanced back at Jay, smiling fondly.

"For a while, I thought it was like a dream I had. Until Jay showed up for my eighteenth birthday—he had been waiting all that time. He said it still wasn't safe for me to come back, because a pack war happened, and everyone fell apart. He told me the Alpha ran, and the Luna died, and the next Alpha in line went missing...but he found them. And he needed my help."

"*Your* help?" This had to be a dream, right? There was no way any of this was real.

"Jay wanted to restore the pack. He wanted the true Alpha to return, but he knew Xavier couldn’t because of what happened. Xavier needed a new mate, a girl who could handle him, and when Jay asked for a contender, I thought of…you. But I said no—I wasn't having it. I mean, you're human, and well…Xavier was always kind of intimidating."

"I never met Jay before today," I said, my voice laced with disbelief.

"Remember all those rain checks? When I canceled on you, we'd secretly meet up—Jay and I," she admitted. "But we stopped seeing each other for a while and it really hurt."

She looked up at me. "Then the whole virginity thing happened. Colton and Jay contacted me when they discovered what we were doing; they said they were getting in contact to help you sell your virginity, but I knew the real plan. I also knew how much money they had, so I thought it would be a good fit." She looked away sheepishly. "You really needed the money, and I knew Colton was handsome, so it worked."

What the actual hell? "You pretended you didn't know them when you really did?"

She nodded. "I'm sorry I couldn't tell you. I never planned to tell you—never planned to shift. It hurts my body so I didn't think it was relevant, and you would have called me insane anyway."

"And…every time Xavier said he would kill me, and I told you? Why didn't you reassure me more?"

"I didn’t know what was up with him. He seemed to be going insane."

"You told on us when we planned to escape!"

"They weren't going to come after us! They knew already—I just told them when we were leaving. I was genuinely surprised when they showed up at the airport." She frowned, wiping tears from her eyes. "I never meant to hurt you, Cal."

"Lola, can you not see this from my perspective? You've lied to me for our entire friendship. You faked this whole thing and pretended you were in the dark, too. Do you know how stressed I’ve been?! I almost killed myself!" I screamed at her, and her eyes dropped. "Why couldn't you have told me?"

"I was scared!"

"Scared? How the—"

"Of *this*! Of you thinking I was some kind of monster and hating me. I didn't want to lose you, which is why I never planned to tell you. Everything was supposed to return to normal. We were supposed to leave and forget about this whole thing."

"Forget about Jay?"

"No, not Jay. We were planning to still meet up."

"Are there any other secrets you've been hiding that you want to announce now, or can you still not trust me completely?"

She nibbled on her lip, a nervous look in her eyes.

"Out with it," I snapped.

"I— No. There's nothing else. Nothing I can think of, but if I do, I promise I'll tell you."

I stared at her, and my stomach flipped. I didn't know Lola—I only knew one side of her. How could she hide a secret like this for so long? "Okay." I pushed myself up.

"Okay?"

"There's nothing else, is there?" I looked back down to her.

She shook her head. "Nothing else"

"Then…okay. You told me everything."

"Aren't you going to ask questions? You always ask questions. Don't you want to know more?" Her brow furrowed.

"I don't want to talk to you, Lola." I focused on her, and when her eyes widened, I felt a sharp pain in my heart. I needed time, though. I had been terrified this whole time. Hell, at one point, she made me think I was crazy for seeing wolf-bears.

She knew this whole time, and she said nothing. She *knew* how terrified I was of everything, and she said nothing. She hid everything and left me in the dark—of course I was upset with her.

Lola had a mate. She was a wolf. She knew Xavier and Colton. She was in their pack.

Everything was a lie, and I was clueless.

It was like some sick joke the whole time. They *all* knew, but no one told me. My hands balled into fists.

"Caliana, I'm sorry," Lola called after me as I pushed through the door.

Jay was standing there, like a dog waiting on his owner. In an instant, he ran through the door, straight to Lola, and I rolled my eyes. I really wanted to storm off, but all I could do was limp, so that wasn’t an option.

I needed to find Xavier and talk to him. The last words he had said to me...had his wolf really chosen me as his mate? I slowly made my way to his room and knocked on the door. When I pushed it open, he was looking out the window, studying the scenery.

He turned back to me when I cleared my throat, announcing my arrival. "Lola told you?"

"She did."

"And you're not with her?"

"Why would I be?"

"To ask more questions. I mean, you found out—"

"Yes, I found out. After knowing her for so long, and I just found out. I don't want to talk to her right now."

"It's taboo to tell humans we exist, so she couldn't."

"You did—you told me!"

"Yeah, because you saw us. We couldn't lie."

"Why didn't she come out with the truth then?"

"Maybe she didn’t want to—probably scared you'd act like this."

"Then maybe I don't want to talk to her."

He arched an eyebrow. "You almost died, Caliana. You looked death in the face, took down a wolf, were beaten half to death, and yet you're still this stubborn?" In response, I folded my arms and noticed the corner of his lip twitch before a small chuckle came from his throat. "You are an unusual woman."

"You're a wolf-be—"

"Don't say it." He raised his finger.

"Wolf-bear."

He shook his head before walking over to his bed and sitting. "What do you want?"

I stared at him like he had a turtle on his head. "What the hell do you mean *what do you want*?"

"You came barging into my room."

"I knocked!"

"Not the point."

"What you said to me..."

"About?"

"Don't try to confuse me." I walked over to him and sat on his bed, my ankles sore from standing so much. He tilted his head at my action while I glared down at him. "The *thing* you said."

"What did I say?"

"You know what you said."

"No, I don't."

I didn't want to say it; I felt narcissistic. What if I totally misheard him? What if he didn't actually say what I thought he said? "About…your wolf?"

"How he appeared?"

"*Why* he appeared?" Wait. That smirk. He was...HE WAS PURPOSELY WINDING ME UP. "Xavier, I almost died, and you think I have time to play games?"

"Are you going to use that excuse forever? *Oh, I almost died*."

"I took down a wolf—sort of—I can easily take you down."

"You're injured."

I decided to get straight to the point. I needed an answer. "Did he choose me as his mate?"

Silence. The humor in his voice disappeared, and instead he laid back, his eyes focused on the ceiling. "I don't know."

"You don't know? You said so earlier."

"I guessed. He came out when you were being attacked, plus I got turned on for the first time in ages, and *something* didn't let me allow you to go home." He was being open for once, and honest.

It made me smile—it actually was nice. "Hmm..." I hummed the word. "What does this mean?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?" My brow furrowed.

"You should rest, you’ve been through a lot."

"I'm not resting, and I'm not leaving this room until I know what's happening. How does this whole mate thing work?"

"It just…works. I don't understand it either."

"The way you're acting—it's like you're rejecting me."

"I am."

**Episode 49**

“Why?!" I almost yelled when Xavier agreed he was rejecting me. He literally told me I was the first girl he’s been interested in for ages but dropped that.

"Why what?"

"Why are you rejecting me? Your wolf won't be happy with you." I scowled.

"I am my wolf. Kind of." He blinked, confused by his own species.

"Great to know, but you didn't answer my question."

He kept his eyes focused on me before his brow furrowed. "What were you expecting?"

"I...." I paused, hesitating. What was I expecting? "I don't know, but I didn't expect you to reject me so easily, like you don’t care."

"If you don't know what to expect, then why act like this?"

"You told me your wolf chose me as his mate, and I managed to turn you on, and you didn't want me to go, so…I don't know. I was expecting something other than rejection, I guess."

"Wait. I hope you're not expecting me to ask you out."

"Well, no, not that, but—"

"Caliana," he said, his tone serious. "Think about all of this. Think about what I am. I'm not some human being that can casually ask a girl out and everything can be normal."

"What?"

"I'm a *wolf*. We have one mate and one mate only, but for some reason my wolf wanted a second chance. If I choose you, you could never leave."

"I couldn't?"

"Technically, you could, but it would make my wolf disappear again, and he likely wouldn't come back next time. It means I could never fuck another girl."

Jealousy washed over me at the thought, a scowl on my face. "You *used me* to attract your wolf so you can have sex with other girls?"

"Did you ignore everything I said? Mates aren't some casual boyfriend-girlfriend thing."

"I get that."

"No, you don't. You're young, you don't un—"

"YOU'RE YOUNG, TOO!"

"But I was born into this life—I know about it; I know what mates are like. And no offense, but I'm not okay with losing my wolf again," he said.

I pointed an accusing finger at him. "What, so you're saying you'd get bored of me?"

"I'm saying you'd probably panic or couldn't handle it, and you'd run, and my wolf would leave again."

"Lola and Jay were apart."

"Lola and Jay knew they'd be back together. They didn't reject each other."

"If you reject me, won't your wolf leave?"

"I won't reject you, but I also won't pursue anything with you."

"And if I reject you?"

In an instant, his eyes returned to me, but he had no expression on his face. Xavier hesitated. "How would that benefit you?"

"I was just asking." I paused. "So…what? I'm supposed to go back home and forget this happened?"

"Probably."

"Will you actually let me this time?"

"Probably not."

"How does that make sense, Xavier?"

"I didn't say it does. I'll have Colton make me stay home, though."

I folded my arms. "What if I don't want to leave?"

"You do."

"You don't know that. What if I want to be your girlf—*mate*?"

He sighed and sat up, throwing his legs over the side of the bed. He grabbed me and pulled me closer to him, tilting his head. "I told you this isn't a casual boyfriend-girlfriend situation."

"And I told you that I understand that."

"Do you really?" He didn't look convinced. If anything, he almost looked bored. "You're okay staying with someone as scary as me? Someone who can get so angry? What if I got so annoyed, I turned into a wolf and ate you? Or if I didn't let you go and kept you here forever? I'm giving you a chance now. What if I got possessive and wouldn't even let you look at another man?"

I stayed silent.

"You do realize I'm the future Alpha of my pack if I ever decide to go back? Making you a Luna—a Luna who would have to direct a pack of *wolf-bears* while she has no powers. They might want to overturn you because you're weak. Or what about when I need children to carry on the Alpha bloodline? You're really ready to settle down and get pregnant?"

I stared up to him and swallowed the lump in my throat.

A small smile appeared on his face. "Exactly wh—"

"You're not as scary as you think—it's a facade. Your wolf *chose* me, so he knows to behave and not eat me, although I can't say the same for you." I offered him a smug smile. "Possessive? I think I've handled your attitude enough already. I could tame you. And your pack is all over the place, but maybe a Luna could put them in place and fix shit since they sound like idiots. If they want to attack me, you and Colton will protect me." I pretended to think. "I never really thought about children before, but if it's necessary…"

The shock on his face made my smile grow even wider. I was proud of how confident I sounded when I was actually really nervous.

"You're insane." He sighed.

"It's your fault." I froze. "Lola could return to her pack if—"

"What about your family?"

"I can visit them."

"Please tell me you're not actually thinking about this."

"Why don't you want me to?"

"I don't want to ruin your life, Caliana."

"Maybe you're scared I'll ruin your life."

"Sure, that too."

"XAVIER!"

"Kidding." It was silent for a full minute before he glanced over at me. "Do you still want to sell your virginity to me?"

"No."

"I see."

"I like you for some unknown reason, and if my first time having sex with you would be for money, that'd be weird."

"Don’t your parents need the money?"

They did, but everything had changed. He couldn’t pay me for my virginity, not after everything that had happened. "I'll find another way to get it."

"Colton and I have a lot of money from jobs we've done."

I didn't want to ask what *jobs* he meant. "That's really nice to know." I rolled my eyes.

"It wouldn’t make a dent in what we have."

"I'm not taking your money, Xavier."

"You were going to before."

"It's different now."

He frowned. "What's wrong with you?"

"What?"

"If you don't want to stay with me because of money, the—"

"I *like* you. Why can't you understand that?"

"Because of how horribly I treated you. I made you cry on more than one occasion, I scared you. I did bad things."

"Old news. Plus, if you didn't even mean those things, what's the point in being upset about it? You were trying to push me away to avoid anything bad happening."

"Still."

"Still nothing." I blinked. "Hey, so…since you're rejecting me, is it cool if I sell my virginity to Colton and get the money from him?"

His whole body tensed, and anger flashed in his eyes. "No! Why the hell would that be okay?"

"You obviously didn't change your mind about rejecting me, so it's not like I have to stay loyal to you. It's not like I like Colton, so I don't care about taking money from him."

"Not allowed."

"Why?"

"Because he's my brother." I arched an eyebrow, and he narrowed his eyes. "Fine, because I don't want to fucking share you."

"Then don't reject me." I pointed at his chest. " If you don't want to pursue anything, I'll be playing with other men." I hadn't actually wanted to do anything with Colton—it was to prove a point, but still.

"Are you serious about this whole thing?"

"One hundred percent."

"About everything?"

"I don't think you want to go back to your pack, but even if you did, I'd be the most well-behaved…”

"Luna."

"Yeah, that! I'd be the best Luna ever, and I'd set those idiots straight." I pursed my lips. "And you. I'd set you straight too; I could be the wolf-whisperer."

"You're insane."

"You've said th— XAVIER!" I squealed when he pulled me toward him, but my words were quickly cut off when he pressed his lips against mine roughly. I didn't hesitate, worried he’d change his mind and pull back. My hands were around his neck in an instant, and I returned the very hot and passionate kiss.

He broke the kiss but only to trail his soft lips along my jaw and down to my neck.

"Wait," I stopped him, and he obeyed. "I'm in pain." I pointed to my stomach. "You have to be gentle."

He tilted his head. "I can't be gentle," he stated proudly. "I'll wait until you're better."

"No! I'm sexually frustrated—I want to do it now. Fine, hurt me if you can’t be gentle!"

"No," Xavier shook his head, "but I will kiss you." This time his hand gently went to the uninjured side of my face, and he planted a soft kiss on my lips. No tongue, no hot steamy action. Instead, he stayed like that for a few moments, and I thought I was going to pass out until he pulled back.

I let out a long breath, returning my eyes to him. "Don't tease me like that."

"How did everything go with Lola? On a serious note."

"Why are you interested in that?"

"She's your best friend, Caliana. You're not mad at her, are you?"

"Of course I'm mad at her."

"Why?"

"Because she's been my best friend for ages, and we share everything! Or so I thought."

"Humans aren't allowed to know—she was doing the right thing."

"No, I found out everything from you—someone I barely knew."

"Yeah, because you had run-ins with them. I couldn't lie. You thought they were dogs I created; I had to correct you."

"Why didn't she tell me after I found out that all this was real? Or why didn't she tell me she knew you guys? She acted clueless! Then she told you about our escape plan…do you know how much this affects my trust issues?"

"I get where you're coming from, but you shouldn't be mad."

"I should. She knows I have trust issues. She wouldn't have even said anything if she hadn't been forced to shift. I'd still be clueless about everything—AND SHE HAS A MATE!"

He seemed to be stuck for words, so I kept going. "I've been out of the loop here. You guys all knew each other, you all knew something I didn't. I had all these plans and ideas in my head, and you guys were getting secret information from Lola. Do you know how dumb I feel?" I paused. "How do I not know she's not hiding anything else?"

"What else could she be hiding?"

"I don't know. Maybe she's done the dirty with Colton or you. She's secretly a vampire. Her real name isn't Lola."

His lips suddenly pressed into a straight line, and he glanced away, and I immediately sensed something was up. My eyes narrowed and turned to a judgmental glare. "What?"

"Not—"

"Xavier, what? Oh my god, did you two—"

"No, Jay's her mate! She hasn't done anything like that." He shook his head.

"A vampire?"

"Seriously?"

"Her name isn't Lola?"

He didn't say anything, but he pulled a face, and my jaw dropped. "Her name's *not* Lola?! What the hell? I've been calling her Lola—you guys called her Lola!"

"Wouldn't it be strange if we called her another name? It would be a bit suspicious."

"You guys didn't mess up once."

"Some of us are smart, Caliana. Unlike—"

"Hush," I stopped him before bringing my finger to my lip. "What's her name?"

"It's not my place to—"

"Don't act like the goody two-shoes now. Didn't you call me a whore and a bunch of bad names? I'm pretty sure you can tell me her real name. What harm will it do?"

He looked away from me.

"Is it that bad?"

"No, but I'm sorry for the things I called you."

"Don't say sorry now."

"I am, though. I was horrible and said those things so you wouldn't get close to me. And well, I don't know…I was kind of annoyed you would throw it away so easily."

"God, it's weird when you're sappy." I offered him a small smile then tapped his chest. "But no getting out of this."

"Her name's Leah. Aliyah."

"Aliyah?! What type of name is that?"

"What type of name is Caliana? Thinking about it, it's pretty similar..."

"Rude.”

"Jay's father picked it; there are a lot of strange names in our pack."

"Lola is...Aliyah? No way." I shook my head. That name was too serious for Lola—too weird. Then again, she was the definition of weird. "Tha—"

"Shut up."

"Shut up? Excuse you—"

"Listen."

"Listen," I mimicked him.

"I want you to be my mate, Caliana."

**Episode 50**

I stared at Xavier in complete shock. "Excuse me?"

"I'm not repeating myself."

I paused. "We were just talking about that, and you steered away from the conversation to Lola, and then back to it?"

"I was thinking of how to say it."

A small smile broke out on my face. "You're cute."

"Shut up." He scowled at my response.

"You really want me to be your mate? Like boyfriend-girlfriend?"

"You heard me already." He rolled his eyes at how I dragged the whole thing out.

"Ask me."

"Ask you?"

"You said you want me to be your mate. That's not a question—I can't answer and say yes."

"Okay, wait."

"Waiting…"

"Think about this."

"I did."

"Seriously. If I ask you to be my mate, you can never leave or my wolf leaves too. You can't just...want this to be casual. You have to actually see a future."

"Isn't the girl supposed to be the one thinking about the future?"

"This isn't a joke."

"I'm aware, Xavier."

"Look at it this way." He pushed me down on the bed and went for his belt, unbuckling it, causing my eyes to widen. "I'm going to impregnate you—right now. You're going to be Luna and stay by my side forever and direct a pack and raise the Alpha bloodline."

"Wait! Wait, no—" I struggled backward to get away, and he stopped moving immediately.

Instead, he looked down at me with raised eyebrows. "Exactly."

"What the hell do you mean *exactly*?"

"You're not ready,"

"You don’t need me pregnant right now! I'm ready to do this boyfriend-girlfriend mate thing, though."

"And be stuck with me forever?"

I hesitated. This was impulsive. Was I ready to be his mate? He was a *wolf*. Like, a mythical creature—it was insane. He was scary and had killed people. Could I spend the rest of my life with him? Be the partial ruler of a pack full of other demons like him?

Fuck. I wasn't ready for that.

"See?"

My eyes traveled back to Xavier.

"You aren't ready. Before today, we hadn’t even flirted. There was nothing between us until now."

"That's a lie."

"It's not a lie."

"Okay, I'm not ready. So what?"

"So you're not becoming my mate."

"Not right this second. Let me process it—plan it out. Ask me when I have time to think about it; there's no point jumping into something."

"You're human."

"So?"

"You're fragile compared to my kind."

"False."

"Look at you right now.”

"Fine, I'll reject you if you don't want me." I shrugged. He'd lose his wolf if I did, so—

"Okay."

"Okay?" My brow furrowed. "What?"

"Do it."

"You'll lose your wolf!"

"I'm used to being without him. You'll be safe if you reject me."

"If that’s true, why don't you just reject me?"

"I can't."

"He won't let you?"

"I don't want to." He laid back on the bed. "Go ahead, do your thing—reject me."

"How can you be so casual about this? After everything you talked about, won't you be sad?"

"Sure, but what are the other options?"

"I want to be your mate, Xavier." His body tensed, but I needed to explain myself. "You care about me enough to lose your wolf again. You'd rather lose that part of you than see me hurt. Do you really think I’d find that in another man?"

He turned his head, glancing over at me. I climbed onto the bed and laid next to him.

"We're not having—"

"I want to cuddle." I frowned.

"Cuddle?"

"Yes."

"No."

"*Yes*." I wrapped my left arm around his chest and nuzzled into him. When I felt him move, I threw my leg over him to trap him in place.

"You're so gross." He sighed.

"You want me as your mate, though."

"My wolf does."

"You already said *you* did—no take backs."

"You're such a child," he grumbled.

"You've never had this, have you?"

"Had what?"

"A cuddle." I paused. "I mean…you did kill your mate, the person you were supposed to do this with."

"I suppose I haven't." He shrugged. "Doesn't bother me."

"You don't like it?" I looked up to him and began sliding my hand down his body. "Even when I do this—"

"Behave." He grabbed my hand and stopped it before it could reach its destination. A frown formed on my face.

I didn't even jump when the door opened, but Xavier adjusted slightly. I glanced back and noticed Colton standing there.

"Can you please get a lock for your door?" I whispered to Xavier.

Colton glanced between us and for once, didn't make a sexual remark. Instead, he raised his eyebrows. "I didn't know cuddling was in your lane, Xavier."

"It's not," he retorted.

"Sure." Colton glanced at me for a mere second before his eyes flashed back to Xavier. "Jay's going."

"Going where?"

"Back to the pack."

"Okay."

"He wants you to join him."

"No." Xavier sat up, staring at his brother.

"Even after what happened?" Colton challenged.

Xavier hesitated before glancing at me. When he noticed me staring at him, he offered me a weak smile before averting his eyes to Colton. "Tell him to go, and I'll think about it"

"Okay—"

"Is Lola going with him?" I chimed in.

"No, she needs rest."

"She knows everything," Xavier informed his brother. "Even that her name is Leah."

"It's Lola, not Leah," I snapped, wanting to forget about my best friend’s betrayal.

"I see. I assume she's mad."

"I'm right here, why don't you ask me?" I scowled.

"You don't like me—it's not like you're going to answer," Colton snapped.

"You need to respect me more. I might be your sister-in-law, and you—" My words were cut off when Xavier's hand slapped over my mouth to stop me from saying anything else. The surprise on Colton's face made me confused, and his eyes quickly flew to Xavier.

"She's still dosed on the pills I gave her earlier. That's why she's being annoying and clingy," Xavier said lowly. Colton didn't say anything, he only watched his brother.

The silence was uncomfortable.

"But, yeah, she's mad at Leah."

"We can call her Leah now?"

"I guess." Xavier shrugged.

"Are we ignoring me?" I announced.

Colton didn't even look at me. He turned and left, shutting the door behind him. I tried to push myself up and chase him, not wanting to end the conversation on that note, but Xavier kept me in place. "Stay."

"I'm not a dog," I said but didn't move. "Why are you the Alpha?"

"I was born into the Alpha bloodline."

"You and Colton are twins. How did you decide?"

"Colton didn't want the responsibility. He wanted to be the Beta."

"There's no conjoined Alpha thing?"

" I guess there could be, but he never wanted that. To quote him exactly: *I'm only Alpha in bed; I don't want to run some dumb pack with responsibilities*."

"Of course he'd say that." I sighed but had to admit there was some humor in it.

Xavier's hand slid down until it touched my ass, and he pulled me on top of him. I blinked before planting a small kiss on his lips. "You're indecisive."

"Am I?"

"Yes. One minute you don't want me near you, and the next you're pulling me on top of you."

"Which do you want?"

"You know what I want."

"I like hearing you say it."

I felt my face heat at his words, stunned into silence. I leaned into him and began kissing all over his face.

"Cali, stop that." He pushed me off.

"I'm marking you." I grinned, and he froze.

"Marking..." He whispered the word.

"It's a joke," I quickly said, and his eyes flicked up to mine, pulled from his thoughts.

"I know."

"Then why the Vietnam flashback?"

"Nothing."

"Oh my god. Do you have to, like, pee on your mate to claim them? Like dogs do with territory?" I scrunched up my face.

"What? No. Jesus, Caliana. Just because I can turn into a wolf doesn't mean I live like one."

"Good."

He offered me a strange look before pushing me off the bed. I stood and glared down at him with narrowed eyes before he got off the bed right behind me. "Go talk to Leah."

"Wh—" I paused, momentarily forgetting Lola was Leah. "No."

"Yes."

"No!"

"I'm telling you: yes." When he slapped my ass, I squealed and jumped.

"There's nothing to talk about."

"There's a lot to talk about."

"No." I folded my arms. "I'm mad."

He studied me for a moment before shrugging. "Okay. Leave Le—Lola down there. Alone. Crying. Even though she risked her own life by shifting into a wolf to protect you, which is tough for half-breeds. It can kill them. She’d never shifted before because it's a risk to her life, yet she did it to save you. Leave her alone, even though she made me promise to protect you no matter what. Even though she loved you so much she was scared of losing you over this. Even though she stayed with you when Jay offered for her to live with him. Sure, stay mad at your best friend over one dumb little secret she didn't tell you for your own safety. She was scared you would hate her."

I was frozen at the end of that. I hadn't thought of that. I hadn't listened to her properly; I had been so upset.

She told me about half-breeds. She literally shifted and risked her life to protect me. Not only that, but she refused Jay's invitation for me. She refused her mate just to stay with me.

I was so mad and upset she hadn't told me. I hadn't told her some stuff, too, and sure, she had a huge secret, but after all she did for me…

I slowly walked toward the door. "I'm going to Lola," I whispered quietly, and Xavier didn't say anything. The moment I was out the door, I raced toward the sitting room where I’d left Lola. Just as I ran into the kitchen, my eyes fell on Colton and Jay.

"Go, she'll be fine," Colton said.

"No, she won't. She's upset. I need to be there for her—"

"Excuse me," I interrupted Jay, and he looked over at me. This was Lola's boyfriend…or mate. I stared at him for a second, and he offered me a weak smile, but it looked fake.

My brow furrowed, and Colton slapped the back of Jay's head. "Ignore him. He's upset with you because Leah's crying."

"Oh." I cleared my throat. "Well, I'm going to talk to her."

The frustration in Jay's eyes seemed to clear. "About what?"

"Things."

He narrowed his eyes and tried to push past Colton, who held him steady. "Are you going to make her more upset?"

"Okay, listen here, dumbass wolf." I narrowed my own eyes, already sick of his attitude. "Just because she's your mate doesn't mean you have to be possessive. Of course, I was upset with her. She freaking lied to me! She's my best friend, but you don't need to get all in my business, got that?"

He paused and glanced at Colton, who just shrugged. His body seemed to go from rigid to relaxed, and he let out a small chuckle. "Okay. I'll put my trust in you, I guess. I'm going now."

Jay waved and left like nothing happened. I pushed that to the back of my mind and took a deep breath as I glanced at the sitting room door.

Time to have a conversation that would make or break my friendship with Lola.

**Episode 51**

I pushed open the door and saw Lola's body shaking. Sniffles came from her, and her hands were covering her face. I cleared my throat, and she jumped slightly. It took her a moment to lift her head but my god, the state she was in…her eyes were red and puffy, her cheeks stained with tears, and her nose was running.

I sighed and left to get tissues, pausing when I whacked into Colton. I stood back, surprised when he held out some for me. "Uh…thanks."

"No problem," he said before turning and leaving. I returned to the room and immediately caught Lola's eyes. She stared at me as if I were a beast.

"Tissues…" I threw the roll to her, and she caught it. She pulled some off and began wiping her face immediately, and she looked like crap. She pushed herself up from under the blanket, and my eyes widened.

"Lola, your stomach."

"It's fine, I only broke some ribs. They'll heal fast."

"HEAL FAST?!"

"Just because I'm a half-breed doesn't mean I lack what they have." She shrugged, and I winced at her bruises. I felt bad.

Instead of saying anything, I walked to the chair on the opposite side of the room and sat. Her eyes followed me like a dog, and she wiped her face again.

"So…Leah. Why didn't you tell me your name was Leah? You said no more secrets."

She looked down. "I was going to, but then I decided I would legally change it for you."

"What?"

"It wouldn't be a lie if I changed it. I didn't want to lie anymore, and I know you only know me as Lola, so I was going to find out how to legally change it! I promise—ask Jay. I didn't want another lie to make you hate me more, but every choice I make is always wrong."

Only Lola...only she would do something like that.

I couldn't help the small smile that formed on my face. She seemed surprised by this but didn't smile herself. "Do you hate me?"

"I don't hate you; I'm just hurt."

"You should hate me." She swallowed. "I don't deserve you as my friend. I shouldn't have lied to you, and I know there is no valid reason why I did."

"I see."

"I'll leave." She raised her head. "I told Jay; if you want to go back home, I'll stay here. If you want to stay here, I'll go back to the pack. I don't want to make you uncomfortable or upset, Caliana. I love you and don't deserve you, and I messed up everything a—"

"Aliyah." Her eyes widened when I said her name. "It'll take a while to get used to..."

"You don't need to! Just call me Lola, okay?"

"Listen: I'm still slightly upset. I'm hurt you lied to me. I probably won't trust you for a while—it's just how it is." I frowned at her expression. "But it doesn't mean I hate you. It doesn't mean you have to change your name. It doesn't mean you have to leave. It'll take time, but I'll get over it."

"You d—"

"I'll get over it," I repeated. I loved Lola too much to stop being friends over one secret, no matter how big. She had been with me through thick and thin.

"Thank you." She began sobbing, and my eyes flew open. Her sobs came out as if she were choking, and her body shook. "I THOUGHT I WAS GOING TO HAVE TO LEAVE AND NEVER SEE YOU AGAIN, AND I WANTED TO DIE! I LOVE YOU, AND I'LL WORK MY HARDEST TO GET YOU TO LOVE ME AGAIN."

I let out a small laugh, and she wiped her nose with the tissue. "Do you want to go home tomorrow? I'm ready."

"What about Jay?"

"I want to mend *us* before anything else."

"Well..." I pursed my lips. "I'm going to stay for a while."

"Until you're healed?"

"Not exactly. I might be thinking about…becoming Xavier's mate."

"No, you can't!"

"What? Why?" Not the reaction I was expecting.

"Do you know what comes with being his mate? He's an Alpha."

"Yeah, he told me."

"No, he didn't. You'll have to have his babies to c—"

"He told me."

She stopped in her tracks. "He...told you?"

"Yeah. He said he wanted me to be his mate, but he's going to let me think about it."

She blinked. "He said that? And you agreed?"

"It's all a bit much, but I think I'll say yes."

"I mean, he went Rogue, so you won't be a Luna. Technically," she spoke to herself. "But it's dangerous."

"I know."

"You don't know. It's very dangerous, please—"

"I know, Lola. I'll be fine. I've been beaten already. If this hasn't scared me off, what will?"

"You're so weird." She paused. "The world doesn't deserve you..."

I stared at my friend. She was timider now, almost scared to speak. When we fought in the past, things would go back to normal almost immediately. I couldn't even be mad at her. She literally risked her life by shifting to protect me. She had known there was a chance she'd die, but she didn't even hesitate.

I couldn't ruin our friendship over this.

I stood from my place and walked over to her before slowly leaning over and hugging her. She didn't move for a second before weakly wrapping her own arms around me, and in a few seconds, she was sobbing again.

"It'll be okay," I told her. "Time will fix things."

"Thank you," she whimpered. "I'll make it up to you."

"We should go for a walk later. Take a breath, talk it out privately—in our own place."

"Can we?"

"If you're better."

"I love you." She wiped her eyes again. She was a half-breed, and t—

I froze, my mind suddenly returning to Xavier. Everything he said earlier suddenly popped into my mind, about being the Luna and having his children in the future…

"I need to talk to Xavier," I said quietly before standing.

"Are you okay?" Her brow furrowed, and the concern was obvious. I nodded, not having any more time to think. I ran out of the room, and up to Xavier's, where I smashed through the door.

Both Colton and Xavier glanced at me in confusion.

"DAMMIT!" I yelped, forgetting I was injured, and my hand went to my stomach.

"What's wrong?" Xavier was standing now.

"I need to talk to you…" My eyes went past him and to his brother. "Alone."

"I feel excluded. Let me in on this." Colton fake pouted, and I paused.

"Did you kill your mate?" Suddenly, he froze. "You chased her, didn't you?" My brow furrowed. "Is she dead?"

"Maybe." He pursed his lips. "But if you don't want to fill me in on your little secret, I'll keep mine."

"Fine, do that. I don't care." I shrugged. "Leave."

Colton scowled but did as I said for once. I was pretty sure it was the look Xavier gave him, but I was going to pretend he just listened to what I said.

"What happened?" Xavier hesitated. "Are you and Aali—Lola okay?"

"Yeah, but that isn't it."

"Then?"

"Our babies."

He was confused. Xavier didn't say anything for a few seconds—he just blinked several times. He looked so out of it, and I nudged him before he quickly raised one eyebrow. "Our babies?"

"I mean…baby. I don't know how many things you need."

"Things. You called babies *things.*"

"Look, I don't know. Pups, babies, little wolf-bears, whatever you want to call them. Wait, why are you smiling?"

"Because you're funny."

"This is serious!"

"Okay, okay. What?"

"I'm human. You're a wolf. If we had children..."

His face suddenly contorted, and realization hit him, too. "They'd be half-breeds..." He had forgotten that part of it. I felt a large lump form in my throat, like I lost my breath.

Why was I even thinking so far into the future about having children with him? I had never even planned for some, and suddenly my mind was flipped upside down. I couldn't be what he wanted because I was a dumb human. How the hell would I be suited for him?

"I'm sorry..." When I spoke up weakly, his brow furrowed, and he allowed his eyes to return to mine, and in an instant, they flew open.

"Wait, why are you crying?"

"I'm not." My brow furrowed, my own hand reaching up to my face. "What the hell?" When I retracted it, the lone tear was on my finger, proving me wrong. "I didn't even realize." I sighed. "I'm sorry."

"Caliana," he let out a frustrated sigh and I expected him to be mad at me, "why are you so dumb?"

This was where my usual smart remark would be thrown in, disagreeing with what he said, but I couldn't even speak. I *was* dumb. I argued so confidently about why he should choose me, when in reality, this wouldn't work.

"I'm sorry," I said for the third time.

"You shouldn't apologize."

"I should."

"What did you have to say sorry for?"

"For not being up to your standards." I swallowed the lump in my throat. "You're right."

"I'm right? You're admitting you're dumb?"

"No, you’re right that I shouldn't be with you." I looked up at him this time. "We don't work. I'm being greedy—you were right. I'll leave, but I won't reject you. Then you can find another girl. Someone who can bring your pack together, and if you need kids in the future, actually give you…pedigree ones. Someone not as awkward—"

When he burst out laughing, every muscle in my body tensed. My eyes flashed from confusion to anger. I was pouring my heart out, and he thought this whole thing was funny. Did he not understand how much this hurt me, telling him to find another girl?

"It's not funny! I'm serious, Xavier," I snapped before turning. "Whatever. I'm going—"

"No," he pulled me back, still chuckling, "you're not. I'm sorry."

"Shut up."

"Believe me, it was heartfelt until you said *pedigree*. Like a pedigree dog over a mutt. You know children in my species aren't just animals."

"That's what you got from the whole thing?" I glared at him.

"No." He shook his head. "I also got how amazing and hilarious you are. How even in bad moments like this, somehow you can make me laugh. How clueless you are, and how eager you were to learn. How I wouldn't swap you for any girl in the world, Cali."

All I could do was watch him in confusion. Had he really just said all that?

"But I can't provide for you," I mumbled. "Half-breeds a—"

"I never said I was definitely going back to the pack. It's not like what we have would revolve around children—that doesn't need to happen for ages, if at all. You need to worry about now, not the future." He blinked. "Unless you're trying not to hurt my feelings, and this is an excuse to run away."

"No!" I chimed in quickly. "Not an excuse. I don't want to leave you—I've decided that already. I want to stay with you."

"What about school?"

"Holiday isn't over."

"When it is?"

"I'll drop out."

"What the hell? No, you won't."

"I only have one year left, but it doesn't matter. I don't have the money for it, so it was my plan the whole time."

"No."

"What the hell do you mean *no*?"

"You're finishing—"

"No, I'm not." I paused. "Look, I'll decide later, after we decide about us."

"I've decided on my end. I want you to be my mate."

"Ask me, then. Right now, before either of us changes our minds."

"Are you sure?"

"Obviously. Hurry."

He blinked. "How do I do it?"

"WHAT DO YOU MEAN *HOW*?!"

"There's no need to shout." He was clearly embarrassed about this whole situation, which made me smile.

"How about this?" I raised my head. "Xavier, can I be your mate?"

"Yes?"

"Okay."

"Okay...does that mean—"

"Yep," I stated proudly. "I, Caliana Hart, am officially your mate."

**Episode 52**

"You are?" Xavier asked.

"Yes. We are mates."

He nodded. "You're mine?"

"Yes, Xavier. I'm yours," I laughed at his strange behavior. This was clearly foreign to him, and it was honestly hilarious. "And you belong to me."

A small smile formed on his face. "I see."

"Why do you sound confused?"

"It's weird."

"It is," I responded. "Are we keeping it a secret?"

His eyebrows pulled together. "Do you want to?"

"I thought you'd want to."

"Why?"

"Isn't it embarrassing to have me as your mate?"

"What? No." He looked bewildered. "Definitely not."

"You turned from a beast to a sweetheart overnight."

"Shut up," he scoffed.

I played with my fingers and tapped my feet, my whole body feeling restless. He raised his eyebrows. "You can go tell her."

When he said that, I turned on my heel and went to sprint downstairs, but he caught my arm and pulled me back before I could get anywhere.

"First, give your boyfriend a kiss."

Boyfriend... It was the first time he used that word.

I reached my hands up and pulled his face toward me before planting a soft kiss on his lips. I felt them turn into a frown. "Why are you injured? I want to fuck the hell out of you," he whined.

My eyes opened. "You're insane," I groaned. "I mean…you can if you want."

"No, I've waited this long. I can wait a bit longer."

"You have..." I backed off. "If you liked me, why didn't you just take my virginity? That's why I was here, and you haven’t done anything. I'm pretty sure you can write a book with more than fifty chapters about the buildup."

"Why is that your example?” He shook his head.

"Answer."

"I don't know. At first, I thought I couldn't...physically. Because I needed a boner to do it."

"Then when you realized...?"

"Something wouldn't let me. I felt sick—I'm pretty sure it was my wolf. I didn't want to use your body like that."

"Wow, quite the romantic, aren't you?" I pursed my lips. "How many girls have you slept with?"

He raised his eyebrows. "What does that matter?"

"I'm just curious."

"Three, maybe…no. Five."

I couldn't help but feel jealous, partially annoyed at everything. "At the beginning, Colton said you hadn't slept with a girl in like a week or something. But if you killed your mate two years ago—"

"He lied about that to freak you out." He shrugged. "I only almost slept with one girl after I killed my mate. But we didn't do anything because I couldn't, you know..."

"I don't want to hear about it in detail, thanks." I scowled, unable to stop my petty self from feeling jealous, even though he didn't know me at the time.

He reached out and lifted my chin. "You look upset."

"Not upset, just jealous."

"I didn't even kno—"

"I know, I know," I grumbled, holding up my hands. "I'm not mad or seriously upset, just being petty and dumb. I can't help it."

He eyed me, a small smile on his lips. "I didn't feel anything with them. I threw them out right after."

"That's not nice."

"I'm trying to cheer you up."

"Why did Colton have a naked girl in the house the first day I came here? I haven't seen any since."

"I told him no hook-ups in this house while you guys were here, because no offense, but you've a big mouth. You might slip up and tell the girl, and we'd have to kill her."

I arched an eyebrow.

"Not really kill…you know what I mean," he said quickly, making my eyes narrow. "I think it was to scare you, to see if you freaked out and ran. He was testing you, probably. I don't know. I wasn't even aware you were coming. He only said he had a surprise coming, but I never expected you."

"It's weird how things turned out," I said slowly before trailing my finger along his chest then down to his stomach. I tilted my head suddenly. "When did you realize you liked me?"

"I don't know how to explain it. The night it hit me like a train was when I stayed in your room. I felt something weird, then realized it was like part of my wo—"

"Your wolf liked me, not you?" I narrowed my eyes.

"He just realized first, maybe. I don't know," he grumbled, obviously embarrassed by this, but it only made me smile. I planted a kiss on his lips—the way he got flustered over this was cute.

"That's really adorable. You should be more like your wolf." I paused. "TURN INTO YOUR WOLF! I WANT TO SEE YOUR WOLF."

"I don't think I can even shift on command anymore..." He said the words slowly, but his hand balled into a fist.

"Xavier! I want your wolf now!"

"No! No, later. Not in here—stop."

"Stop?" My brow furrowed, and suddenly I realized he wasn’t talking to me. He was focused on something else now and looked like he was trying to contain something.

The cracking of bones made me step back in surprise. I hadn't actually expected him to shift.

His body contorted into a wolf-like face before fully evolving into a large, black wolf. Its bright eyes stared into my own, and its ears perked up.

My heart was beating out of my chest. This thing could eat me in a second. This thing was...my mate.

"Hello," I said nervously before letting out a scream as it dove forward. I was expecting it to bite me or something, but instead its large head rubbed into me, whines breaking from its throat. The wolf's tail...Xavier's tail was wagging so fast I could barely see it, and his ears had fallen back.

It continued pushing into me, whimpering until I raised my arms and wrapped them around his neck. "Hello," I repeated. The moment I spoke, his large, hot tongue licked the length of my face over and over until I had to push him back.

"I'll drown, calm down." I laughed. "Sit."

The wolf's eyes narrowed, and he let out a huff.

"A girl can try." I shrugged in response. "I wish I could ask you questions. You're...amazing." I placed my hand on his neck, admiring his soft fur.

The wolf raised his head, so I looked up, trying to follow his gaze until the stomping caught my attention. His front paws stomped the ground, and he let out a growl, shaking his head before raising it again.

I reached out under his chin and began scratching, and he let out a low, delighted whimper. HE WAS LIKE A GIANT DOG. "Aww, dumb Xavier kept you locked away." I continued to scratch him, and he was pleased. "You don't seem scary at all; you're just a big, huggable wolf-bear."

The door opening made me jump, and the wolf dropped its head to look at the intruder.

"Oh my god," I heard Colton's voice. "What the hell? Caliana, stand back." He reached out and pulled me away from the large wolf, and in an instant, the wolf's demeanor changed.

His fangs were on display, and his eyes narrowed, a growl erupting from his throat. My eyes widened at the flashback the sound caused, reminding me of how he killed earlier. How he ripped those wolves apart without hesitation, the blood dripping from his teeth.

His eyes were locked onto Colton's hand that held my arm, clearly not happy.

"Caliana, go," Colton said lowly, but I tugged my arm away and ran toward the large wolf.

"Calm down," I told him before leaning into Xavier’s big, furry body. "There's no need to get worked up—he's your brother."

When I looked back at Colton, he stared at me as if I were a crazy person. "What’s going on?"

I turned back to face him properly as the wolf's large head tried to get under my arm to nuzzle into me. "What do you mean *what's going on*?"

"Uh…I don't know. Xavier's a fucking wolf that's *cuddling* you instead of killing you."

"He's my mate."

"Sorry?"

"You heard me, Colton."

"Xavier change back," Colton demanded, and the wolf growled. "Change back now!"

The wolf wasn't pleased with Colton's response, and his muscles tensed. "Let's not cause a fight. Could you please change back for now?" I patted the wolf's head, trying to calm him.

The wolf's ears fell back, and it whined but leaned into me again before backing off. The cracking made me nauseous and in an instant, Xavier was back, but this time he was pale, panting heavily on the floor.

"What the hell was that?" Colton stared at him.

"What do you mean? He can change now," I said, confused.

"He couldn't change back! Xavier, you didn't have control of your wolf."

"What?" I turned back to Xavier, who pushed himself up weakly and wrapped a blanket around his waist. "You couldn't...?"

"Of course he couldn't. He wouldn't have growled at me—his wolf had full control." Colton seemed annoyed. "Why the hell did you change?"

"He came out on his own. He was eager to meet Caliana properly." Xavier clearly was in surprise too.

"That wasn't you at all? That doesn't usually happen?" I looked up to Xavier, suddenly feeling bad.

"No." Colton sighed. "When we shift, we have control of our wolf's body. We hear their thoughts and their opinion on the situation, but we have full control and are conscious the whole time. That was his wolf. You growled at me!"

"*He* growled at you!" Xavier argued. "You were taking Caliana away from us."

"I thought you had changed and were going to attack her!"

"I wouldn't attack her."

"Aww, you care about me." I smiled at Colton, but he just gave me a dirty look.

"What's this about her being your mate?"

"What do you mean? It's pretty clear."

"You know what I mean!"

"It means we're a thing," I said, happily leaning into Xavier, but he pushed me off with a sigh, causing me to narrow my eyes. "Rude."

"Go tell Lola about this," Xavier told me. "Okay?"

"You're trying to get rid of me."

"Go," his hand lowered to squeeze my ass before he leaned down to whisper in my ear, "and I'll reward you later."

"I heard that," Colton announced, causing my face to flush.

"Just because you just killed your mate doesn't mean you can hate on Xavier's relationship," I accused with a scowl.

"My mate?"

"The girl you chased...the one who saved me." My heart plummeted to my stomach. She saved me—I'd be dead if it weren’t for her. "Did you kill her, Colton?"

"That's none of your business," he said.

"She saved my life! If it wasn't for her, I'd be dead. I wouldn't be here…but you aren't heartbroken, so you must not have."

He said nothing but removed his gaze from me. "Go, Caliana."

When I actually properly looked at him, my eyes widened. He wasn't normal Colton. He wasn't the fun, joking Colton. He was breathing heavily, and his eyes almost seemed to glisten, so for once, I listened and left, a miserable feeling spreading through the house.

**Episode 53**

**Xavier**

Both Colton and I stared at the door where Caliana had made her exit. I felt like I hadn't eaten in days—I wasn't hungry, but I felt weak, like the energy was drained from me. I pushed myself back and sat on the bed, brushing a hand through my hair.

"Mates? You weren't joking?"

I looked up at Colton. "You thought I was joking?"

"I didn't think you'd go through with it. Did you actually.... *Mates* or just casual dating?"

"Mates."

"Xavier..."

"Don't bother lecturing me."

"Does she know everything? If you go back to the pack, she'll have to be the Luna. She'd have to have your offspring. You think she's okay with that?"

"You don't think I told her? I told her everything, and she doesn't care. She's stronger than you think."

"She's human, Xavier! This is dangerous for her."

"You don't think I know that?" I snapped, standing now. "I do. I can't help it, though. Blame this dumb mate thing!"

"Sit down." Colton sighed, walking over and tipping me so I fell back onto the bed. "Damn, your wolf really did drain you. You had no control of him whatsoever?"

"No, he came out when she wanted to see him. I'm pretty sure he chose her before I realized I even liked her."

"Before you liked her? What are you, a boy in high school?" He pulled a face.

I narrowed my eyes. "How would you word it?"

He paused to think. "Hmm…a woman I'm solely interested in and want to fuck until the earth ends."

"That's not—" I cut off my words, realizing what Cal said earlier. Colton had chased his mate in that place; he had actually found her. "Where's your mate?"

"Dead." He shrugged. "Girls are such a hassle."

I arched an eyebrow. "Okay, and where is she really?"

He glanced to me, tilting his head, confused by what I said. "In the afterlife? Reborn as a turtle? How should I know? Maybe on a playdate with your old mate—the one you killed."

"You didn't kill her."

"Why would you think that?"

"I killed my mate, and I hated her. She destroyed our family. You can't easily say you killed your mate, or you wouldn't be acting so casual right now." He didn't say anything for a moment, but I noticed his body tensed. His jaw tightened when I raised both my eyebrows, challenging him to continue. "You couldn't kill her, could you?"

"I planned to, I think," he said slowly. "But I couldn't."

"Where is she? Did you reject each other?"

"She tried to kill me." He pulled down the shoulder of his top, revealing a small cut, then held out his hand, revealing another. They must have been deep if they still hadn't healed.

"Wow."

"She's very feisty," he commented, but he seemed distant now. He was looking somewhere else, and the room seemed too quiet. I was waiting for him to talk but it was like he had gone into a trance.

With a small sigh, I raised my hands and clapped them in front of his face. He didn't jump like Caliana would have. Instead, he turned to look at me. "I *like* her."

"Obviously you like her—she's your mate."

"I don't want to like her; I don't want to have a mate. I hate this dumb wolf thing. Sometimes I wish we could be human and smash whoever we want." He offered me a curious look. "I wonder if you could pick any girl in the world, would you still be with Caliana?"

"Of course."

"You sure? You've barely met any girls. Think of the—"

"Only Caliana," I growled, and he raised his eyebrows before holding up his hands as if he were surrendering.

"See, I don't want that."

"Want what?"

"Only Caliana." He deepened his voice, and I assumed he was mimicking me. I chuckled at his immature behavior, and when he noticed, he grinned back. "I'm serious, Xavier."

"I'm still lost."

"Look, you have your wolf back, but you can never do anything with any other girl. You're stuck with Caliana now."

"I don't *want* any other girl."

"That's such a dumb way to live—I want choices. Settling for one person is boring."

"Didn't you just say you liked your mate?"

"Yeah, but I don't want to. I don't want her to be my mate, but I also do. No. *I* don't, but my wolf does," he rambled on. "She tried to kill me twice! Sure, she's hot and gorgeous and feisty and managed to kick my ass like no one else has... She's also cute, and the way she ac—"

"You're talking like you’re in love."

"It's my wolf!"

"Did you reject her? I mean, that's a thing—"

"Let’s stop talking about her."

I didn’t stop. "What's her name?"

"Maya."

I offered a smug look. His wolf was obviously getting the better of him, clearly wanting to be with his destined mate. I could see Colton was fighting it; he probably wanted to smash then move on, but his wolf had different plans.

"If you reject each other on mutual terms, you won't lose your wolf."

"I want to stop talking about it, Xavier," he huffed. "I'll probably just kill her. She tried to kill me, so it's only fair if I kill her. It's not like I'm attacking her unprovoked."

"Do whatever you think is right. I've had enough mate drama for a lifetime."

"Are you sure Caliana will stay?"

"What?" Even the thought of her leaving hurt. "Of course she will." When did I changed? It felt like only a day ago, I was calling her horrible names, and now I wanted to protect her with my life.

Up until now, I tried to deny this was my second chance at a mate. Maybe because she was human, maybe because I didn't want this whole thing in the first place. I didn't know why, but I had finally given up fighting.

"She won't get scared?"

"She was kidnapped and abused. She's not running even after that—she's braver than you think. She's not *some human* like you keep calling her; she's Caliana."

"Okay, lover boy." Colton chuckled. "Why do you act so stiff around her then? She tried to cuddle you a moment ago, and you shoved her away."

"It's weird." I scrunched up my face. "Don't call me lover boy. Like you said, it's my wolf showing my soft side—not me."

"You're still not used to human contact. I'm not surprised—you have been a loner for more than two years now. Probably affected your social skills."

Colton’s words didn’t even faze me. I couldn’t stop thinking about how Caliana had been kidnapped, tortured. When we found out she was gone, it took everything in me to stay calm. I had convinced myself I didn't care, told myself it was fine—she was just a human and I'd get over her.

That didn't happen.

I wanted to *die*. I wanted to kill someone. If Colton had teased me then, there was a chance my brother would have a scar on his face right now. I bit my tongue at the thought of the Alpha. He kidnapped her to get back at me for killing his sister. I didn't even get the chance to kill him—his Beta saved him just in time.

I couldn't help but wonder if he'd come back. Colton's mate was part of that pack, and if their Alpha fled...would it fall apart?

It wasn't my concern, and if Colton wasn't interested in it, I shouldn’t be either. Then again, if I were to go back to my pack, I could recruit them. There were a lot of strong wolves in that pack. We’d put up a fight to get through them, and even then, a good few of them hadn't died.

That proved something.

Maybe I could rebuild the pack... *No. Don't think like that.*

I didn't know where this was coming from. I planned my life as a Rogue, exactly like this. Caliana was my mate now, and that was possibly spurring some sort of Alpha part of me forward. Or maybe it was because Jay constantly talked about me coming back.

Either way, I couldn't put Caliana in any more danger.

When a stinging sensation spread through my face, my eyes widened. I glared at my brother. "What the hell, Colton?" I snapped, shoving him backward into the door.

He scowled at my movement, obviously not expecting me to jump up from the bed so quickly. "You were in a trance."

"Clap your hands then—don’t slap me!"

"I did!"

"Not loud enough," I grumbled, frustrated by his grin, obviously content at my reaction.

"I heard what you said to Caliana." A goofy grin appeared on his face, but I didn't respond. I said a lot of things to her; I knew he was waiting for me to ask for clarification, but I wouldn’t.

That didn't stop him, though.

"About giving her a *reward* if she left. What's the reward? Are you finally doing the dirty, or is she still playing hard to get?"

I glanced at him, my brow furrowing. "Wait...that's what you think is going on here?"

Now it was his turn to be confused. "What *is* going on?"

I wasn't about to tell him how Caliana was constantly at me to take her virginity, and how I wouldn't because she was injured. Honestly, I was scared I would break her in minutes.

She was so fragile—anything could kill her. I had to be careful around her, but it was going to be quite the struggle with how she acted. If only she weren’t human, or…

"Hey." My eyes returned to Colton as he called out to me. "I might go for a while."

"Go where?”

He hesitated before shaking his head. "I don't know—ignore me. My head's weird lately."

I stared at my brother, curious about his behavior. He noticed me watching him closely and turned away with a sigh. "We better go down to them."

We didn't need to go down to the girls. It wasn't like he cared, but I could see he was using it as an excuse to get away from me so I couldn't pester him with more questions. He didn't seem to be overly bothered about it, but seeing as we both liked our space, I dropped the topic easily.

*I want her.*

My whole body froze at the voice that rang through me. It felt like decades since I’d heard him, like this was a whole new thing to me. My heart picked up, and my eyes widened, my wolf's voice replaying in my head.

*I want to see her now.*

I narrowed my eyes at the demands my wolf made; he obviously took advantage of the full control earlier. I pushed his thoughts to the back of my mind and followed Colton out the door, down the stairs to where the girls were.

I wanted her, too.

**Episode 54**

"Lola, do you know if Colton killed his mate?"

"I don't think he did."

"Why?"

"When Xavier killed his mate, Jay described it like Xavier was having a panic attack or something. He threw up, he was shaking, he didn't talk to anyone for weeks, yet Colton seems fine."

"Oh, I see." When I said that, Lola glanced up to look at me. When her face contorted in surprise, I suddenly panicked. "What?"

"Your face."

"You saw my face already. Can you not point it out?"

"No, I mean...it's not swollen. Your eye is open, and the bruise is almost healed."

"What?" My brow furrowed, and realization hit me. I could properly see through my eye now. No way the swelling had gone down that quick.

"You're mates with him, aren't you?" she asked.

"How did you know?"

"Apart from your confidence…" She smiled. "I also heard him shift. Did he lick you or something?"

"Yes?"

"It's weird. Mates have a strong bond, and you know how when a dog gets hurt, he licks the wound? It's kind of the same for our kind. It helps us heal. Not as fast as what happened to you, normally, but he has Alpha genes."

"Why didn't Jay do the same for you?"

"Even if he did, it wouldn't work as well. He's not the Alpha. Not only that, but it's not like magic. It can't heal internally—only exterior wounds. That's why the bruising is still there, but the swelling has gone down."

"Amazing," I said slowly.

"Wait..." She blinked. "YOU'RE MATES! YOU CHOSE HIM? YOU SAID YES?"

"How is the realization only hitting you now?" I blinked and sat on the couch. No doubt there was still some tension between us, but it was nice we could still talk like this. It would definitely take time for me to forgive her fully, but we would get there.

"I'm shocked."

"I feel attached to him—it's weird. He was okay with me rejecting him just to protect me; he was okay losing his wolf again, just for me." I paused. "And that's probably impossible to find anywhere else."

"Well, technically it *is* impossible because you’re human."

"Lola." I scowled, and she held up her hands.

"Poor Alex…"

"Who?"

"ALEX, CALIANA! THE GUY AT HOME WHO LOVES YOU?"

"Oh, yeah...Alex. Wow, how could I forget?"

"Blinded by love? Well, you snooze, you lose.” She shrugged. “He missed out."

"Wait...YOUR BOYFRIEND ANT," I accused. "The online one you never met…"

"Jay,” she said in a guilty tone.

"And Tommy? He wasn't actually your first?"

"No, he was." She sighed. "Why do you think I hate it so much? I can't tell you how upset I am that it wasn’t Jay, but I thought it was a weird dream from when I was younger. I didn't realize Jay actually existed when I had sex with Tommy."

"Oh..." I said slowly.

"I promise, I didn't lie to you forever. I thought it was a dream. Jay told me how dangerous it was for me as a half-breed, so for you as a human...plus, I thought you'd think I was gross."

"I told you, I'll get over it." I sighed. "You don't need to explain yourself."

"I'm sorry."

The awkward silence made me uncomfortable. It was never like this in the past. The door pushed open just in time—if it would have gone on any longer, I probably would have died. Colton walked in and glanced between us. "So..." he said when his eyes fell to me. "You’re his mate?"

"What's with the judgmental stare?" I arched an eyebrow.

"Curious about you and Xavier. What made you agree, wh—"

"Nope." I pushed myself off the couch and limped over to him as fiercely as I could then jabbed my forefinger into his chest. "You do not have the right to ask questions or interrogate me about my relationship with Xavier. You can't give me that judgy look, either."

"Sorry?" He was obviously not expecting that.

"Don't act confused. You and Jay wanted this, right? You wanted to find Xavier a new mate. *That's* why I was brought here—not for my virginity. Truth is out now. You kidnapped me, you didn't let me go when I tried to leave," I snapped. "Now when I do what you want, you think you have the right to judge me? That's not how this works, dog."

It was silent for a minute before I heard a small giggle behind me. Lola obviously found me telling Colton off humorous.

"I guess you're right."

"Don't you dare, *I gu*— Wait, *what*?" My brow furrowed immediately. "I'm right?"

"Yes, you're right."

"Why am I right? I mean, I know I'm right, but you're agreeing with me."

"Take the win, Cal," Lola called from behind me.

"I didn't think of it like that." Colton shrugged. "I'm only concerned for my brother. Mates are a serious thing, not some joke."

"I've been told. Several times."

"You do know he's the Alpha."

"Yes, thanks, Captain Obvious."

"And you know—"

"I'll be a Luna if he goes back to the pack. I have to carry on the Alpha blood; I have to give birth. Got it, thanks."

"You're calm about this," Colton said slowly, his eyes widening at my words.

"Because I've already gone through this with Xavier." A smirk appeared on my face. "And you're going to be below me if I become Luna."

"Shouldn't Xavier be the one below you? I mean, maybe if you beg—"

I slapped his chest, narrowing my eyes. "Your mate wouldn't be happy if she heard you saying that. She's *not* dead, right?"

His body went rigid, and his eyes immediately flicked to Lola, accusing. I whistled and brought his attention back to me. "I asked you a question—not her."

"That's none of your business." He patted my head. "Now be a good girl and shut the hell up."

"Don't hurt her, Colton. Please."

He must have been expecting a smart-ass remark back because when I said that, he froze.

"She saved my life. I owe her that much—to ask you not to hurt her."

"She's alive," he confirmed.

"What? You had a sappy talk?" Lola chimed in from behind, and I grinned. "You two lovebirds now?"

"Far from it. I told her I'd rip her to shreds if she ever showed up on our property again."

"So romantic." Lola sighed. "Why can't Jay be like that?"

Colton rolled his eyes before turning his head to look back. "Hey, man."

"Hi." Xavier's voice appeared, and he popped around the door. His eyes fell to me, then Lola, then back to me. "When's Jay coming back?" Xavier asked.

"In a few hours."

"Is she caught up on everything?" He glanced at Colton.

"Yeah."

"FINALLY!" I announced loudly, stomping my foot to catch their attention. "If any one of you lies to me again, I'm done. I am leaving all of you; I don't want any contact with you, I don't want to see you, I don't even want you to think about me. Understand?"

"Overreaction," Colton hummed.

"No," Lola snapped. "She's right. No more secrets—look how much I've hurt her. You asswipes aren't allowed to do it, either. I'm done hiding things. I'm an open book now. She had every right to act this way."

Xavier met my eyes before nodding toward the door, then turned to walk away. I quickly hopped forward and brushed past Colton, running to catch up with him. "Where are we going?"

"I don't know," he mumbled quietly.

I reached out and wrapped my smaller hand around his. His eyes fell to where we were connected before glancing at me and arching an eyebrow.

I offered him a wide smile and nuzzled into his arm. "We're mates now—I can do this."

He shook his head with a sigh but didn't release me. Instead, he returned my grip. I bit my lip in an attempt to hide my smile. We left out the back door, and I allowed him to guide me. We left the back garden and walked into the woods. He led me to wherever, but I kept my eyes on him. He was so beautiful and so perfect...and he was *mine*.

"Stop looking at me, it's creepy," he grumbled, and my head snapped to a different direction immediately. "Oh, you listened to me."

"Mhm," I said lowly.

"Look at me again—I like your attention."

My eyes widened, and my heart rate increased from his words. It felt as though my throat and lips had dried, so my tongue swiped across my lower lip.

"You're red," he commented.

"Your fault," I huffed in response.

"Do you remember this place?" he asked.

My attention wasn't focused on our surroundings until now. I studied the place closely before a small laugh left my throat. "Yeah, actually."

"Where you first found out—"

"Wolf-bears were real," I finished for him before receiving a weird look.

"Are you always going to use such a pathetic name for my kind?"

"It's cute!"

"It's dumb."

"I like it."

"Yeah, you're dumb."

I nudged him roughly, giving him an accusing glare. "You're an ass."

"I'm gonna destroy yours."

"XAVIER!"

The corner of his lip twitched, obviously amused at his own joke, which made me roll my eyes in return, even though I found it a bit funny.

"What was it like?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Being kidnapped. That would only happen to you, by the way.”

"Not as scary as selling my virginity to the Alpha," I retorted.

"You aren't selling it anymore—I can take it whenever I please." He turned to face me, lowering his head slightly. "And you're going to *love* it."

"As much as you love me?"

"You're gross." He frowned.

"Ugh, you ruin cute moments." I scowled before pausing. "Your wolf's more romantic than you."

"Hmm…"

"Wait, you didn't have any control of him, did you?" The mood suddenly shifted. "He was his own—"

"I'll practice."

"Practice?"

"Yeah, it's like when we first became of age with our wolves. They were in control at first; I just have to work with him."

"You could learn from him—he appreciates me more than you do!" I scowled.

"You don't know that."

"Aww, you care."

"False."

"*True*. Do I have the power to call out your wolf?"

His face fell.

"You thought I didn't realize, huh?" A cocky smile appeared on my face.

"Don't. Calling him out isn't a game since I don't have control of him yet."

"But *I* do. He loves me," I said proudly before placing my hands on my hips. "You could show me some affection like he does."

"What? You want me to lick your entire face?"

"I mean...you could use your tongue somewhere else."

His eyes widened slightly, shocked at my statement. Silence hung in the air for a minute until his lip twitched, and I burst out laughing, amused at my own joke. Yeah...joke.

"Do you have a plan?" I looked up at him before glancing where Colton first shifted. At that moment, my heart dropped to my butt. I had never been so scared. Seeing a human turn into some sort of beast. Thus, the wolf-bear was born.

"Ow," I whined when Xavier flicked my forehead. I reached up and rubbed the tender spot before nudging him roughly. "Don't."

"Then listen to me."

"What?"

"You asked me about a plan. I asked what you meant."

"Are you going back to your pack? Are you staying Rogue? What's happening? I mean, I'm a big part of your life now, so I want to be filled in."

I knew if a lot of girls said *I'm a huge part of your life now* or *we're going to be together forever*, it would be creepy. But this wasn't normal, mates weren’t normal, so I felt pretty justified.

He pursed his lips. "God, it's weird."

"What?"

"You."

"Excuse me?" My brow furrowed, insulted by whatever he meant.

"Like...you're here."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"You're mine." He sighed, not happy he had to explain. "You aren't just an annoying prop anymore."

"AN ANNOYING PROP?"

"I'm kidding." He chuckled, stopping my hand from hitting his arm. He used it to pull me closer before planting a kiss on my lips.

"You've changed," I said after he pulled back. "You're actually showing your soft side."

"Because of you."

I couldn't stop the smile forming on my face when he said that. "This whole mate thing is kind of cool."

"Only because it makes you feel important." He sighed, shaking his head.

"*And* because I get you." I grabbed his arm. "So…no plan?"

He narrowed his eyes, thinking. "I guess, for now...you're my plan."

It was official: I was in love with a wolf-bear. And I wanted to spend the rest of my life with him.