**Torn Between Alphas**

**Manuscript - Season 2**

**Episodes 55-122**

**Episode 55**

My eyes scanned the room, unfortunately not finding Xavier. I laid back with a small grunt—he was probably out looking for Colton.

Xavier...my *mate*. My heart fluttered at those words.

I pulled up my shirt and looked at my stomach. Even though it had been weeks since the attack, there was still a tiny bit of bruising. My ankles healed fine, but now there was just my stomach.

Xavier wouldn't touch me in the slightest—he gave my body no attention, but now that it didn't hurt, I was going to persuade him to finally take my virginity tonight. It was cute how respectful he was toward me, even with his animalistic side.

I pushed myself up and walked to the ensuite, brushing my teeth and taking a quick shower. I hadn't slept in my room since we had gotten together; I basically claimed his room as my own. He didn't object, of course.

The house was dead silent as I dried myself off. A frown formed on my lips—it was so empty here. Lola hadn't been here for a whole week. She had returned to see her old pack with Jay.

I expected them to be gone for a day, but nope, it was a *week*.

Colton left at the same time, saying he had somewhere to be. Before that, he had grown distant and wasn't in the house often, and now he had been gone a whole week, too. He hadn't called Xavier either, which meant Xavier constantly worried.

I sat on the bed, fully dressed. Had I pushed everyone away? Did Colton leave because I was here? Did Lola leave because she still felt like I hadn't forgiven her?

"Hey."

My eyes flashed to Xavier, who stood at the door. I offered him a small smile and stood. "Hiya."

"Something wrong?" He frowned, noticing the look on my face.

I avoided his gaze, glancing somewhere else. "I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"Where did everyone go? Did they leave because of me?"

"What? No, of course not."

"Colton left you! Since I became your mate, he grew distant, and now he's been missing for a week. Did you two have a fight?"

"No." He shook his head. "None of this is your fault. Jay's introducing Lola back to the pack."

"For a whole week?"

"Yes." He hesitated. "And Colton's doing his own thing."

"You're making up excuses!"

"He's looking for his mate, Cali."

My eyes widened, his words catching me by surprise. "His mate? She really is alive?"

He nodded. "He had a chat with her when he was supposed to kill her, back when they took you."

"I thought she would have tried to kill him or reject him."

"She did." He chuckled. "Colton's plan was to leave her alone, but since they didn't reject each other, he can't help trying to get her."

"Why didn't they reject each other?"

"I don't know, I didn't ask. I'm letting him do his own thing. I'm not the best person to give advice in that area."

"I would be."

"No, you wouldn't."

"I would!" I argued before kneeling on the bed and wrapping my arms around him, pulling him closer.

He raised an eyebrow in response to my action. "What are you doing?"

I grabbed his hand and pulled it to my stomach. His eyes widened. "Are you pregna—"

"WE HAVEN'T HAD SEX! NO!"

"Oh, yeah. Then what?"

I pushed his hand against my stomach. "Look, I'm not even wincing. I feel no pain whatsoever."

"Impressive," he said sarcastically, and I scowled.

"You know what that means?" I whispered, planting kisses on his neck and moving lower.

In an instant, I was flung back on the bed, and he looked down at me with a bored expression. "It's too early for that." His body tensed, and he turned away. "I'm going for a shower."

I watched him walk away, my jaw hanging. Was he serious? WAS HE SERIOUS? He threw me to the curb; I had never felt rejection like this. He hadn't even said no in a nice way. I stood angrily and stormed out of the room and headed downstairs.

There was no smell of food, so I assumed he hadn't had breakfast yet. I was mad at him, but I’d still make him food, I guessed. I decided scrambled eggs on toast would do for now. He wasn't getting any full breakfast with love in it.

He came down when I was setting the table, and he sat, already knowing I made food for him. I scowled and placed his food in front of him before sitting at the other end of the table.

He raised his eyes from his food, noting where I was sitting. His eyebrows pulled together, confused by my actions, which only made me scowl more. "Are you okay?" he asked.

"I do not want to talk to you right now."

"Why?" He munched on his toast and looked so innocent, but my heart felt like it was pounding out of my chest.

Ever since I became his mate, it was like a stronger bond formed. Not just the boyfriend-girlfriend thing...it was weird. I almost felt like he was my other half, or like he was part of me. It could have been my mind playing tricks, but I felt like I understood him more.

"You're annoyed with me?" He tilted his head.

"Are you stupid?" I stared at him in shock. "You practically threw me off you and rejected me in such a mean, careless way."

"You're upset over that?" He raised both his eyebrows, and I shoved the food into my mouth just so I couldn't speak.

I scarfed the rest of it down, ignoring how it burned my tongue and throat before washing it down with milk. I went to walk past him, but he grabbed my hand. I was ready for any excuses he planned to throw at me—I was ready to bite back.

"Thank you for the food."

That was it?

"Yeah." Obviously, I wasn't *mad* mad at him; I was being petty. It did upset me how he constantly rejected me, though. Maybe he didn't like my body and was finding excuses each time. I tried to brush that thought to the back of my mind, but it was making me insecure.

I walked to the bathroom and shut the door behind me, then pulled down my trousers. I lifted my top and glanced at the red stretch marks on my body, sighing. Why weren't they the cute, silvery-white ones? These just looked like I was clawed viciously or something. I pulled a face, disgusted.

I traced them with my fingers, pursing my lips. I reached out for the foundation and squirted some onto my hand. I never thought of covering them up, but maybe it could work. With the tip of my finger, I glided some foundation along the longest, most obvious mark.

"What are you doing?"

I screamed at the sound of Xavier and pulled up my leggings to hide my underwear. I groaned when I realized the foundation was now going to rub against the inside of my trousers. "What the hell?" I snapped at him. "Don't you know how to knock?"

He blinked. "You didn't lock the door; how should I know you were in here?"

"God, you're frustrating." I began washing my hands at the sink before freezing up when I felt him tugging on my waist band. I slapped his hand away quickly. "Get off—what are you doing?"

"What were *you* doing?"

"None of your business," I retorted, watching as he picked up the foundation. He studied it before putting some on his hand and rubbing it in. He then pulled the side of my leggings down a tiny bit, revealing where I had put some on my marks.

"PERVERT." I shoved him off, and he tilted his head.

"I am your mate..."

"My mate who constantly rejects me when I make advances." I folded my arms across my chest, and he frowned.

"Were you covering them?"

My cheeks lit up. I knew he wasn't dumb, but I didn’t think he was smart enough to realize what I was doing. "No. I was testing if that suited my skin tone."

"On your hip?"

"Yeah. The sun doesn't tan the skin there."

"And…you happened to put the one streak right along a mark?"

"It was an accident."

"It was a perfect line to cover it, so that's a lie."

"Shut up," I snapped.

"Why were you covering it?"

I groaned. "I said *shut up*."

"Why?"

"BECAUSE OF YOU, XAVIER," I snapped, turning to face him. His eyebrows knitted together, surprised I was blaming him for this. How did he not understand? He was usually smart…he usually caught on.

"Wha—"

"You reject me *over* *and over*. The most you do is kiss me. It's like you don’t want to come near, or even *look* at my body! Don't say it's because I'm injured, because I'm not sore anymore, and you know it.” I glared at him. "I can't think of any reason other than you're just turned off by my body."

He hesitated and let out a small sigh, shaking his head. "You really are an idiot."

"*Me*? You are! You make me feel like crap and don't even realize it."

He flinched, guilt clear on his face. "I'm sorry, Caliana. That's not—"

"That's not what? That's complete and—"

"Shut up and let me talk." His words made me zip my mouth in an instant—I felt like a child being scolded. "I love your body." He sighed. "I told you the marks are not ugly—nowhere near it. Remember? You're my little tiger. My striped, brave, dangerous, beautiful tiger." He tugged me over to him and planted a kiss on my forehead.

I tried to keep my breathing steady and calm my heart. "Then why?"

"Because I'm in love with you and your body. If I see you...if I touch you, I won't be able to contain myself or him."

"*Him*? Your wolf?"

"You know how he feels about you. He adores you, and he's dangerous and wild. I didn't want to do anything with you until I have full control, so I don't hurt you."

"You said you were rough before—I'm already expecting that."

"Oh, shut up." He flicked my forehead. "You're all talk. As if you can handle it when you haven't even done anything before. You were red in the face that time you tried jerking me off, Cali."

"We weren't even a thing then!"

"Still proves my point."

"No, it doesn't," I argued. "I don't care if you can't help yourself. I just want you," I whined and wrapped my arms around him. He sighed, shaking his head slowly and patting my head as if I were the dog in the relationship.

I scowled at how he treated me like I was some kid instead of his girlfriend. I nudged him. "That's all I get in return?"

He immediately gripped my chin and angled my face upward before planting a kiss on my lips. I expected him to pull back and tease me, but instead he began to nibble my lower lip. I granted him access, and his tongue began exploring my mouth. I guided my hand down to his trousers, but he cut it off immediately.

I frowned. "Please."

"Tonight."

I backed off quicker than you can say *quick,* and my eyes widened. "Really?"

He chuckled at my reaction. "You look excited."

"I am—I've been waiting forever!"

"Alright, slut." My jaw dropped, and he held up his hands just as quick. "I'm kidding, Cal!"

"You better be." I scowled. "You can only call me that in bed."

Now it was his turn to be surprised. In fact, I was pretty sure his cheeks went a tiny bit red, but I wasn't going to call that out. He sighed. "You never fail to surprise me."

"*And* I'm stuck with you forever now." I grinned, expecting a rude remark back saying he regretted it or something like that. Instead, he just smiled and nodded.

Smiling Xavier... It was nice.

"You're so weird," I added.

"I have a question..."

"What?"

"I might go back to my pack to make sure they're in order. I'm not staying or anything—"

"What's the question?"

"Will you stay here?"

A frown immediately appeared on my face. "Why? I want to see them!"

"Why do you think? You're my mate—my *human* mate. I'm nervous about their reaction, whether it's good or bad."

"Why, though?"

"If it's good, they'll drill me with questions about why I won't return as Alpha. If it's bad, a riot will happen because you're human. I don't know what state they’re in, I only know a lot of them have left."

"Fine," I pouted, disappointed I couldn't go on this journey with him. I was curious. "I'll be alone here, then?"

"Lola should be back by then."

I left the room and made my way to our bedroom. "When are you going?"

"Tomorrow or the next day," he spoke, obviously following behind me. I sat on the bed and looked up at him. His eyes fell to my clothes on the floor before raising both eyebrows. "I see you've made yourself at home."

"I mean, if you want me to go back to sleeping in my room, tha—"

"No," he said quickly, and I laughed. If anyone said they loved someone this early on, it would be weird, but I knew I was mated for life with him. Honestly, it still hadn't full sunken in; I felt like one day it was going to hit me like a bomb, and I'd probably freak out. For now, though, I was content and happy knowing I'd be with him.

He was still the same arrogant, stubborn Xavier, but he had opened up more and was more affectionate. Although he rarely let me out of his sight—he was very protective, even when he didn't need to be. Whether it was because I was human or just his mate, it was frustrating sometimes while also being cute.

"What are you thinking about?" He cocked his head to the side.

"Us."

"What about us?"

"How much you adore me, obviously."

"Narcissist." He rolled his eyes before picking the clothes up and throwing them on the bed. I wiggled my feet before crawling over to his dresser and searching it.

"Get out of there." He grabbed me and pulled me back, shutting it. "What are you doing?"

"Looking for a condom for tonight."

He scrunched up his face. "I hate condoms."

"I'm not on the pill."

"I'll pull out." I narrowed my eyes, and he sighed. "Fine."

"Good boy." I patted his head, and he rolled his eyes.

Sorry, Xavier—I was not prepared for wolf-bear babies. Yet.

**Episode 56**

A vibration woke me from my nap, and I sat up in bed, blinking furiously. I wiped the drool off my lower lip, scrunching up my face in disgust. I momentarily forgot what woke me until another buzz made me reach under the covers and pull out my phone. I blinked, my hazy eyes attempting to make out the caller I.D.

A huge smile grew on my face when I saw the name and immediately answered.

"MOM!" I yelled down the phone. "How are you!?" I had texted my parents since I got here, but I had only had two phone calls, and they were from my father. Don't get me wrong—I loved him, but it was great being able to hear my mother.

"How are you, pet?" Her voice was so calm and soothing. I couldn't stop the smile forming on my face. I glanced around, thankful Xavier wasn't here. I knew he'd call me lazy if he caught me napping…I tended to do it often.

"I'm great, Mom. I have huge news. I mean, I don't know if I should tell you, but I'm going to anyway. I have a boyfriend," I stated proudly.

"You finally got a guy?"

"*Finally*? Really?" I scowled at her choice of words. "And before you ask, no, I didn’t beg him. He's handsome, too. Gorgeous-looking and all mine." I couldn't stop myself from wiggling in excitement, proud of my achievement.

I wasn't dumb enough to reveal he was a wolf-bear, though.

"I'm so happy for you, darling." She had such a soft voice, it could make anyone fall asleep. "Make sure he treats you well, and be safe."

My face heated at her words—I knew what she meant by that. I hesitated, my brow furrowing when I realized my mother ignored my first question. I opened with *How are you?* but she deflected and instead asked how I was. My hand tightened around the mobile, and my heart sped up. "Mom?"

"Yes, pet?" Her voice wasn't soft...it was *weak*.

"Mom...how are you?" Silence. My eyes were already watering, and I attempted to swallow the lump in my throat. "Mom...answer me. How are you?"

"I'm alive, darling." A small chuckle came from her. "I wanted to hear your voice. I miss you so much."

Tears were streaming down my face. *I'm alive.* You can't just say that to your daughter. That's not the right answer.

"Mom! You're supposed to say you're fine! You're fine, right?" A sob broke through my throat, and I knew I should have remained calm—I knew this would upset her—but I couldn't help it. Had I seriously tried to pretend things were okay?

"Listen, Caliana..." Her voice cracked slightly, and I could tell she was trying not to cry. "You don't need to worry about anything, okay? I—"

"No, Mom, I—"

She breathed heavily. "You enjoy your holiday. I'm okay. I called to say hello, okay? Y—" Her words were cut off by coughing. Heavy coughing that made my heartbeat quicken before I heard a door open on the other end.

I could hear my father's voice in the distance—it sounded frantic. He was asking what was wrong and who she was talking to.

"It's only Caliana, darling." Her voice was raspy after her coughing fit.

I heard some fumbling, a few words exchanged between my parents, before my father's voice appeared on the phone. "Caliana?"

"Dad," I breathed. "How's Mom? Really."

"She's fi—"

"Don't you dare say *fine*," I snapped. "Don't you dare! Tell me what's wrong." Tears soaked the bed and my clothes already; my nose was running, and I reached out for a box of tissues.

"Your mother's been moved down on the list...."

"What? No! Why? That's not fair! She's been waiting ages—you paid money to get her to the top of the list."

"Caliana, calm down." My father's voice shook, clearly nervous.

"NO, I'LL CALL THEM! THAT'S NOT FA—"

"You can't do anything if you get angry at them. It'll only make it worse. Please, don't make your mother stressed."

"She needs that transplant, Dad," I sobbed, going into hysterics. "She needs it, you know it, too!"

"Look, baby. We'll get it sorted—worry about yourself for now."

"Worry about myself when Mom is *dying*? Are you serious?!" I wiped my eyes once more; they were beginning to burn from the continuous rubbing. "I'm dropping out of college. I don't want to go—"

"You aren't. You don't need to, honey." He paused. “Your mother’s calling me, hold on.”

I waited a few minutes, my heart racing. Had something happened in those few seconds? Was she all right?

“You have a boyfriend?” When my dad’s voice returned, and when he asked the question, I sighed. Had my mother really—

"Caliana," my father cut off my train of thought.

"Yes, but that's not the issue right now." I sighed.

"He better not be—"

"Dad. *Not* the issue. He's great to me; you don't need to worry. He's not a bad influence." I wiped my eyes.

"Sorry, but I’m always worried about you." He sighed and before I could respond, there was coughing in the background. Bad coughing, and my father's rushed words stressed me out. "I'll call you back in a bit, Caliana."

Then he hung up.

I stared at my phone in my hand, my tears spilling down my cheeks. Everything was so good until reality hit me again. Who did I think I was, being happy for myself when this was happening back home?

"DAMMIT!" I screamed and threw my phone to the side, tears streaming down my face. When no crash sound came, I turned my head, my eyes landing on Xavier, who caught the phone in one hand just before it landed on the ground.

"Caliana." His voice was softer than usual. I tried to stop my tears, embarrassed by how I looked, but I couldn't. "What's wrong?"

My eyes flashed up to him, and I hesitated. I was about to spill it all out, but I knew what he'd do. He'd give me the money, but I couldn't take it from him like I was charity.

It was for my mother, though. And I could pay him back. Eventually.

"Caliana…"

"I want to go home." The words slipped out. A hurt look crossed his face for a second, and he momentarily refused to look my way. "I didn't mean it li—"

"What's wrong?"

"I need to go home and see my mom."

"Why are you crying? I can help you if you tell me." He walked over and gently took my head in his hands. His thumb slid across my cheek, wiping a tear away, and for a second, I felt at peace. Relaxed.

Xavier was amazing.

"She's ill," I admitted. "Really ill."

"Ill?"

"She has a collapsed lung, and she needs a transplant..." I stopped myself from saying anything else. "But I just want to see her."

"I will take you to her. When do you want to go?"

"I want to go alone." My heart hurt when I said those words, but the expression he wore made it worse. I bit the inside of my cheek.

He looked upset, but he immediately pushed it away. "No, I'm coming"

"You can't. I'm not bringing you home to meet my parents yet, or they'll think I'm super serious about you."

"Are you not?" His brow furrowed.

I raised my hands. "I am! I'm totally down."

"Then why can’t I come with you?"

"They won't get this whole mate-bonding thing, Xavier. They think you're human—a normal boyfriend. They'll think we're moving way too fast."

"But…you do plan on staying with me?"

"Of course!" I said to stop him from doubting himself anymore. "As long as I'm alive, anyway."

A small smile grew on his face. "Then I'll come with you."

"What?" I sighed. "Did you not hear what I said?"

He frowned, but I couldn't help but smile. He was acting all pouty, and it was adorable. "But I want to."

"I'm just going to visit them. You're going to your pack, remember? I'll go to my parents while you're busy with that. I was going to be alone here anyway." I leaned up and pecked him on the lips.

He seemed hesitant and didn't answer.

"There's nothing to be worried about, Xavier."

"Promise you'll come back?"

That question caught me by surprise, and my brow furrowed instantly. "Come back? As in... Wait, do you think I'm running away? That I won't come back here?"

"I did kind of hold you captive," he mumbled, avoiding my gaze.

I bit my lip to hide my smile. He was worried I was leaving him... I stood and wrapped my arms around his neck. "I asked you to be my mate, remember?"

"Yeah, but I hinted at it."

"Yeah, but I love you." I always hated when people said the L-word early in relationships. This felt weird, though, like I was actually connected to him. I couldn't see any other guy in a romantic way, even if I wanted to.

I didn't want to admit it, but I felt attached to him; I didn't plan on telling him anytime soon.

"Okay." He sighed. "But Lola's going with you."

"I'm not a child," I huffed but was glad she'd come with me. I wanted to get back on the right track, and this little journey back to our home would help.

"How long will you be gone?"

"Two weeks, maybe?"

His jaw tightened. "Is there..." He didn't finish his sentence.

"Is there *what*?"

"Is there anyone I should be worried about?"

"Worri—what? XAVIER, I DON'T PLAN ON CHEATING!" I realized what he was also concerned about. "Idiot, I told you: I only want you."

"I'm just making sure!"

"Are there any girls I should be worried about?" I arched an eyebrow.

"Never."

"I trust you." I offered him a smile.

"I trust you," he responded calmly. I could see how awkward he was about this whole thing, and honestly, it was adorable. He was a very attractive man, yet when it came to these things, he acted like a child.

"And no backing out tonight," I added for good measure.

"Tonight?"

"My virginity." I scowled, and he slowly nodded. "I'm serious, Xavier. If you don't fuck me, maybe I'll have to find someone at home w—"

"Caliana!" His eyes narrowed, and I jumped. I stared at him, the corner of my lip twitching before I busted out laughing. He had actually gotten upset over a joke I was about to make.

"It's not funny," he grumbled.

"Xavier, it's a joke. I would never ever *ever*—I promise you." I leaned into him. "But please…let's do it tonight. I'll beg if I have to."

His eyes suddenly lit up. "You will?"

"What? No! It's a phrase."

"Oh." Okay, now that it was confirmed...and I knew what he was into…

I was nervous.

**Episode 57**

I stared at my suitcase in dismay. I had no sexy clothes—nothing. Why would I? I imagined this guy would be some creep when I made the original deal. The last thing I imagined was a hot wolf-bear who would turn out to be my mate.

The only relatively sexy thing I had was a lacy purple bra and underwear to match. Literally nothing else. I pulled them out and walked into the bathroom, changing into them and dropping my other ones in the laundry basket.

When I looked in the mirror, my face heated. I turned to look at the back before turning to the front. I actually looked...not terrible. I trailed the design, nibbling my lip nervously. I had never felt sexy before, but this made me look decent. I pulled on my pink fluffy robe and covered myself, feeling a bit too indecent to walk around without it.

I scowled at the mirror. I did *not* look attractive in this robe—I looked like a pink marshmallow. An old, gross, pink marshmallow, and after looking at the outfit under this, the robe was a downgrade. I opened the door, walking back into the room before freezing when I saw Xavier glancing at my suitcase.

"Get out, you nosy dog!" I said, diving onto my suitcase. I shoved him away and closed it before pulling it off the bed and onto the ground.

"Why are you wearing that?" he asked, tugging at the robe. My eyes widened, and my face immediately grew warm, thinking of the lacy undergarments the robe hid underneath.

I had momentarily felt good in them, but now, I suddenly felt insecure. What if he thought I looked weird or I was putting too much effort into it? I needed to change now! I turned and looked up to him. "Nothing."

"I asked *why* you’re wearing that...and you said nothing?" He tilted his head. "What’s underneath?"

"Don't." I slapped his hand away when he tried to open it, and he frowned.

"Are you naked?"

"No!"

"Then why are you hiding?"

"I'm not."

"Yes, you—" He paused. "Are you wearing something you don't want me to see you in? Sorry. Something you wanted me to see you in, but now you've grown insecure and don't want me to?"

I stared at the man who was clearly a psychic. "Edward Cullen."

"What?"

"Nothing."

He blinked before reaching down again, holding the belt of the robe that kept it tied together. "I want to see."

"I don't want you to see."

"It was your idea to have sex, Cali."

"Yeah, but I want to change now!" I groaned, my hand on top of his to stop him from opening my robe.

He tilted his head before guiding me back until I landed on the bed. He leaned down, planting a small kiss on my lips. "I want to see you."

My whole body tensed. *Don't die.*

"Please."

I removed my hand from his own with a sigh, averting my eyes, and he knew this was my way of saying yes. My cheeks warmed as he undid the soft belt of the robe, then stopped. "Are you sure?"

"What?"

"If you really don't want me to, I won't."

I couldn't help but chuckle at his caring attitude. "It's fine, Xavier."

He pulled it off without another question, clearly not hiding how interested he was. My stomach turned over when the air hit my half-naked body. I counted to ten in my head, but he still hadn't responded. I looked up at him with a frown but paused when I noticed some color in his cheeks. He momentarily made eye contact with me, but he instantly broke it.

He mumbled something, and my brow furrowed. "What?"

"I can't explain how I feel right now, apart from I don't want to ever let another guy so much as touch you. Or take you..." He grumbled. "You're perfection." I bit my lip at his words, and he smiled. "And as gorgeous as you look in those right now, I want to rip them off you."

"Don't! They're the only pretty ones I have."

He lifted me before putting me back on the bed so my head was on the pillow, then crawled on top of me. "I want to do things to you that you can't even imagine," he growled. He leaned down and planted a kiss on my lips, which turned a bit needier as his tongue trailed my bottom lip before entering my mouth. Our tongues battled and without realizing it, my fingers were already knotted in his hair.

Xavier wasn't going to get away this time—this would FINALLY be the goddamn night.

His hands trailed down from my face to my body, and I froze at the snapping sound. "XAVIER!" I shoved him off, staring at my now broken bra in his hand. "I TOLD YOU NOT TO!"

"You're hot," he mumbled, his eyes no longer on my face.

I covered myself instantly. "I'm going to kill you."

"I'll buy you a new set, don't worry."

"You—" I sighed, deciding not to even argue. I wasn't going to lie; I was very nervous right now.

He reached down to my hands and slowly removed them from my chest. "I want to see you." God, how could he sound so cute yet so seductive at the same time?

Xavier leaned in and continued the kiss, but this time his hands had found new territory. My whole body flinched as he held my breast in his hand roughly, molding and playing with it.

Keep in mind, little virgin Caliana had never been touched like this, and it felt like my head was going to explode. My whole body jumped when I felt his…bulge against me.

This was happening. Oh my god.

“Calm down.” He pulled back, brushing my hair away from my face. “If you don’t wa—”

“I want to!” Great. Now I looked desperate.

“Okay.” He chuckled. “We’ll take it slow. If I pull off my boxers, are you going to freak out and run?”

“Stop making fun of me. Of course I won’t,” I grumbled, and he pushed himself off me.

He did it with no shame. As if he didn’t fucking show me his dick, as if it were just…normal to whip it out. I averted my eyes immediately, my face bright red.

I WAS MAKING THIS MORE AWKWARD THAN IT SHOULD BE. NOW WHAT?! Oh my god, this wasn’t how it went in porn.

“Do I need to do something?” I turned back to him and made sure to keep my eyes on his face, not on his member.

“Do something? It’s already hard.”

“I know it is!” I snapped. “I mean to…make it easier to put it in.”

He stared at me before bursting out laughing. HOW COULD HE JUST SIT THERE, NAKED AND LAUGHING?! My face was on fire.

“Caliana, you’re making me wear a condom. Why the hell would you need to suck my dick if I’m wearing one?”

“DON’T SAY IT SO CASUALLY,” I screeched, blocking my ears.

He pulled me up roughly, the smile gone from his face. “But if you still want to—”

“Shut up.” I covered his mouth, and when I felt his dick against my stomach, I think I melted. I involuntarily wiggled away, and the corner of his lip twitched.

“Are you sure you want to do this?”

“Of course! I’m just not as experienced as you.” I groaned before pulling out a condom and passing it to him. “Put this on!”

“You don’t want to do it for me?”

“Am I supposed to?”

“I’m teasing you.” He chuckled and took it from me, ripping it open. I turned away, allowing him to put it on himself, humming quietly.

“You can’t even look at my dick, and you expect me to fuck you?”

“I’m sorry, I’m nervous,” I grumbled. He pushed me back down before slowly pulling off my panties, making me squirm. Okay, this was happening. This was a thing. Okay.

“Calm down, I’m not doing it yet.” He sighed at my squirming.

“Then why do you need to pull them down already?” I grumbled.

“You do realize questioning me nonstop is ruining the mood…”

“Sorry.” I sighed, lying back. Goosebumps arose on my arms, the hair on the back of my neck stood, and I was shocked I didn’t have a fit right then and there when I felt his warm breath against my core. “WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!” I squealed, trying to squirm away, but he grabbed my thighs to hold me in place. I stared down at him; his face was inches away from me.

“Eating you out? To hel—”

“DON’T SAY IT OUT LOUD,” I announced, slapping his forehead.

“Then shut up and let me do it. It’ll help,” he grumbled.

“W—”

He didn’t wait. His tongue caused a sensation I had never felt before. My whole body jerked when he began playing with my clit, and as I shifted to relieve the pressure, his grip on my thighs tightened.

My hands gripped the bed sheets. I leaned back and shut my eyes, breathing heavily.

When he noticed me relax, he didn’t slow down. Instead, he went all in. His warm breath mixed with his tongue, exploring my nether regions, causing my thighs to shake. My hand dropped down, grabbing his hair and holding him there.

My hips involuntarily rose against him, begging for more. I was biting my lip as hard as possible, trying to stop unwanted noises from escaping. My thighs were tight, my breaths heavy, and suddenly he was gone. My eyes flashed open, and I stared at him, blinking slowly. “What…WHY DID YOU STOP?”

“Because you looked like you were about to come.” He frowned.

“Stop saying such lewd stuff!”

“YOU ASKED!”

“Just say a different reason!” I snapped. “I want more”

“No,” he said.

“No?! Xavier…”

“Stop being greedy.”

“I want mooooooore,” I whined, wrapping my legs around him. “Please.”

“It’s cute when you beg.”

I scowled. “I take back what I said.”

He crawled up, planting kisses along my body as he went. His lips stopped over my breasts, and I squeaked when he bit lightly on my nipple. It was a small, shocking pain, but it felt *good*. My hand involuntarily went to my other breast, but he stopped me instantly.

He gave me attention with his own hands, letting mine rest. I shut my eyes, my hand going to the back of his head. His tongue swirled around the hard bud with ease, and he definitely knew it was driving me crazy; I felt his lips turn up into a smile.

For once I didn’t care and just stayed silent. But I couldn’t help the small whimpers that came from me.

When his mouth left my breast, the cool air helped the pleasure. He trailed kisses on my jawline. “Feel good?”

I nodded quickly. “But you’re going too quick…”

He smiled at my reaction. “Caliana, as long as you stay with me, I can guarantee I will give you this pleasure whenever you want. Let’s just look at this as a sample of what you signed up for being with me.”

That was true. I wanted more of the sample, though.

“Are you sure you’re ready?” he asked quietly, pulling back to look down at me. I nodded. I had been a tiny bit unsure, but right then, everywhere was throbbing. I was trying to stay calm, but if this man didn’t hurry, I was going to pin him down.

My breath hitched when I felt his length rub against my slit, and my grip on him tightened. He raised his eyebrows, and I nodded again. “I’m fine.”

“You sure?”

“Positive.”

He continued to grind against me until I couldn’t handle it anymore. “Please stop teasing,” I whimpered, tired of this charade.

A small smile appeared on his lips. “You’re quite the horny bunny,” he murmured quietly, causing me to blush.

“Shut up!” I narrowed my eyes. “You were all talk, saying it was going to be tough to control yourself, yet here you are all chill about it.” I hesitated. “I think your body count is higher than you say it is.”

He cocked his head to the side, smiling. “Nope, it is what I said.” His thumb clipped past my lip. “As for tough to control…I can guarantee you, if you weren’t a virgin, I would not be going this slow.”

I pursed my lips, my face warming slightly. He made me feel unnatural—somehow my stomach was always flipping. “Enough talking,” I mumbled. I didn’t want to shout at him to hurry, but I was on the edge of bursting now.

He smiled at my impatience but nodded willingly. This was honestly calmer than I expected. Seeing how rough he usually was, I hadn’t expected him to really care about my side. He was sweet.

My whole body jumped when I felt him line his member up, making me lose control. I let out a yelp when he grabbed my legs and put them over his shoulders, causing me to stare up at him like an animal in a trap.

“It’ll help.” He promised.

“How—” I stopped my question and shook my head, allowing him to continue.

“You tell me to fuck you, but you keep asking questions, Caliana.” He sighed, shaking his head.

“I’m sorry,” I grumbled, clearly uneducated about this whole thing. I was awkward—too awkward. Probably why I was a virgin until now.

He pushed in without warning, filling me. My hands gripped the covers, and I let out a small whimper, and he stopped immediately. I looked back up at him—something was different now. He looked like he was struggling. He sucked in a small breath and shut his darkened eyes, exhaling.

“I’m good,” I confirmed before he could even ask.

This time it was slower as he began to push in. It caused a sensation I had never experienced before, and although it was painful, it also felt good.

I bit my lip as he continued to spread me out, filling me up inch by inch. Now and again, he would stop, waiting for me to adjust to him. It was sweet of him to do it, but it was obvious how much he struggled to go slow.

When he began to pull out, I panicked and locked my legs around him. He blinked in confusion before chuckling. “Caliana, I’m not pulling out. Thrusting is a thing in sex.”

My face lit up at his words. He was way too forward with all of this. He gave me a few moments to adjust to his length, and even then, he didn’t go all the way. As he continued to try to get me used to him, I shut my eyes. The pain was no doubt still there—clearly, he was bigger than the average human.

IT REALLY FUCKING HURT. A LOT. BUT FELT GOOD. I WAS SO FUCKING CONFUSED.

Was it because he was a wolf-bear? But he knew how to act with me, seeing as it was my first time.

I hadn’t even realized I was moaning until I saw the satisfied grin on his face, which only made me blush. A sharp pain on my thigh caused me to wince, and I glanced there to see his hand holding me tighter than he probably should be.

He loosened his grip when he realized what he was doing, his face dropping. “Sorry.”

My cheeks were burning. I didn’t even know if they were my own moans leaving my throat because I was hypnotized. I reached up, my hand on the side of his cheek. “You don’t need to hold back, you know?”

Maybe I should have worded that a bit more carefully, because the moment I said that, something in him snapped. He caught this and attempted to regain his composure, but his jaw tightened. He leaned down and planted a kiss on my lips that turned from sweet and soft to rough and passionate. He did this as a distraction, speeding up his pace.

My hands left the sheets and wrapped around him, my nails digging into his back. Unstoppable moans broke from my throat. He caught onto the idea that I was too out of it to be able to return the kiss, so he led his lips down, trailing my jaw, then my neck.

My back arched as he continued his slow but rough thrusts, not being able to hold back the moans that threatened to escape my lips.

He suckled on my skin, nipped at it lightly. The grunts and groans that came from his lips as his thrusts sped up turned me on even more than before.

My eyes were beginning to water, and it felt as if my body was about to spasm. My breathing was shallow, and my legs shook without warning.

“Good girl,” he growled into my ear, which almost sent me over the edge.

My back arched, and a strangled whimper left my throat, attempting to grind up into him, but to my dismay, he held me down. His kisses returned to my lips, and I opened my eyes to see him above me. His eyes were clouded with lust.

“You’re still Xavier?”

He blinked, and his brow furrowed. “What the fuck? Of course I am—way to ruin the mood.”

I couldn’t help but grin at the way I ruined it. It was my talent.

He thrust up into me all the way, and I screamed out, my body attempting to rise, but he made sure to pin me down. “I deserved that,” I mumbled sheepishly. I expected another casual reply until I felt he reached down and massaged my clit. It felt like an electric shock ran through my body, and a soft moan left my lips, almost feeling lightheaded.

“You’re close,” he whispered into my ear, and I involuntarily nodded. “Come for me, Caliana.” He nibbled my ear, and that was all I needed. From all the attention he was giving me, it sent me over the edge. The words made something click in me, and even if I wanted, I didn’t think it was possible to hold back.

Uncontrollable sounds left my lips as my whole body shook. I leaned up into him, biting and nibbling on his neck to muffle my sounds as I rode out my orgasm. I felt as if I were about to pass out, and when it finally ended, I was honestly upset about it.

“Why was it so short?! I wanted longer.” I tried to shout the words, but they barely came out as a whisper, my energy drained.

“It was your first time.” he sighed. “You know, a lot of the time girls have to fake orgasms, so be happy.”

“Oh…” I couldn’t properly respond, feeling out of it.

“I love you and all, and you look tired,” he leaned down, “but you’re going to help me finish.”

His demanding tone was enough to bring me back to reality and make me warm. The feeling of him still inside me. The sound of him pounding me every time as our skin connected—his grunts, the look on his face was enough to make me lightheaded all over again.

How this man managed to do that without even trying…

“For someone who’s supposed to have animalistic ways, I’ve seen guys on porn fuck harder than you.” It took everything in me to be able to put the sentence together, but it was for his benefit. I knew he was holding back, and I’d rather him fully enjoy himself, too.

My eyes widened when I saw the fire in him.

He looked like a predator, cataloging his prey. “I mean…” His words were cut off slightly from his own moans. “I was going to go easy on you, but if that’s not what you want…”

“It’s not.”

With those words, whether I’d regret them or not, Xavier was going to have his way.

**Episode 58**

"Sore," I whined, staring up at the ceiling. I turned my head to the right and saw Xavier staring at me. His long dark eyelashes were beautiful, and he blinked like a lost puppy.

"I told you."

I had attempted to get out of bed and...my thighs and groin weren't feeling the best. It was kind of like when you pulled a muscle. A large arm wrapped around my waist and pulled me over. "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine, just a bit sore."

"Are you sure?" He raised the covers and looked me over. "I'm sorry."

My eyes fell to the scrapes on my body and the love bites that covered my skin. "Why are you sorry?"

"For hurting you."

"Did you not enjoy it?"

He blinked. "I'm trying to stay calm."

"Stay calm?"

"I want to fuck you so hard right now...it was amazing." His grip tightened on his pillow. "I'm just making sure you're okay."

A small smile appeared on my face. Honestly, I was trying to act cool about all this when inside I was so excited. Sure, it had hurt a bit and I was sore now, but it was beyond amazing.

I nodded. "I loved it."

His eyes lit up. "Then…"

"I am not ready for round two." I slapped his forehead lightly.

"Sorry, though...for losing control a bit."

I leaned in, planting a soft kiss on his lips. "You couldn't help it. And I told you I was expecting it."

"I love you so much, Caliana."

My eyes widened at the L-word. I mean, I knew I loved him…but to hear him say it so *boldly*. "Am I not supposed to say that?" He tilted his head.

"No, it's just...for humans, saying that word now is a bit quick," I admitted. "It took me by surprise." Even though I had said it already, too.

"I'm not sorry for saying it, though." He shrugged. "I do love you and want to spend forever with you."

My cheeks lit up, and my heart beat faster. "Really?"

"Of course." His brow furrowed. "You *are* my mate..."

It still felt unrealistic to me that a man like him would go for me. Not only that, but he literally planned to stay with me forever.

"If you ever cheat on m—"

"I cannot," he said. "Not on my mate. Ever. I would never even look at another girl."

"Apart from our daughter, right?"

"You want a daughter?"

"NO, IT WAS A JOKE." I shoved my hand in his face, embarrassed by how relaxed he sounded about us having children. Although it made me panic, it was reassuring in a way. It showed he was serious about staying with me.

"Oh, I see." He hesitated. "It's a terrible joke."

"It's not. I hate you sometimes."

"The way you acted last night—"

"Stop." I narrowed my eyes. "Don't say anything."

"I love you."

"Xavier!" I put my face in my hands, my cheeks on fire. He was doing this to get me in a fluster, and it was working. The bed creaked, and I peeked through my hands to see Xavier getting up.

I attempted to follow, but he glanced to me immediately. "No, stay."

"What? Why?"

"I'll run you a bath."

My brow furrowed. "What?"

"Online, it said it helps. You know, after sex." He glanced away, and honestly if he had his wolf ears right now, they would be resting against his head shyly. A wide smile grew on my face.

"Did you really look online just to see how to make me less sore?"

"What if I did?" He scowled.

"It's really sweet."

"You're weird." He began leaving the room. "Stay."

"Okay, Daddy."

His eyes widened at the joke I made, and immediately he left. The corner of my lip twitched, trying to bite back the smile. I laid back in the bed, wiggling in excitement.

I finally lost my virginity. And the man who took it was a man I loved and hoped to spend my whole life with. I understood it seemed quick that I wanted to spend the rest of my life with him. I thought I'd never be like this, but something changed the moment we became mates. I was attached to him.

I shut my eyes, the smile refusing to fade from my face.

A pinch made my eyes flash open, and I scowled up at Xavier. "Why?"

"The bath's ready."

"How?"

"I turned on water..."

"That was quick."

"You fell asleep."

"I di— What?" My brow furrowed, not even realizing I dozed off. I pushed myself up and attempted to stand, hiding the grimace.

"I'll carry you."

"You will not." There was no point in even arguing with him, because before I could speak, I was already in his arms. I let out a squeak before glaring at him and hitting the side of his arm lightly.

He didn't even care. He had no issues as he carried me toward the bathroom. Maybe it was his super wolf-bear powers.

I raised my eyebrows when I noticed the bath was bubbly. He set me down in it, wetting his own arms and covering them in suds before standing back up. The water was a bit hot at first, but once my body got used to it, it was glorious. I snuggled in under the bubbles, an involuntary but happy moan coming from me. My muscles relaxed instantly. I shut my eyes and rested my head back.

"Don't fall asleep." His voice was gruff. "You'll drown."

"Thanks for the advice." I rolled my eyes, and he chuckled in response. He walked over and pulled the toilet lid down so he could sit on it. My eyes flashed open at the sound of it closing, and I glanced over to him. "What are you doing?"

"Sitting?"

"WHY ARE YOU SITTING DOWN HERE?"

"To watch you."

"That's weird."

"No, it's not."

"Yes, it is. Don't just sit on a toilet lid and stare at me."

"But I like looking at you." I sank lower in the bath so he wouldn't see my smile. He tilted his head. "Do you want me to leave?"

"You don't have to," I mumbled, bubbles arising since my mouth had been partially underwater. "But I'm not going to talk—I'm relaxing."

"That's fine," he said calmly. I shut my eyes for a moment, diving into my thoughts. My hands played with the bubbles as I let myself soak. I didn't feel the need to wash my hair—I'd have a shower after or something. This was just for relaxing.

After a few minutes, I opened my eyes and glanced over to Xavier, surprised to find he was still watching me. I raised my eyebrows. "You're acting strange."

"Strange?"

"Don't get me wrong, I know we're together now and stuff, but you've switched from distant to...not distant so quickly. You don't need to put this act on now," I commented.

He didn't say anything for a moment, but a small smile appeared on his lips, and he shook his head. "Humans are so...behind."

"Behind?" I scowled. "I take offense to that"

"I just mean so uneducated about my kind."

"Maybe because we don't know you exist."

"True," he mumbled before sighing. "I guess you could say I'm…attached."

"Attached?"

"There are a few animals that mate for life, right? Swans, gibbons—"

"Wolves?"

He nodded. "Since I’m part wolf, my kind takes on their traits."

"So…since we had sex, you're more in love with me?"

He was silent for a moment before smiling. "I guess you could say that. It's my wolf trait coming out."

"Wow. If only humans were like that—there would be no cheating whatsoever." I sighed.

"Do you not feel attached to me?"

"I do! I definitely do—I adore you. I'm talking about guys, though. They always seem to cheat, and girls, too, I guess. I'm just saying I wish this mate thing was more popular, you know?"

"I'm sorry for acting like this."

"What do you mean?"

"Possessive."

"It's kind of hot." I said it before I could even think about the words. My cheeks lit up. Honestly, I knew possessive guys could be unhealthy and toxic, but as long as they weren't abusive, I found the trait to be hot.

To have someone worry over you, to want to protect you and want you all to themselves and no one else...it was super attractive to me.

"I didn't mean that." I groaned, sinking back into the water, but he was already smiling at my response. I narrowed my eyes and glared at him, not amused that he found my answer funny.

I wasn't going to lie. I was going to miss him big time when I went home.

"Are you excited to go back?"

"Yeah, I want to see my parents. Especially my mom since she's not feeling her best."

"If your parents didn't live there, would you want to go back?"

"What?"

"I don't know." He paused before leaning back. "Are there any males you were interested in? Before you met me."

"Why ask me that?"

"Curious."

"I mean, kind of, kind of not."

His eyes flashed open. "Oh? When was that?"

"Before I came here?"

"Right before you came here?" His brow furrowed.

"Yeah. He was the person I had been messaging, although he was way more into me than I was him."

"I am not surprised."

"What?"

"That he was way more into you." My cheeks lit up at the strangely worded compliment, but I stayed quiet. "Are you excited to see him?"

My eyebrows pulled together. "I mean...sure. Alex is a friend."

"How excited?"

"Not as excited as seeing my parents or home. Just want to make sure Alex is okay."

"Does he know you're not single?"

"No. I stopped talking to him when I became interested in you."

"You don't like him anymore? At all?"

"I was never really super attracted to him. Like I said, he likes me. The only reason I was kind of interested was because he was the first guy who actually liked me."

"So…I shouldn’t be worried at all when you go home?"

I turned to look at him now, my eyes widening. "You're really worried I'll cheat on you?"

"I'm more worried about him trying to make a move, but yes."

"I said no." It came out as a strained laugh. "You idiot. I'm head over heels for you, I don't care for Alex anymore."

He spoke slowly. "I don't like him."

"You don't know him."

"He likes you."

"*Liked*. He's probably over me. I've left him on *read* one too many times—you don't have to worry."

When he didn't look happy, I let out a small sigh. "Lola will keep an eye on me, too, and report back to you every night."

"No, it's fine. I trust you," he grumbled.

"Good." I laid back in the bath, closing my eyes.

"Will you send nudes?"

"I'm ignoring you now."

I seriously was going to miss this idiot.

∞

I couldn’t believe I was leaving tomorrow to go back home. It was only for a week or two—I wasn't certain yet. It would be determined by how I felt when I was there. I walked into the bedroom, wearing only a dressing down over my bra and panties. A few hours in the bath, and I wasn't as sore and stiff as this morning. I had grown used to it now.

Xavier came in behind me, his hair all messed up after his shower. He looked down at me in a curious manner before offering me a small smile and a kiss on my forehead.

I was going to miss him, big time. "Lola will be here tomorrow," he commented. "Early."

"I thought she was coming back tonight," I questioned, but he shook his head.

"She said tomorrow."

I narrowed my eyes, immediately knowing why. She was aware Xavier had just taken my virginity. Not only that, but I informed her how amazing it was and how much I was going to miss him when I left.

She wasn't coming tonight because she wanted to give us another night alone. Luckily for me, he hadn't actually caught on yet. The towel was wrapped around his waist, so the rest of his body was on display, and my god, it was *perfection*. My eyes went from his v-line to his abs to his pecks, and then to...his eyes.

My cheeks lit up when I noticed him watching me with a curious expression, one eyebrow arching.

I turned away immediately, staring at a blank space on the wall.

"I'm your mate; you don't need to be embarrassed when you look at me," he commented, and I slowly turned back to him.

"I wasn't looking at you."

"Sorry, checking me out. Is that a better term?" The smirk he wore made me sigh and raise my middle finger. I walked around to him and stared up at him with narrowed eyes. "Hello?" he said, obviously confused.

I reached out and grabbed Xavier’s hand, placing it on my breast immediately after opening my dressing gown. I offered him a bright smile. “Your reward,” I stated boldly, allowing his large hand to rest on my chest. “For the bath earlier.”

His brow furrowed instantly, and I smiled. I loved taking him by surprise, and it was happening more and more lately. This was so much more than him just knowing I was half-naked under my gown; he was touching me now, and his gaze was strong.

Xavier tensed. “Cal,” he said, obviously trying to stay calm before squeezing me softly, his fingertips slowly sinking in, warmly pressing against the skin before he continued to speak. God, it felt so *good*. “Do you seriously need to keep turning me on like this?” I almost laughed; it was obvious he was pointing out he was rock hard. Again.

I did it so casually, and I was so proud of myself. After we’d had sex the night before, it was so freeing to do little things like this with him. However, when Xavier tightened his grip, my breath immediately quickened, a small whimper leaving my lips.

I was only dragged back to reality when I focused in on the words he had just said. My eyes fell to his crotch, noticing the huge bulge instantly. I stared in surprise for a moment before I burst out laughing. “You really are simple, getting excited over the smallest things,” I teased.

Xavier raised his eyebrow rather quickly at my words, probably thinking I was trying to play this off. And…I was. But the look in his eyes told me he wasn’t going to let me get out of this, not now that I had started it. Good thing I didn’t want out of it.

“Last time I checked, you know how easy it is for you to turn me on. Are you trying to excite me on purpose?” It almost sounded like he was angry at first until he gave me a small grin—it was so cute. “Two can play at that game, you know.”

I chuckled at what he said, at first, until he slipped his hand from my breasts and down to my bare abdomen. Lower and lower, turning so his fingers reached down and slipped under my panties. *Holy shit.*

Without giving me a chance to speak, Xavier slipped his index and middle finger into my wetness. A glint shone in his eye immediately, smirking as he felt how turned on I was. He’d barely started touching me, but I was already coming undone, and as much as I hated that cocky look on his face, I didn’t want him to stop.

The moment Xavier’s fingers slipped to somewhere I hadn’t expected, I jumped slightly. My thighs tightened and my legs felt wobbly. In an instant, I reached out for his arm, steadying myself, my smaller hands clinging to Xavier almost desperately.

A small scowl formed on his lips after I had tightened and closed my legs, cutting him off. Xavier was no longer able to slip his fingers inside of me. I took a deep breath and dropped the gown to the floor, making it obvious what I wanted. I rubbed my body against him, making him suck in a small breath.

“Take off your clothes,” he ordered.

Normally, I’d put up a fight and argue with him, just because I could, but for once I stood back, doing as I was told. This time, there was no hesitation; I undressed quickly, almost falling over because I was moving too fast on shaky legs.

Xavier sighed at my clumsiness but pulled me into him. I could feel him tense as my bare body rubbed against him, his bulge peeking out from under his towel. I bit back my own smirk of victory; for once, it was *his* face that was slightly red.

His movements stopped as he glanced down at me. “Caliana…are you okay to go on? I can’t stop if we keep going now…” I smiled at his words; it was obvious he was losing control around me, and I loved it. Being around him made me go over the edge, and it seemed the same was true as far as he was concerned.

But his words only made me want him more. I was in love with this needy side of him. I was in love with every side of him, but he was so desperate like this, and I loved it. His touch affected me like crazy, and it was amazing that mine seemed to do the same to him. My eyes lit up, and my grip tightened, rubbing against him. I noticed his hands ball up into fists as my breasts pressed to his bare chest.

I reached down, undoing his towel slowly so it dropped to the ground. “Just let me do this,” I purred quietly as he stood still, following my wish. I was shocked by how sexy my voice sounded, and it gave me even more confidence as he watched me with a curious expression on his face. It was one mixed with lust, but it was still sweet. Moments ago, Xavier had been concerned about me, how I felt after our fun last night.

But I could tell that seeing me like this, so bold and without a care, it only turned Xavier on more. “Okay,” he murmured softly, reaching down to my cheek and planting a small kiss on my lips. “I’ll pleasure you, since you’re such a good girl.”

The strange words made my cheeks light up, and I tapped his chest. “You’re so weird.”

Xavier smiled down at me, making me freeze. He was usually the one who said lewd things, but for once, I wanted to turn it around on him. I liked surprising him, and he would no doubt be surprised if I talked dirty to him. I smiled as the plan formed in my mind; I reached up, gripping his side slowly. “Xavier…” I murmured softly.

“Hm?”

“Can you do me a favor?”

“What’s that?”

“Bend me over and f—”

“Hush.” He silenced me immediately, causing me to glare at him.

“How come you can say things, but I can’t?!” I argued, shoving a finger at his chest roughly, in an accusing manner.

“Because if *you* say something like that, I’ll do it without thinking twice.” He said the words so casually, but there was so much truth behind them that my lips sealed almost immediately.

“Pervert,” he added with a small grin, causing me to scowl. Just from the look on my face, he returned his hand to my core, making me squeal. His hand brushed across my still-tightly-shut legs, and without warning, he parted them.

“Shut up and behave and moan to your heart’s content,” he joked, causing me to blush. Even from the stupid words he used to make fun of me, he was still a massive turn-on. He leaned in, parting my lips with his own, sucking tightly while his tongue swirled around.

His free hand went to my side, quickly leading up to my breasts once more. He spun us so he backed me until he pressed up against me, so I was forced to fall back and lay on the bed, and he leaned over me.

The fall had let him save some space to work between my legs, and he hadn’t missed the change, his fingers slipping into my wetness again, grinding against me. I whined against his lips, my small frame jerking slightly, but he easily kept me pinned down.

My back arched involuntarily, my free hand reaching down to the sheets and grabbing them tightly. I grumbled when I realized I had washed them after last night, so now I would have to do another load tomorrow…

*Speaking of load…*

A smile formed on Xavier’s face, the reaction my body gave him so much more than he wanted. Watching me grasp at the sheets desperately must’ve been incredibly sexy for him. His tongue left my mouth and rolled over the nape of my neck as his lips grazed my soft skin.

He’d begun to suckle as his tongue continuously slipped over me. His free hand ran up to my ample breasts, fingers brushing the side of my nipple as he squeezed and pinched me. His hand between my legs pounded fast against my pussy. The speed of his fingers jerked my insides, giving me no time to recover. “Look at you, Caliana,” he purred, teasing me. “Already so hot just from my touch… How good does it feel?”

Good. *So good*. Want-to-skip-my-flight-tomorrow good.

**Episode 59**

"I've decided I don't want you to go anymore," Xavier said, taking my suitcase from me.

Lola pulled it back instantly, glaring at him. "Let her have some freedom."

"I do! But I want her to stay!"

"You know, try to look a bit scarier when you meet the pack." Jay tapped Xavier's shoulder in a friendly manner before glancing to me. "What did you do to tame the beast?"

"We had sex, two night—"

"Xavier!" My cheeks lit up, and I clasped my hand over his mouth. Lola was already aware, and I was pretty sure Jay was too, but for Xavier to say it so openly made me get weird. He was too open about stuff. "What did I say about privacy?"

"Why?"

"*Why*? Because sex isn't something people talk about out of nowhere," I hissed.

"I want people to know you are mine."

"You can easily say I'm your girlfriend or mate. You don't need to announce we— I don't even know why I'm trying to persuade you."

Colton stood next to Jay. Of course he had hammered Xavier with questions when he found out, but now he looked distant. Although Colton and I weren't exactly the best of friends, seeing him act like this was worrying.

I walked over to him. "Are you okay?"

He glanced down to me, obviously in his own thoughts. "Yeah."

"Are you sure? You're not worried about a certain person?"

"Why would I be worried about you?" He pulled a face.

"I WAS TALKING ABOUT YOUR MATE," I snapped. "Besides, if I become Luna, you should be worried about me all the time."

He arched an eyebrow. "Have a safe flight, Caliana."

I stuck out my tongue and turned away, returning to Xavier. I pulled my suitcase from his hands again and wheeled it behind me. He kept taking it back, like that was going to stop me from going home. "I'll be back, I promise." I stood on my tiptoes and planted a quick kiss on his lips.

He disagreed with the quick kiss and instead grabbed me, holding me in place. He deepened the kiss, his tongue exploring my mouth, and I responded for a second before reminding myself we were in public.

My eyes widened, and I shoved him off me. "Bold."

"You responded."

"I forgot where we were."

"You guys are cute," Jay commented, glancing between us.

I turned to face him and narrowed my eyes. "You're still not in my good book."

Jay paused and just smiled in response, which made me more frustrated. I glanced at Lola, expecting her to comfort Jay, but she threw a smug smile his way, which he returned with the middle finger.

"This is getting too sappy for me—I'm out." Colton waved his hand and left the airport. I followed after him with my eyes, a frown forming once more. It was a surprise he had come to see me off, but he was acting so different lately.

I was never close with him, so in all honesty, it didn't really bother me. I was more concerned it would affect Xavier since they were so close.

"CALIANA!" My eyes widened at the shouting, and I glanced up to see Violet running toward me with her brother Lilac. I stared at them in confusion and paused when she hugged me. "Have a safe flight."

I stared at the teenager in surprise. The last time we had met, Lola had—

"YOU STABBED HER IN THE FOOT KNOWING SHE WAS IN YOUR PACK?!" I turned to Lola, staring at her with an accusing look. The pieces of the puzzle finally coming together.

"I didn't really know her. She wasn't in the pack when I was there, not really. The twins were brought in later than most—they weren't born into it."

"Still!"

"It's fine, it's all healed up." Violet shrugged.

Lilac scowled. "It's not fine—she was injured for no reason."

"I told her to stab me."

"Still—"

"Cut it out both of you," Xavier said, and everyone went silent. I stared up at him and arched an eyebrow, finding it a bit hot when he took on this authority role. He noted my expression and offered me a smirk, which made me glance away.

Since he finally took my virginity, I was...extremely turned on almost every time I looked at him. He obviously knew, which made it ten times worse.

The woman on the speaker announced our gate was opening, and it made my stomach flip. I was going home...

Xavier had not been happy when he found out he couldn't bring me straight to my flight. I leaned up and planted a quick kiss on the side of his lips.

His brow furrowed. "I don't want you to go."

"You've said that one hundred times. I have to. I'll be back before you know it. Good luck with your pack, Alpha." I patted his head and turned, but of course his arms wrapped around my waist and tugged me back into him.

"Have wet dreams of me," he grumbled next to my ear, and my eyes widened. If my face wasn't red before, it was definitely the color of a stoplight now. I almost melted in his arms. "I won't..." I walked stiffly away, trying to give him a casual wave.

Once we were out of sight, I let out a deep breath and received a judgmental and curious look from my best friend. "What was that about?"

"Nothing," I said all too quickly.

"He said something sexual, huh?"

"Not really," I lied through my teeth.

"How good was your first time? Did he hurt you?"

"WHY IS EVERYONE SO OPEN ABOUT THIS?!" I covered my face, blushing as the scene appeared in my mind. I wanted to shrivel into a ball and die if Lola kept talking about it.

"So...good?"

"Yes," I groaned, knowing she wouldn't give up until I filled her in. "Very good, but I was so embarrassed because I came way faster than I expected, and it was humiliating."

"You went from sharing no details to *a lot* of details," she pointed out before grinning. "Wow, he must be good in bed. You didn't fake it?"

"No, of course not!"

"And did he—"

"Yes, of course he finished, too! Stop asking questions."

"And he didn't hurt you?"

"I mean, not really. He went slow, even though I could see it took a lot of effort, but he's…big." I frowned. "Very intimidating."

"Jay's big..."

"WHY DO I NEED TO KNOW THAT?!"

"I think it's in their genes."

We continued talking about it until we finally boarded our plane. We said we'd talk more on the topic on the plane, then leave it alone after, but of course I fell straight to sleep in an instant before the plane even took off.

I didn't wake up until we landed, which honestly scared me because I thought we were crash landing. I glanced beside me and saw Lola reading a book. "Why are you reading that?" I grumbled, wiping my eyes.

She was reading the second book of the Twilight saga and glanced over at me. "This is the dumbest book ever, but I like it," she said. "Except for Edward."

"Only because your boyfriend is a wolf-bear," I grumbled, staring out the window as the plane was lining up to the terminal. My heart pounded when I realized we were on home turf before groaning when everyone began standing.

I hated crowds.

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"Did you call an Uber?" I yawned as we tugged our luggage behind us.

Lola shook her head, and I was about to question her until I raised my head and saw my father waiting next to his car. My eyes widened and, in an instant, I was in his arms.

"I missed you!" I said, my voice muffled by his jacket.

He pulled me back and stared at me. "Please tell me you didn't cut your holiday short."

"No, no. I was coming back for a bit."

"Is your boyfriend not with you?"

"Don't ask me that. If I brought him home straight away, you two would have scared him off!"

"That was the plan."

"Dad! Please. I'm serious about him."

"You barely know him."

"Before we met up, we talked for ages online. I do know him," I lied, and he gave me a questionable look.

"Is he ugly?"

"Seriously?" I rolled my eyes. "What a great way to welcome me back."

A small smile formed on his lips, and he glanced past me. "Lola! Long time no see"

I hesitated and made eye contact with my best friend. She offered him a wide smile, pulling him into her own hug without warning.

"I take it you took care of her on the trip?"

"Something like that." She chuckled, and we both got into the car. Once we were all in, we set off to home.

"Lola, do you need to be dropped at home?" he asked.

"If that's alright," she announced, obviously wanting to go home to her parents. "I'll meet up with you later, Cal." She understood I also wanted alone time with my mother.

The journey was filled with my dad questioning me about Xavier and the trip, and I made sure to keep my responses short. Lola's house was on the way to ours, so it wasn't a bother dropping her off.

"CALIANA, STOP!" my dad shouted when I opened the door as we began pulling into the driveway.

I was already out and shut the door behind me, racing to the front door. I checked if it was open, and thankfully it was, so I charged in and went to run up the stairs to my mother. "Down here, darling," she called.

I ran into the room where my mother was, and I stared at her, watching as she let out small breaths. The thing in her nose that helped her breathe made her look more ill. I didn't know the name—maybe a ventilator?

She also looked skinnier. She was tough, sure, but I knew it was going to be too much. Having cystic fibrosis then cancer was too much for one person to handle.

Luckily, they caught her cancer early, so it wasn't as bad as it could have been. She had beaten it once, but it had come back. Then, she’d beaten it again, and even though it was gone, I always had a feeling it would return.

It *would* return, and the treatment was super expensive. And now she needed a lung transplant we couldn't afford.

Guilt washed over me. I had gone to Xavier to get money for my mother, but all I did was get a boyfriend for myself.

"Did you hear me?"

"What?" I was pulled from my trance.

"Give me a hug." She opened her arms, and I immediately ran into them. I slowed right at the end to avoid hurting her. My father hated me seeing my mom like this because he knew how much it affected me.

"It's been too long, darling," she cooed before pulling back and tucking a piece of hair behind my ear. "You didn't bring your boyfriend?"

"No, I don't want you two scaring Xavier off yet." I chuckled, sitting next to her.

"What a fancy name..." She frowned. "I want to see him. Do you have pictures?"

"Yeah."

"No willy pics, please."

"MOM, NO! WE DON'T SEND THAT TYPE OF STUFF, WHAT THE HELL?" I felt my face light up. I turned on my phone and smiled when messages came in from Xavier.

*Have a safe flight.*

*Have you landed yet?*

*Are you safe?*

*Message me when you're off and let me know or call me. I'd rather that.*

I shook my head with a small smile. "How caring," My mother hummed, being nosy as usual, and I pulled my phone away to hide it. I scanned through my pictures and brought up one of Xavier. He was on his phone, his hair naturally messy, his face confused. It was adorable and one of my favorites.

I passed my phone to my mother. "That's him."

The doorbell rang right as she studied it, and I glanced up. "Who's that?"

"They're from the mental hospital. They're here to escort you."

*What?*

**Episode 60**

I turned to my mother in confusion. "MENTAL? WHAT?!"

She choked out a laugh before coughing. I stared at her in shock, not sure what was going on.

"Why? What is happening?"

"Because you think a model is your *boyfriend.*"

"Excuse me?"

"You're gorgeous, Caliana, but you can be a handful, and you’re very strange." She sighed. "I was expecting someone uglier…"

"Thank you, Mother, for that confidence boost." I scowled, making my sarcasm clear. "I'm serious, he's mine. Look." I swiped to another picture—a selfie I had forced him to take with me. Proof he was real, and I *wasn't* insane.

She studied it, her brow furrowing. "He's quite the looker," she commented.

"He's gorgeous," I said proudly.

"Are you sure he isn't a man who…plays around?"

"I'm sure! You'd love him if you met him," I argued before replying to his text, letting him know I made it safely. Almost instantly he responded, and I couldn't help but smile.

"You look like you're in love." She giggled. "How long have you known him?"

"Quite a while," I lied again.

Someone knocked on the door, and I turned around, expecting to see my dad. My eyes widened when I saw Alex standing there, a small smile on his face. "Welcome back."

"Hey!" I stood and walked over, pulling him into a hug. "I'm sorry I didn't call or text—I was super busy. I didn't even message my parents enough."

"No problem." He chuckled, standing back. "You enjoy yourself?"

"Yeah, it was great."

I glanced to my mother from the corner of my eye, watching her stand. "I'll leave you two be—I'll talk to you later, Cal." I glared at her, but she was gone too soon.

I turned back to Alex. "What are you doing here?"

"I was asking your parents about you…I was kind of worried. They told me you were coming home today, so I thought I’d drop by and see how you were."

"I'm good," I said, feeling slightly awkward. "How are you?"

"Good," he responded with a smile.

"Listen…Alex—"

"You have a boyfriend" So he *had* heard the conversation with my mom.

I glanced away, scratching my arm nervously to distract myself. "Yeah..."

"Is it serious?"

I nodded again. "Pretty serious."

"Have you known him long?"

"Kinda." I waved my hand, and a hopeful look crossed his eyes.

"You don't need to feel awkward."

"I'm sorry." I sighed.

"You broke my heart. I've tried to get with you for a long time and take you on dates, but you couldn't eve—" His eyes widened when he saw my expression. "Caliana, I'm joking!"

"Oh...okay. Thank god." I let out a breath, shutting my eyes.

"Who's the lucky guy?"

"His name's Xavier."

"Let me guess. Hot and rich?"

I pulled a face; he hit the nail on the head, but that wasn't why I loved Xavier. Instead, I forced out a laugh and rolled my eyes. It was awkward with Alex, and I hated it. He was a genuinely nice guy, and he didn't deserve this.

"Is Lola back, too?"

"Yep."

"I'm glad you enjoyed your trip," he said casually. "You going to the opening night?"

"What?"

"For college. Welcoming the first-year students."

I was about to say no before hesitating. "When is it?"

"Three or four days from now."

Usually, I wouldn't go to an event like this, but it had been ages since I’d seen my own campus. If I wasn't going back to school this year, it could be my last chance to properly look around. "Sure." I smiled before pausing. "I'll invite Lola, too."

He probably didn't count it as a date, but I was taking every precaution. Alex wasn't the type to force anything but being in a relationship with someone—especially a possessive wolf-bear—I didn't want Xavier to get even a hint of him.

"Sounds good." Alex pulled me into another hug. "I'll leave and let you get back to your parents. It was great seeing you, Caliana."

"You too, Alex. See you around"

Alex left, and I let out a deep breath, watching my mother walk in with a tray of cookies in one hand, pulling her cannula. "Where's Alex?" She glanced around, and I sighed.

"Gone."

"Gone? Why? He was so excited to come see you." She paused before her expression softened. "Is he upset over Xavier?"

"I don't know." I sat down with a drawn-out sigh.

"He was head over heels for you, Caliana. Just because you didn't have feelings for him doesn't mean he didn't have a huge crush on you. He came to welcome you back and found out you have a boyfriend—he's probably hurt."

"If he was upset with me, he wouldn't have invited me out, Mom."

"He invited you out?" She raised her eyebrows. "Before or after you told him about your boyfriend."

"Not like that." I rolled my eyes. "He said he was going to the opening night and invited me along."

"Alone?"

"I'm bringing Lola with me," I said. "Just in case."

"Poor boy."

"Don't make me feel guilty!"

"Don't get me wrong, darling," she giggled, "I'm delighted you're happy, but...Alex adored you."

"You can stop reminding me." I frowned. "You'll love Xavier when you meet him, though."

"Will I?"

"Yes! Why are you doubting him?"

"Because he's gorgeous." She sighed. "He might be a player."

"Player?" I cringed. "He's not! Wait until you meet him."

"I want to meet him now."

"No." I shook my head. "You have to wait. Dad will probably freak out and question him."

"We know nothing about him."

"You will soon."

"Did he use protection?"

"MOM, WHAT THE HELL?!" My cheeks heated.

"Honey, don't lie. With someone like him, I know you had to do— Hh my, was he your first?"

"Stop talking about it!!"

"Caliana—"

"Yes, we used protection. Jesus, Mom, don’t ask questions like that!” I hissed, my face burning.

She only chuckled at my reaction. "Darling, it's natural."

"It’s weird talking about it with you," I huffed, folding my arms.

"Talk about what?" My father came around the corner with a newspaper in his hands.

"Sex," my mother said.

"I'm leaving." I stood, and without another word, left the room. I opened my phone and hit the call button on Xavier's contact before immediately hanging up. If he was with his pack, I shouldn't disturb him. I was about to put my phone back into my pocket, but it began buzzing. A smile grew on my face when I saw the caller ID. I answered immediately, bringing the phone to my ear. "Hey."

"How are you?"

Not even a hello. "Good, how are you?"

"Nervous."

"About meeting the pack tomorrow?"

"Yeah, Jay's trying to tell me what to say, but it sounds stupid."

"Then be yourself."

"Are you sure that is a good idea?"

"Why wouldn’t it be? I fell for you."

"Yeah, but you're stupid."

"First of all, excuse you. Second of all, your pack is stupid, too."

"They are..."

"They're probably looking for a leader, and you have the Alpha genes. As long as you’re confident like usual—and not overly—I'm sure things will be fine."

"I miss you."

"Stop being a baby." I smiled at the phone. He changed from a wild dog to an adorable puppy overnight.

"Bet you're excited to see your friend Alan again."

"It's Alex." I laughed before pausing. "I saw him already."

"Oh?"

"I told him I have a boyfriend now, so he backed off. Don't worry."

"Wow—dick move to completely drop you," he commented.

"Oh, he didn't. Alex, Lola, and I are going out as a group to the opening night on campus."

"Oh."

"As a *group*. He knows I'm not interested, okay?" I laughed at his unhappy behavior. "Plus, I bet the female wolf-bears will be swooning over you when you visit the pack."

"Are you ever going to stop with the wolf-bear thing?"

"Probably not," I said honestly. "Thanks for reassuring me about not being interested in other girls, by the way."

"Sorry, I assumed you didn’t need to be reassured," he commented, causing me to roll my eyes. "I'll snap anyone's neck who tries to go near me."

"Tone it down a bit." I shook my head at his aggressive behavior. "Girls will try to get with you—after all, you’re the Alpha. Make sure they know you have a mate, please."

"The hottest mate ever."

"Shut up." I blushed, sitting on my old bed.

"How are your parents?"

"They're good." I smiled. "Very interested in you."

"Are they?"

"They really want to meet you."

"Then why didn't you let me come?"

"My father will scare you off, and they'll question you about everything. You aren't prepared, believe me." I frowned. "My mom thinks you'll break my heart because of how hot you are."

He sounded surprised. "But I am your mate and—"

"She doesn't know what mates are; humans don't work the same way. There’s only normal boyfriend-girlfriend stuff here. Not only that, but there is quite a bit of cheating in today's society."

"Humans really are pathetic..."

"Your girlfriend is a human."

"I didn't mean you."

"Your girlfriend's parents are also human."

"Not them either! No one like you—only normal humans."

"Wow, I'm not even normal?"

"No! I didn't mea—"

"Xav, I'm kidding." I giggled at his stressed tone.

"You're not funny."

"I thought it was funny."

"Is Lola not with you?"

"No, she went home to see how her parents are, but we're meeting up later."

"I jerked off earlier thinking of you."

"Xavier," I sighed, "don't say that so openly!"

"Why?"

"Because—" I cut off my sentence. Why was I even trying to explain it to a person like him? He was always open. "Never mind. How's Colton? Is he going to the pack with you?"

"Yes."

"He's not acting strange?"

"He's flustered and out of it, so I guess he is."

"You aren't worried?"

"He can handle himself."

"Can he handle wanting to murder his mate?"

"I do not plan to get involved with him and his mate. From what I’ve heard, his mate is a demon. "

"A real demon?"

"What?"

"I don't know—wolf-bears are real. Do you mean she's literally a demon or acts like one?"

"She acts like one, Caliana."

"Well, she did save me. I'm kind of indebted to her, so I hope he doesn't kill her."

"You're a very strange person," Xavier mumbled.

"A strange person you adore."

"Maybe…I don't know…"

"Definitely."

"Well..."

I smiled, longing to kiss him right then. "I'm going to go. I'll call you later, okay?"

"Okay babe." BABE BABE BABE BABE BABE BABE. HE CALLED ME *BABE*. OH MY GOD. OH MY GOD. HE ACTUALLY DID THAT. "Cal, you still there?"

"Yes! Yep, hi! Hi, still here," I confirmed. "But I'm going now. Bye—love you!" I hung up the phone, my face on fire. Had I seriously had a mini freakout over one word?

It hurt how much I missed him. Deep down, I knew it was because we were mates. This was not normal between two humans, but he was a huge part of my life now.

It was hard to explain, but he belonged to me. A small frown appeared on my face. Lola loved Jay like this, probably more, since she was a half-breed. Yet she decided to stay with me rather than move in with him, even when he asked.

She constantly rejected him for me. I felt bad for getting so angry with her now. I let out a sigh, lying back on my old bed.

The door pushed open, and my dad peeked around the corner. "Cal."

"What?"

"What's a mate?"

**Episode 61**

My father had really asked me about mates. I froze, and my eyes flew open. How did I explain this to my dad, of all people?

Wait.

"Mate," I said slowly. "You know, like, a *friend*. Like they say in Australia—it's a private joke between us."

"Is it? What was the whole *human* talk?"

"Yes, Dad! Do you need to question my relationship when you don't even know the guy? It's a private joke."

"I *don't* know the guy," he pointed out, which was fair. If I had a kid who came home suddenly dating a random person I didn't know, I'd be concerned.

"I promise, Dad, you'll love him." I hoped he would, anyway. Who wouldn't love Xavier?

Okay, a lot of people. I hated him when I first met him—more than anyone could imagine. We wanted to kill each other at one point. Oh my god, we literally made a *bet* on who could kill the other first.

I had almost forgotten about that, and I couldn't help but chuckle at the thought. That was funny; at the time, it was petrifying, but *now,* it was funny.

"I trust you, Caliana. But no babies."

"Dad!" I groaned, and he offered me a small smile before leaving. I hated when my parents treated me like a teenager. The one thing I didn't miss about my parents was their constant interrogations.

I lay down, shutting my eyes. I was tired from the flight, and a nap would do me...

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"Good morning, sleepy!" Lola dove on my bed. Yesterday was spent napping and catching up with my parents. Lola had planned to come over, but her dads decided to fuss over her the whole day, since they missed her when she was gone.

"It's too early." I pushed her off. "How are you even here?"

"Your dad let me in." She smiled brightly. "It's already noon."

I pushed myself up and rubbed my eyes. They were sore, and I was tired—I just wanted to fall back asleep. I picked up my phone and noticed messages from Xavier. "Xav's meeting the pack today."

"He's probably nervous."

"I wish I could be there for him." I unlocked the mobile and messaged him back, letting him know I had just woken up, and I wished him luck.

"Don't worry." She patted my shoulder. "It's better this way. He'd have been worried about you if you were there. Plus, Jay's with him, and probably Colton, too."

I nodded slowly. She was right.

"Lola—"

"Come on, let's go out." She pulled my hand, trying to drag me from the room. "Are you spending your time here, or are we going back to our place?"

"I think I'll stay at my parents' house for a bit. I do want to go back to our apartment and check on everything. It feels like it's been years..."

"That's a bit dramatic."

"Whatever. I need to get breakfast first."

"We'll get something when we're out," she groaned, tugging at my arm over and over. "Come on!"

"Fine! Let me say bye to my parents first." I forced myself out of bed and got dressed.

"Oh, your parents went out."

"Where?" A frown formed on my face.

"Not sure—they told me to tell you they'd be back in the afternoon."

"Oh, okay," I mumbled, disappointed they hadn't told me themselves; then again, my mother never wanted to wake me when I was asleep. A weak smile appeared on my face, thinking of her kind and supportive attitude. She was my favorite person in the world, along with Xavier and Lola.

Not much later, Lola and I were finally back in our hometown. "It's so busy here," I commented.

"It was quiet where we were with Xavier and Colton. It was just us, kind of."

"That's true. God, even when you say his name, I miss him so much. Is that bad?" I couldn't help but laugh at my clinginess. Before Xavier, I remember making fun of almost every couple I met. Even from a distance, public affection made me cringe.

Wait…it still made me cringe. My nose wrinkled in disgust at the thought of a couple cuddling and constantly kissing in front of people. My pet peeve was when you're walking down a busy street and they randomly stop in front of you. IN FRONT OF YOU, WHERE YOU WERE WALKING, JUST TO MAKE OUT.

I shuddered at the thought until Xavier popped into my head. Would I give him affection in public?

Yeah. I probably would. If he were here right now, I'd be on top of him, making sure he never left. God, I missed that man so much.

"Stop." Lola caught my attention.

"Why stop?" I paused. "Wait, stop what?"

"Thinking about him."

"Xavier?"

"No, Donald Trump." Her words were laced with sarcasm. "Of course I'm talking about Xavier."

"Oh."

"I know it's hard to be apart since he's your mate, but you need to get him off your mind, girl, or it'll wear you down. That's what happened with me and Jay."

"What happened?"

"Back before you knew everything... When we were separated, the more I thought about him, the worse I felt about staying here. I thought about how we weren't together. Remember when I was in the hospital? It was actually because of mate withdrawals. I was rundown because I let my wolf take over, thinking about him all the time, so I forgot about myself."

"That sounds insane."

"I'm not sure if it can happen to you, since you don't have a wolf. I also think it's because I'm a half-breed, my immune sy—" She cut herself off. "I'm sorry for rambling. Basically, I was saying try not to think of him too much, or it'll only hurt you."

"It's almost impossible to not think about him, though."

"I get it." She reached out and patted my head. "You'll get used to it."

"I don't want to get used to it," I huffed.

"That's not what I meant." She offered me a sideways look. "You'll be back to him before you know it, okay? Use this time as a break from the big bad wolf."

My lips puckered, but I understood what she meant. "You're right."

"You're actually agreeing with me?" Lola was curious about my response.

"Don't get me wrong, I miss Xavier—a bit too much," I added, confirming. "But he's possessive and clingy. Especially now that we fuc—"

I cut my words off and sucked in a breath. I was getting distracted thinking of him. I raised my eyes again to find Lola giving me an extremely judgmental look. “Basically, this will be like a girls’ weekend. You know—"

Lola cut me off. "A bridal shower? Hen party?"

"I'm not marrying him." I rolled my eyes at her attempt but couldn’t stop the thoughts from rolling through my mind. Marriage. I never actually planned on it, but only because I assumed I'd be alone. It wasn't that I was totally against marriage or anything—I just never assumed it would happen to me.

A wedding. Marrying Xavier.

The thought made my cheeks warm, and my heartbeat accelerated. Why was I excited? This whole marriage thing always seemed fake to me, but Xavier being mine…being my husband…

The words made me shudder. It sounded like a lot of pressure I couldn't handle. I was freaking over a marriage, but I agreed to be his mate. His mate, which was a bigger commitment. If people divorced, they could easily find someone else, but wolf-bears...if their mate leaves, they can't have another. Xavier got a second chance, but I didn’t think he’d get another. If we didn't work out, he could never have another girl. That finally dawned on me, and I momentarily felt dizzy.

Lola and I had arrived at our favorite cafe, and I quickly took a seat on one of the metal chairs under the outdoor canopy.

"You okay?" Lola frowned.

I nodded. "Thinking about mates..."

"Oh." She already caught on. "About how mates are serious? Don't feel pressured—"

"I *don't* feel pressured. But it freaks me out how much I love someone that I haven't even known super long. I thought my first boyfriend would be someone I knew for ages, like Alex," I ranted. "But I'm somehow head over heels for someone I didn't know several months ago."

"You're funny." She grinned down at me. "You're worried because you're in love. We're lucky to be dating their type because they can’t cheat."

"They can't?" I looked at Lola, interested to know more about this loyalty thing.

"Caliana! Lola!" Both of us looked over to the source of the high-pitched voice. My eyes lit up when Mrs. Smith came running out of the cafe. This was her *dream*; this little cafe had been her and her husband's pride and joy. Right up until Mr. Smith died in a car crash last year. The limp Mrs. Smith carried was proof the accident affected her in a bad way, too.

A sad smile grew on my face as I looked down at the shorter woman with the bright smile. Lola and I helped her out when her husband passed away and she was ill. While I was at college—and with Xavier—she had gone to the back of my mind completely.

"I haven't seen you girls in ages!" She pulled us into a hug before nodding inside. "Come on, food's on the house."

We went inside, and there were only two other customers, drinking their coffee and eating their food. It wasn’t the busiest spot, but it was homey and welcoming.

"Thank you for the offer, Mrs. Smith," I shook my head, "but we don't have time to sit today."

The bright smile on her face fell, her lips forming a straight line.

"Don't have time to eat? There is *always* time to eat."

"We came to get coffee before heading off," Lola tried to help me. Mrs. Smith had the best toasted white chocolate mocha around—it would cause anyone's mouth to orgasm.

Okay, that sounded weird.

"Sit," she demanded, and with a small sigh, both Lola and I sat.

"Now," she leaned forward, a small smile on her lips, "tell me all about your wolf boyfriend."

**Episode 62**

*Tell me all about your wolf boyfriend.*

Is that what she said? Had I heard her right?

I turned to Lola, looking for some sort of guidance. My lips were parted, and my jaw involuntarily dropped the moment she uttered those words. "Sorry?"

"You heard me." She offered me a wide smile.

"I don't think I did." I wanted to make sure. I didn’t want to get too specific with my question in case Lola and I misheard her.

"Your boyfriend—the wolf. Tell me about him."

"Keep your voice down!" I hissed, even though there were only two others here, and they weren't exactly paying attention. She leaned onto her hand and tilted her head, giving me a look that basically told me to shut up.

Lola's hand reached out, her forefinger and thumb grabbing the woman's cheek, pulling at it. Immediately, Mrs. Smith's hand went up and slapped her away. "Don't be rude, Aliyah."

"Yeah, I'm out." Lola got out of her seat and turned to leave while I sat there in complete shock. My hand quickly reached out and stopped her, pulling her back.

This older woman in front of me—the one Lola and I had helped, who had given us free meals—was suddenly asking about my *wolf* boyfriend. Was the world ending?

"How do you know?" I finally managed to speak. I could see Lola glance over to me, and I turned to her, too. "You didn't know about this?" I hissed, asking Lola before Mrs. Smith could answer.

"Does it look like I knew about it?" she retorted.

"It didn't look like you knew Xavier and Colton."

"Seriously?" She narrowed her eyes, and the corner of my lip twitched until Mrs. Smith cleared her throat, reminding us she was there. Both of our eyes snapped toward her, remembering the situation.

"What a coincidence you girls came here," she hummed with a small smile. "I know...because I am one of your kind." She tapped Lola on the nose.

"Excuse me?"

"Yes, your boyfriend's father moved me out here to watch over you."

"What?" Lola was dumbfounded.

"What about me?" I chimed in, confused where I stood in everything.

"You were irrelevant until you decided to bond with that Alpha, Xavier," she said softly before freezing. "Oh my, darling, that sounded horrible. I meant you were irrelevant in the werewolf chain! You're always relevant to me, though."

I arched an eyebrow as old Mrs. Smith appeared. The one who treated us like we were her kids. I rested my chin on my hand, keeping the cautious look on my face, letting her know I wasn't taking her story at face value. I was still partially offended she called me irrelevant so casually.

Lola’s sniggering made me roll my eyes. "You laugh at the dumbest stuff," I huffed. "I think we're ignoring the big thing here. She knows about your type."

"I am her type." Mrs. Smith frowned.

"How do you know Lola? How do you have anything to do with her?"

"You sound salty," Lola whispered, a wide grin on her face. I turned to look at her, my lips pressed into a thin line. The glare immediately made her look away, but it was obvious she found this funny.

"Your boyfriend is my Alpha, which makes you my future Luna, Caliana."

The smile wiped off Lola's face, and the scowl disappeared from my own. We both stared at the woman like she had four heads. Wait…did she? No, I was just getting very, very dizzy.

I shut my eyes and placed my head on the table to rest. This was all a bit too much for me right now. What the hell was going on? I knew I could be a future Luna but having her say it to me so boldly was too much. Not only that, but she knew Xavier—she was part of his pack.

"If you were here, how do you know?" Lola asked.

"We can communicate telepathically in our other forms. You should know this."

"I've lived among humans! Sorry I didn't get wolf training," Lola retorted, uncomfortable in the moment’s spotlight.

"That is true," the woman hummed. "Tell me: how is your boyfriend doing?"

My eyes focused on Mrs. Smith—I felt like I had been lied to. This woman, the one I had been helping, who treated me like her own child, was a goddamn wolf, too—it was like betrayal. Then again, why would she have told me?

I had nothing to do with wolves until now, until my boyfriend turned out to be the Alpha. "He's...good. I assume you know he's meeting with the pack again."

"I do, and I'm more than delighted."

I paused. "If you were here for Lola, do you plan on going back?"

She shook her head. "No, I was planning to leave the packhouse anyway. Jay's father helped me, and I helped him. He sent me and my late-husband—who was also his best friend—here. In return, I was to keep an eye out for you." She pressed her frail finger on Lola's nose.

She always did that when we were younger.

"You are very young to become a Luna. Is this what you want?"

"No one's forcing this on me, I decided willingly. We aren't even positive Xavier will be returning as pack leader; he's going to be meeting with them to see how it goes." I didn't want to go into detail.

She let out a thoughtful humming sound, which made me nervous. I always got worked up when people did that. Like they were trying to scare me, pretend they didn't believe me or something, even when I knew I was telling the truth. "I see." The two words calmed me. "You're missing him a lot, huh?"

I nodded, answering her question without even realizing. I did miss him. I've stated this a lot, and I could see the look on Lola's face from the corner of my eye, clearly not happy Mrs. Smith brought it up.

"I hate to ask this," Lola said slowly. "Was your husband one, too? You know, our kind."

"He was," she said with a sad smile. "He was actually Rogue, believe it or not."

"Rogue?" Lola's eyes widened. "Did he join the pack when you guys realized you were mates?"

I felt slightly out of the loop here. I wasn't sure why Lola was so shocked about this, so instead I just sat there and focused on the conversation. Honestly, I wanted to learn more about their type.

"No, he didn't." She chuckled. "You know how men are."

"He wouldn't join? Even for his mate?" I asked, arching an eyebrow. Would Xavier do it for me?

Seriously? Anything I thought of led back to Xavier lately, and frankly, I wasn't fond of it. I didn't want to turn into one of those psycho girls who relied on her boyfriend all the time.

"It's not like he was wanted," she commented, turning to me. She only now remembered I wasn't as educated as Lola in this whole environment.

"Wasn't wanted?"

"Rogues are looked down upon." Lola turned to me. "There's a natural order of wolves. The top is Alpha, then Beta. There's also a third in command, too, but real wolf packs—like the actual animals—don't have them, only our type."

"Oh…"

"There are a lot of other roles. Delta, Zeta, Omega, and many more you'll learn someday. Rogues are the most hated ones of all."

"Isn't a Rogue just a lone wolf? That's not really fair for them to be hated because they're alone." I frowned. I had heard stories of Rogue wolves, but I never really learned in depth.

Mrs. Smith raised an eyebrow and offered a curious look, probably judging how uneducated I was.

"No." Lola shook her head. "Lone wolves are alone, but they follow the rules. They don't randomly kill or fight—they obey. A Rogue is a lone wolf who breaks the rules. Xavier and Colton could be seen as Rogues because Xavier broke the rule of becoming the next Alpha and left the pack with Colton."

"Oh, wow."

"Lone wolves can be on a pack’s territory as long as they obey the rules of the Alpha, and the Alpha lets them. But they can't stay for more than a week at a time—it's a strange thing. They usually get offered to join the pack, too. So lone wolves who disagree with rules or kill people in the pack turn into a Rogue."

"Basically how real wolves live?"

"Kind of..." Lola pulled a face, obviously not as happy with my comparison, even though it was basically the same. Maybe they saw themselves above wolves or something.

"What about all the other roles in the pack? I thought there was only Alpha and Beta. I found out third was a thing when I met Jay, so how many are there?"

"A good few." Lola seemed to think.

"I need to know! You need to teach me," I whined, shaking her roughly, totally forgetting where we were.

"I'll teach you tonight, okay? You can ask me questions then." Lola smiled at my eagerness. There were so many reasons why I was curious about this.

One: this was a whole new world for me. I was used to humans, the stupid societal roles and rules here. All I knew was, knowing what I knew now changed my world completely, and I didn't want to be left out of the loop.

Two: my boyfriend…*mate* was a wolf-bear. It would be rude to be uneducated in his lifestyle and stuff.

Three: probably the biggest reason, I could be the future Luna of a pack. That word was still crazy to me. *Luna*. Especially being human…

"Okay." I nodded, pulling myself from my thoughts so I wouldn't get nervous. "I want to learn tonight then."

"What about babies?" Mrs. Smith chimed in.

I turned to her, my brow furrowing. "What?"

"Oh," she said slowly, confused. "The moment you become Luna, you will need to get pregnant."

**Episode 63**

It had been two days since Mrs. Smith told me about getting pregnant the moment I became a Luna. He’d mentioned babies before, but he didn’t say I’d need to be pregnant immediately after becoming a Luna.

I cringed at the flashback of Mrs. Smith explaining everything to me.

"*Pregnant*?! Straight away?" I almost choked on my mocha, and Lola started hitting my back to help me, a bit too rough.

Mrs. Smith frowned at my reaction. "Maybe it is not the same anymore..."

"Anymore?"

"I do not want to scare you off, Caliana." She almost seemed nervous. "It is different now, if you know Xavier."

"What was it?"

"He must have told you something about it."

"Jay told me," Lola said quietly. "But I thought it was a thing of the past."

"Can someone explain what the hell you're talking about?"

"I assumed Xavier told you," Lola informed. "The moment there's a Luna in the pack, she must be...*bred,* is what they used to call it."

"Is that normal?"

"No, it's an old thing. Kind of like…history in the normal human world—how women used to be seen as inferior men in the past. Basically, Lunas used to be...not that important."

"Wow."

"It's different now, for most packs. It changed about three or four decades ago; Lunas went from nothing to the second most important person in the pack," she explained. "They were below the Alpha but above the Beta."

"Okay..."

“It was banned in most packs, but a few kept the rule. It’s likely the pack that kidnapped you followed the old rules—most of the bad packs are outdated. Before Xavier left, the rule was in place in our pack. The Luna is used for reproduction."

My stomach turned at the thought. "What?"

She nodded slowly, but I couldn’t pay attention to her. I was only thinking about Xavier’s mother. Xavier told me how his father had attacked his mother, how he forced her to carry his babies. I thought it was something out of the ordinary, but that was simply how the pack worked.

"Caliana." Lola put a hand on my shoulder, noticing my budding panic. "That was when his father was Alpha. I'm sure Xavier plans to change it if he becomes Alpha again, especially when he cares about you so much."

Yeah...I couldn't doubt Xavier. His father hadn't loved his mother—that was why he treated her like that. It was different between me and Xavier.

It had been two days since Mrs. Smith and Lola told me everything, but it wouldn't leave my mind. It was all I could think about. The door slammed open, and I jumped from the bed, my heart racing. "What the hell?"

"Are you ready?"

"Do you know what knocking is?!" I glared at Lola, who watched me before shrugging, clearly not caring. I pulled on my hair tie, letting my waves come crashing down.

Lola started intently at her phone with narrowed eyes. "Jay's not responding to me."

The corner of my lip pulled up—she actually looked distressed. "You have a fight?" I questioned.

Her head snapped up. "No."

"You sure? He never ignores you."

"He probably lost his phone," she mumbled.

"Or he hates—"

"Caliana!" she shouted, and I laughed. I waved my right hand in surrender, making sure she knew I was only winding her up. She and Jay loved each other, maybe more than me and Xavier.

That was a lie. I adored Xavier...I probably loved him even more than he loved me. Even thinking of his name reminded me of what Mrs. Smith said.

"Are you still ignoring him?" It was like Lola read my mind.

I pulled a face, shaking my head slowly. "I'm not ignoring him—don't make me seem like an asshole." I scowled. "Just giving him short responses."

"You're not mad at him, are you?"

My eyebrows rose in sync with my lips that parted at her accusing question. "No! I'm not. I'm just…scared. I don’t know how to ask him about this."

"You're scared he'll hurt you?"

"No! I'm scared it'll hurt him. What if it's a dark bit of his past he doesn't want to talk about? I don't want to hurt him, but I also can't talk to him without bringing it up, hence the one-word replies."

"What was the last thing he sent?"

"He asked if I was okay."

"What did you say?"

"Yep."

"Just yep?"

Dammit. "I DIDN'T RESPOND!"

"Cal!"

"What? I don't want to lie to him and say I'm fine!"

The look she gave me made me feel incredibly guilty. "I'm pretending to nap, okay? I'll respond after this thing tonight."

She narrowed her eyes again. "Fine, but you can't complain about missing him when you're doing this to yourself."

I had been whining about missing Xavier almost every day being here. Even now, when I wasn't responding.

"Darling?" The door pushed open, and my mom walked in. "You two better get a move on."

Lola glanced at the clock in my room then nodded. "Yeah, worry about this later, Cal. Let's—"

"Worry about what?" The moment my mother heard the W-word, she started to panic.

I shook my head immediately, walking over and pulling her into a hug. "It's nothing."

She wrapped her hands hesitantly around mine. "If it was nothing, you wouldn't be worrying."

Lola gave me a look, silently telling me to explain. If I didn't give my mother a good reason, she'd literally forbid me from leaving the house. I glanced around the room, trying to think of some excuse when my eyes landed on the back window.

Without even realizing I was moving, I let go of my mother and walked past her, heading to the window. My hand raised and pressed lightly against the tempered glass. We had a small back garden, but unlike Xavier's, it didn't lead into the woods.

My heartbeat sped up from thinking about him. The wolf-bear...the first night at Xavier’s, I saw one when I looked out the window, and I thought it was a monster. Little did I know, the man I sold my virginity to was the same as the wolf. Had I ever found out who that actual wolf was?

I felt like everything that happened at Xavier's was somehow a figment of my imagination. Stepping back into reality was something different—something foreign. It was incredible how creatures as big as the wolf-bears had never been discovered.

I knew there were theorists; some people believed they might exist, but there was never solid proof. It was strange...no proof. Out of all the wolves I had met—and I knew there were even more—not one had been caught.

"Hey." My mother shook me, but I barely wavered.

I turned back to her and slowly shook my head, a smile forming on my lips. "Boy trouble, but it's fine now," I said honestly. "I'm just really missing him."

She studied me for a moment, trying to see if I was lying, before nodding. "I can't wait to meet him."

"He's wonderful." I grinned. "You'll also get to meet Jay—Lola's boyfriend—too."

"She has a boyfriend?" My mother swung around to look at Lola. When Lola came into my life, my mom instantly filled into the motherly role in Lola’s life.

Lola's cheeks heated, clearly embarrassed. I held my mother’s shoulders. "How about we tell you all about it when we're back, because we're already running late?"

My mother, being an understanding woman, let out a huff but nodded. She wearily sat on my bed, shutting her eyes. "You're right—go. Have fun, but no drinking."

"I hardly think there will be drinks at a school event." I rolled my eyes but leaned in to plant a kiss on her forehead. "Love you."

"I love you too, darling." She held my hand and kissed it before nodding toward the door. We said one more goodbye, and five minutes later we were in the car, heading toward the college.

"Now," Lola glanced at me from the corner of her eye, "time for your date with Alex!"

Oh no.

**Episode 64**

The college was brightly lit, and it was obvious from the chatter that an event was happening. It was strange, the campus being so alive this time of night.

"Hey!" My eyes pulled away from the open door and shifted to Alex, who emerged out of nowhere. Lola glanced at me sideways, but I pretended not to notice.

I lifted my hand, offering Alex a small wave. "Hi."

He met us halfway down the steps, leaning against the railing. "It's great to see you, too, Lola." Alex nodded, and Lola finally greeted him back, a small smile on her face.

"How's Leroy?" I asked, surprisingly missing his younger brother.

Alex pulled a face before forcing his smile to return. "He's fine."

My brow furrowed, but before I could ask anything else, Lola nudged me, stopping my words. I decided to let my curiosity and concern go away for tonight— I didn't want to put a damper on the evening.

Alex turned and led us into the school. I couldn't help but grin as the usual school smell overwhelmed me. It kind of smelled like a bootleg hospital, but it was weirdly comforting. Stands were set up along the hallways, and rooms were fully decorated; it was a showcase of the different things you could study, as well as the different groups you could join.

Lola used to love joining groups at school, but it was never really my thing. I looked up at her. "Don't you want to go say hi to your book club?" I nodded toward the stand in the distance. Lola hesitated and pulled a face, shaking her head.

"No?" My eyebrows pulled together in confusion. She glanced over to Alex, whose eyes wandered around the place in amazement, before mouthing, "I'll tell you later." Assuming it was something to do with wolf-bears, I nodded and dropped it.

"The food and music are in the main hall instead of the gym." Alex turned to let us know.

I pursed my lips. "Is there a reason?"

"Some kids set fire to the gym, so half was destroyed. They're getting it set back up pretty quick though"

"That's terrible." Lola frowned.

"Kind of a relief," I muttered before realizing how sinister it sounded. They both gave me a look, but I brushed it off. "I didn't mean it like that."

The music was loud from the large room, and as we got closer, it echoed through the hallways. Lights were dimmed, but they had some cool ones that lit up in disco fashion. There was a table with little bites to eat, some punch, and sweets. There was also room for people to stand, dance, talk, and a few seats.

"Lola!" We all looked back to see a girl with blonde hair waving furiously. I squinted, trying to figure out who it was, but Lola said her name before I could.

"Sally, hey! I'll be right back." She looked at me apologetically.

"Take your time." I nodded. Sally was probably from one of Lola’s clubs, but I couldn’t really think about that. I was too focused on how dread filled my system at the thought of being alone with Alex again.

Slowly, I turned to face him, and he arched an eyebrow at my expression. "Don't worry, I'm not going to ask you to dance. I understand you have a boyfriend."

I hesitated. "We can dance if you want. Just because I've a boyfriend doesn't mean we can't be friends." I was relieved Alex understood boundaries.

"You sure?" He offered me a curious look, and I nodded. He took my hand, and we walked to the dance floor. I expected him to slow dance, but he instantly dropped my hand and started doing that diving-snorkeling dance.

My eyes widened, and the corner of my lip twitched before I busted out laughing, unable to contain it. "Come on…or are you too embarrassed?" He grinned widely. After a second, I joined in and began doing the grocery-shopping dance.

It felt like the first time in ages I could let loose. I was back home, there were no killer wolves after me, and I was safe among humans. No stress, no worry.

We danced for ages until an out-of-breath Alex raised his hands in surrender. "I'm going to get punch, want some?"

I nodded, my face now red. "Yes, please."

When he left, I pulled out my phone, frowning when I had no texts from Xavier. He was obviously mad at me and although I knew it was because I had been ignoring him, I was still upset. I hated when people did that to me.

"ALCOHOL!" Lola shouted in my ear, and I screamed and ducked away.

I turned to my friend with narrowed eyes, shoving her off me. "What the hell?" She pulled out a flask from her bra and poured some of it into her cup. My eyes widened, and I grabbed it away from her. "Do you want to get kicked out? Where did you get that?"

"Sally." She shrugged, and I let out a sigh, shaking my head. "You know you want some, Cal."

"No, I don't."

"I do," Alex chimed in, carrying two cups filled with punch. Lola's eyes brightened, and she glanced back to me. Alex returned my frustrated gaze with an apologetic look, but finally, I nodded. It wasn't like I was coming back here anyway.

"Fine." I opened the flask and poured some into Alex's drink and then some into my own. When I finished pouring, Lola tipped it up, making sure to fill my cup right to the brim. I tugged the flask away with a scowl. I was a light-weight—Lola…not so much, so it was easier for her to drink.

"Cheers!" Alex held out his cup. Without warning, Lola and Alex threw back their cups, gulping it down. I mimicked them to keep up. I grimaced as the alcohol burned my throat but managed to down it all in a few gulps.

I let out a breath and wiped my top lip when I pulled the cup away, feeling Lola and Alex's gaze. I looked between them. "I hate you both so much, I hope you know that."

"Alcohol?" A hand touched my shoulder, causing me to jump.

We were caught! I knew this would happen! I knew it the whole time!

I spun around, and a look of terror must have been plastered on my face because the person looked surprised. "Tony," I breathed out a sigh of relief when I noticed it was only Alex's friend.

"Hey, Toenail," Lola said but not in a friendly manner. Those two didn't get along.

"Hello, Caliana." Tony smiled, completely ignoring Lola's greeting, pretending she wasn't there. "You know alcohol's not permitted."

"Blame those two." I shrugged. "Want some?" I lifted the flask, and he glanced at it. He took it from my hand and took two huge swigs, causing me to gag. Straight vodka. Gross.

"Yum." He grinned at my reaction before passing it over, but Lola snatched it before I could grab it. "Don't give him any."

"I'm being polite." I frowned at Lola's behavior, but unlike myself, Tony didn't care.

"Care to dance?"

"She has a boyfriend," Alex announced from behind me.

"Is she not allowed to dance anymore? From what I saw, *you* were dancing with her, and I know you're not the boyfriend."

Alex glanced away, clearly embarrassed.

"No other girls want you?" Lola sneered, and once again, Tony flat out ignored her.

"If I say sorry, will you dance with me, Cal?"

"Fine."

"Okay, Alex. I'm sorry for hurting your little feelings," he pouted. I was going to decline the dance invite seeing as it was a half-assed apology, but it was too late. He grabbed my hand roughly and tugged me off to the dance floor.

I received a sympathetic look from Lola but didn't even manage to make eye contact with Alex. Five minutes later, I was still dancing with Tony—a terrible slow dance.

"You seem different," he spoke lowly, his hand on my hip a bit too close to my ass. I tried to push it away once, but he only grinned in response.

"Different?"

"More…confident. I didn't know you liked social events."

"I've been through a lot on holiday, I guess it gave me a boost."

"It's kind of hot."

"I'm not single anymore, Tony," I reminded him.

He sighed. "You're right. No point admitting my crush now."

"Your *crush*?" I arched an eyebrow.

"I mean, I never said anything before because Alex liked you, but I might as well tell you since it doesn't matter anymore."

"Why would you like me? We rarely hang out," I pointed out, but he just shrugged.

"The few times we have, I've—" His sentence cut off as he stumbled into me, his eyes blinking slowly.

With all my strength, I held him upright. "Tony?!"

He pushed himself back up, his breaths suddenly heavy. "I need fresh air," he mumbled weakly.

"I'll get the nurse. You need to sit down."

"No, no. I'm just overheating—I need cool air. Please," he muttered, wrapping his arm around my shoulder. My eyes searched the crowd for Lola and Alex, but they weren't there. I felt a bit woozy myself, the alcohol coursing through my system. Fresh air would probably do me good, too.

"Come on," I said, and thankfully he wasn't too heavy. He was buff, but not too tall. I stumbled out of the hall and turned to head toward the main doors.

"There's a back door this way." He tugged me the other direction, and I followed. Sure enough, he led us to a fire escape, and I pushed it open, thankful no alarm sounded.

He sighed when the cool air surrounded us, and almost instantly, I was shivering. He looked at me with a frown, wrapping his arm around me. "If you're cold, you can go back inside."

"No, I'm fine," I said. It would be rude to leave him when he was sick. He rubbed my arms in an attempt to warm me up, causing me to laugh. "I'm fine, Tony, thank you."

"Body heat works."

"Too bad my boyfriend isn't here then," I stated, reminding him about Xavier.

"Exactly." He chuckled. "He isn't here. I can stand in."

"No, thanks." I rolled my eyes before yelping when his large hand reached down and roughly gripped my ass. "Tony!"

"Calm down, Caliana. I'm warming you up."

"I'm fine!" I said, no longer comfortable, trying to push him off. My heart dropped when I saw the expression on his face. His hand only grabbed me tighter—his physical appearance was enough to let both of us know he was stronger. "Get off me, Tony!" I tried to push him again, but he brought his body closer to mine.

"Now that Alex has given up, I can have you. I respected the bro code for too long," he said, leaning into me, planting kisses along my neck. I raised my hand in an attempt to slap him, but his reflexes were good, and he caught it in time.

"I'll scream."

His hand clasped over my mouth to stop me, "Shut up," he growled and began tugging at my top.

Why was I not panicking? Okay, my leg was still free; all I had to do was raise my leg, kick him in the groin, and I was home free.

He pulled his hand away from my mouth and pressed his lips against mine, his hands dropping to my breasts.

Tears? I was crying? Why? I wasn't scared...but the feeling of his hands on me was enough to make me feel sick. I grimaced, and right when I was about to force my leg up, I heard a growl. A *growl*.

I honestly thought it was my imagination. I missed Xavier so much, I had been hearing his voice in my head while I was gone. But I knew it wasn't my imagination when the man in front of me was gone, and jet-black fur flew by my face...

**Episode 65**

Xavier was here. Why was he here? How did he find me?

I crumbled to the ground because my shaky legs had given out on me. I glanced down to my trembling hands, my stomach turning. *Don't vomit, please.*

Tony’s scream was immediately cut off as the large wolf bit down on the top of him, covering the sound as he began dragging him away. All I could do was stare before wearily dragging myself to stand, almost limping to the door.

"Stop," I tried to shout at him, but it came out as a weak whisper. Did Xavier have control of his wolf right now?

It was dark out, so I had to squint to see the large, dark wolf trying to pull Tony off campus, but now he began to fight back. He kicked his leg up and managed to land a blow on Xavier's stomach. Xavier barely flinched from the attack—it was obvious it didn't hurt, but it only made him angrier.

My hand went to my mouth to stop the bile as it threatened to rise in my throat. My stomach flipped, and I felt like I was going to throw up.

Even from this distance, I could hear the gruesome noises, the horrifying sound of Tony's leg ripping off. It was too much. I backed off and tried to scream, but my voice was hoarse. Tears dripped down my face. "Help…"

Had I even said the word? I couldn't hear my voice—everything was ringing. I tried to catch myself, but it was too late. Everything turned black, and as I lost my balance and passed out, the last thing I felt was someone catching me.

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"She's blinking," a male voice said.

"Caliana, wake up! Cali!" I winced as someone roughly shook me.

"She vomited back there; make sure she doesn't choke on it in her sleep." Alex's voice—he sounded concerned.

"Ew, gross. *You* make sure. I don't want to get vomit on me."

"Lola!" Alex huffed, and he lifted me up. "Caliana, you're okay."

I had trouble opening my eyes, but after some fight, my lids peeled apart, and light blinded me. Instantly, I found two blurred figures above me. Alex and Lola.

"Are you okay?"

"What happened?" It came out raspy, like I hadn't had a drink of water in ages. My vision slowly cleared, and the expression Lola gave me reminded me of everything that happened.

Everything replayed in my mind: from Tony assaulting me to Xavier's wolf throwing him off to...Xavier ripping off Tony's leg.

"Oh my god," I muttered before my voice was louder. "OH MY GOD, HE RIPPED OFF—"

"No, he didn't. I don't know what you saw, but you were dreaming, Caliana." Lola said this with a firm voice and glanced toward Alex. I immediately realized she was telling me not to expose werewolves.

"Yeah..."

"Where's Tony?" Alex asked.

The look on Lola's face told me she was aware of what happened because she seemed to choke up.

"He felt sick." The words came out shaky. "So he left…"

"Did he do something?" Alex's brow furrowed. "Left where?"

When he asked if Tony did something, my stomach turned, and I shrugged. "I don't think he'll be back tonight," I said, wanting to avoid his question. I didn't even want to tell Lola about it—it was humiliating.

I expected Alex to question me more, but instead his lips pressed into a straight line, his brow furrowing. "Good."

"You don't like him?"

"He's not nice."

"Then why hang out with him?"

"Well, he's nice to me when we're in private, but he wasn't nice to his ex."

"Did he rape her?" I said it without warning, and both of them looked at me, puzzled.

"No...he just shouted at her a lot, and he cheated on her. But I told her, and he’s kind of hated me since."

"Oh, right."

Alex glanced away, but I felt Lola's gaze locked tight on me. I wanted to avoid her eyes, but when she refused to look away, I forced myself to make eye contact with her.

Her eyebrows rose, discreetly trying to ask me what happened. Instead, I shook my head, but I knew the only reason she stopped asking me was because Alex was in the room.

Lola tapped Alex on the shoulder. "You go—I'll take care of her."

His eyebrows pulled together, obviously concerned. "I don't want to leave you here alone."

"Please. I need to talk to her," Lola said, and immediately he stood, nodding.

"You have my number. I'll be hanging around campus for a while. If you need anything, call me." He nodded to both of us then offered me a sympathetic smile before leaving. Once he was out of the room, Lola got up and shut the door behind him.

"Are we allowed in here?" I glanced around the nurse's office slowly. The lights were on, and I was lying on one of the two beds.

Lola nodded. "Yeah, now what happened?"

"You know what happened."

"I know *some* of what happened."

"How much?"

"Xavier was here...and Tony's not anymore. There's some blood outside the school, and you're shaken up." Okay, so she knew almost as much as me. "What did Tony do, Cal?"

"Nothing..."

"Cal—"

"He tried, but he did nothing, okay? He tried to kiss me and touch me, but he didn't do anything."

"I'll kill that disgusting toenail." Her fist clenched, and the anger was clear on her face. "I'm going to punch his balls until they're purple and bloody."

My face scrunched at the image, and I shivered. "I think Xavier already punished him enough. He—oh my god. Xavier tore off a leg! He tore off Tony's leg! How is he going to keep him quiet? Will he need to pay him or...I don't know! Threaten him? Oh m—"

"Calm down." Lola put a hand on me. "My man's here to take care of him."

"How do you know?"

"I sense him...it's a weird thing with mates."

"How come I don't sense Xavier?"

"Because..." She cut off her sentence. "I promised I wouldn't lie to you anymore, and I won't, but I can't tell you. It's Xavier's place to share it."

"Is it bad?"

"Not bad. Just...something he'd have to tell you. I wasn't aware of it until Jay told me."

"I need to go to him—I need to stop him."

"It's fine. Jay has his back."

"But he might be mad at me. He saw Tony kissing me and touching me. What if he thinks I cheated on him?"

"He won't."

"Can he read minds?"

"No, but you didn't kiss Tony back, did you?"

"Obviously not! But he was so angry and filled with rage—I don't know if he got a proper look. How did he find me? Why is he here?"

"Caliana..." Lola sat on the bed next to me and placed her hand on my leg. "Their kind is different. Similar to humans, but they do have wolf traits."

"They're angrier?"

"More protective," she said slowly. "Wolves are territorial and will fight for things they love. Especially Alphas. This may sound gross, but mates can be territorial."

"Territorial…" For some obscure reason, I found it hot.

"Yes. You're HIS mate—you belong to him. His wolf side kicked in and got protective when he saw you with someone else. When you didn't reply, maybe he got nervous, and set out to find you. I assume he followed your scent—it would be stronger because you’re mates."

"Oh..."

"It's a lot to get used to, Cal. You can freak out if you want." She looked sad and worried for me, but I shook my head.

"No, I'm fine with that."

"You're fine with that?"

"He's less likely to cheat, right?" I offered her a small grin, and at first, there was no sign of her returning the expression until she shook her head and let out a weak laugh. "You worry me sometimes."

"Better to be positive than negative."

"Unless it's an STD or pregnancy test."

"Lola!" I laughed. "You know some people *want* to get pregnant."

"Old people." She scrunched her nose. "And Lunas." The corner of her lip twitched with the teasing tone, and I just scowled. Then my heartbeat quickened.

*That was* why I was ignoring Xavier. I didn't want to confront him about what I’d learned about his pack, and now he was here. I was going to have to confront him about it in person. Maybe he'd leave. Maybe he was mad and didn't want to talk to me. I mean, I wasn't responding to his texts—maybe that was what was in his mind.

"Stop stressing. Things will work out, okay?"

"My boyfriend ripped off Tony's leg. What if he goes to jail? Tony will sue him!"

"Pretend you didn't see anything. You'd be surprised—they aren't the first humans our kind have hurt to protect people they love, and not once have we been caught." She nudged me with a wink. "We're sneaky."

"Sinister," I mumbled, nibbling nervously on my lip. She said it like it was a good thing—and it could be seen as one—but it made me think how many humans died by their hands. I'd understand if the humans somehow threatened them...

"I told you to stop worrying. I'm going to stop talking about it—let's change the subject. Our hometown is supposed to be a relaxing place."

"It's hard when someone in our hometown was attacked by my mate," I hissed.

"He deserved it. You heard what Alex said about how Tony treated his ex, and then he forced himself on you. He would only hurt more girls in the future, but now they'll be able to run away."

The thought of Tony hopping after people made me snort. "Gross..." I shook my head. "He'll probably use it to his advantage and play the sympathy card."

"Definitely." She pursed her lips. "You know, I feel bad about Alex now."

"What do you mean?"

"I thought he'd be all over you, making you feel bad for dating Xavier. Or at least throwing shade, but when you left with Tony, he was...happy for you."

"Happy I was with Tony?"

"No, happy that you were happy. I asked him why he was smiling—if he was up to something—but he was confused. He's a good friend."

"He is." I nodded, and right when I said that, there was a knock at the door.

"Speak of the devil," Lola said.

"Are we done talking about everything? Can he come back in?"

"Yeah. If there's anything else you need to know, ask me later." She nodded. "Come on in. Cal, do you want me to go?"

"You can go enjoy the dance if you want, I'll catch up to—" The door opening cut me off. I wasn't even looking toward it—I couldn't even see him—but the moment the door opened fully, the mood changed.

I suddenly understood what Lola meant when she said she sensed her mate. She knew it, too, and her body tensed.

With a deep breath, I slowly turned my head. Sure enough, my eyes met with the big, bad wolf himself.

Xavier.

**Episode 66**

My eyes locked onto Xavier's, and it felt like time froze. My heart had fallen into my stomach. Lola glanced to me, immediately concerned with how I would react.

I had been hoping meeting with Xavier again would be cuter, more romantic, since I had been missing him so much. Now, I just felt sick for many reasons. First, I had been avoiding him after finding out about the whole pregnancy thing.

Now he was here, and I had seen his wolf rip one of Tony's legs off. No hesitations, no questions. My mouth was dry.

"Caliana..." His voice was rough and sounded completely different than usual. Even so, it was so nice to hear him say my name, even in a scary scenario like this.

"Xavier, she fainted. Let her rest." Lola stood in front of him, blocking his path, but he didn't stop. His expression, however, changed to something with more concern.

His eyebrows pulled together, and he glanced down to me. "Are you injured?"

"No." My voice came out stronger than I’d expected. Xavier didn't question me any further on my health, but I could see he was worried about something else.

"What happened?"

"What do you mean?" It sounded like a dumb question, in a sense, but I was serious. A lot of things happened. He had bitten off Tony's leg, I had been attacked, he had seen Tony kiss me…so what was his question referencing?

"Lola, leave the room."

"N—"

"LEAVE." The loud, demanding tone made both of us jump, but Lola stood her ground. Her eyes fell to me, and I nodded, reassuring her I would be okay alone. I hoped.

"Don't be tough on her, Xavier," she said lowly before leaving the room and shutting the door behind her. Xavier followed after but instead of leaving, he locked the door so we were trapped. I was terrified; it was just the two of us, and so much had happened.

I knew he wasn't a monster but seeing what his wolf did to Tony made me nervous. What if I made him super angry to the point he—

"Are you scared?" It was like he could read my mind. I wanted to say no, but we needed to be honest if we were going to work through this, so after a moment of hesitation, I nodded.

"Of me?"

"Yes."

"Did you see...?"

"You rip Tony's leg off? Yes! You didn’t even hesitate."

"He kissed you!"

"That doesn't mean you can rip someone's leg off!"

"Did he kiss you?"

"Yes?"

"Or did you kiss him?"

His expression made my heart break. It was clear he was trying to stay calm, but there was hurt in his eyes, and seeing him like that made me sick. "I didn't. You know I wouldn't, Xavier."

"Then why weren't you answering my calls?"

"Is that why you flew here? Be—"

"Why, Caliana?"

"I had a talk with a woman, and I heard things and got nervous."

"That explains nothing." He arched an eyebrow. "You didn't cheat?"

"No! Did you not see how rough he was being? I tried to push him off. He was trying to—" I cut myself off when his face dropped. It went from hurt and concerned to one of pure anger.

Why would I think it was a smart idea to tell my wolf-bear boyfriend about being assaulted? My eyes fell to his fisted hands, and it looked like he was about to break something, so I quickly got up and managed to make it over to him.

I placed my hands over his. "You saved me, though. I'm fine. Nothing happened."

"Colton and Jay tried to stop me from coming here. If I hadn't come... Where was Lola? Why wasn't she—"

"It's not her fault! I trusted him. I thought he was going to pass out, so I brought him outside for fresh air."

"How can you be so stupid?!" he snapped at me. "How do you expect me to trust you to be a Luna if you fall for some stupid guy's trick?"

My face heated. I was slightly embarrassed about how stupid I had been, but mostly I was hurt. His words hurt me more than I could’ve imagined.

"You want to be independent, yet you can't—"

"It was a mistake, okay? I managed to survive an evil pack of wolf-bears attacking me, but I get tricked by one guy and suddenly I'm *weak*?" I thought I was going to say sorry for being dumb, but I had bottled everything up. "I don't even know if I want to be a Luna anymore," I snapped, shoving him away.

It was his turn to be shocked. "What?"

"I heard the full story about your pack. Luna's have to be pregnant— they aren’t important apart from breeding! What? Are we back in the old days when women didn't have rights?"

"You know I'm against that!"

"Are you?"

"*Yes*! You know what happened to my mother! That's why I left the pack—are you crazy? How could you think that of me?" He wasn't even angry now, and I felt myself begin to calm down. I probably shouldn't have accused him of something like that...

It took me a few minutes to respond. "I just…heard how it was in the old days. I love you, and I want to be with you, but if there's a chance I'm going to be treated as some toy for reproduction, I'm not okay with that. You may be against it, but what about those in your pack who are used to the old ways?"

"I'm the Alpha—I'll change it. You know you're only my toy when we're in bed."

The words caught me by surprise, and we instantly made eye contact. We stared for what felt like forever until the corner of his lip tugged up, and I busted out laughing.

"Can't you ever be serious?" I sighed, sitting back down on the bed.

"I need to joke," he frowned, "or else I'm going to kill something. I'm sorry for shouting and getting mad at you—I was just scared. The thought of some guy doing that to you...and if I wasn't there to stop it...."

"You were there, and it won't happen again. Plus, I was a bit tipsy, so I wasn't thinking properly."

“You're still only human. And you were up against a human..."

"No," I stopped him. "Stop thinking I’m too weak to be your mate. We're already mates!"

"I know we are, but—"

"But *nothing*. I love you, and you love me. I know you'll protect me when I need it, but I won't need it. I'm becoming stronger. It was one accident. Are you going to let one stupid mistake ruin this? I took down a wolf-bear, so hold that over my head—not some stupid, disgusting, horny human trying to take advantage of me."

"Caliana..."

"What? You’re breaking up with me? Your wolf will disappear!"

"If it means keeping you safe—"

"What's wrong with you? Why are you acting like this?"

"I can't be apart from you, Caliana! You didn't reply to a few of my calls or texts, and he made me fly out here to make sure nothing was wrong."

I knew by *he*, Xavier meant his wolf. "So?"

"That's not healthy; that's not okay. I was scared something would happen to you and surprise-surprise, something did."

"I was stupid and tipsy. You were right because our bond is that strong. I love you. I love you being protective, and I understand you can't help it."

"I don't want to ruin your life because—"

"You're *not*. As long as you're in it, my life is not ruined. I've never felt safer than when I’m with you. I was only scared earlier because I was in shock. I saw you rip off someone’s leg..."

"I'm sorry..."

"It should be him you apologize to." Suddenly, I froze . "Xavier…oh my god. Where's Tony? He's going to rat on you! You're going to go to jail! I'm going to be dating a locked-up wolf-bear, oh—"

"Jay's taking care of him, it's fine."

"Taking care of him?"

"Paying him off so he won’t speak. Don't worry, it’s being dealt with, okay?"

"I don't know if I can casually say *okay*. You need to go; you might get caught! You left blood behind."

"Cops don't know wolf-bears are real—they'll think a huge wolf ripped off his leg. Tony doesn't know we exist."

"Then why pay him off?"

He sighed and shook his head. "Look at me."

I raised my head slowly, looking into his eyes, and it made all the panic go away. All the fear—everything—disappeared. I was okay, I was fine. I was safe again.

"I love you."

"I love you, too."

"Are you calm?"

"Are you breaking up with me?"

"What?"

"JUST HOW YOU WERE TALKING WAS MAKING ME NERVOUS."

"If you think you can deal with my other side, then no. I'd never break up with you. Only if it was really for your own benefit."

"I won't benefit if you break up with me, so…"

Finally, his handsome chuckle appeared, and everything at the moment was perfect. Being around this man made me feel safe. I couldn't help but wrap my arms around him and lean in. "When do you leave?"

"Oh, I didn't book a flight yet. I just got on the first plane here."

My brows furrowed. "You're insane."

"No, I just have money."

"Must be nice." I laughed before sitting back down on the bed. He sat in the seat beside it. "Can I meet your parents now that I'm here?"

I had basically forgotten about my parents. Xavier was here now, in my hometown, where my parents were.

"You look nervous. Do you not want me to?"

"I do! I'd love that, I'm just a bit nervous." I was being honest, and I pulled a face when saying the words.

He arched a curious eyebrow. "It will be fine."

"I can't believe you're not nervous."

"Why would I be nervous?"

"My parents are human, remember? They're going to question you, and you'll have to twist the story."

"Oh, yeah," he mumbled. It was cute when he acted like a confused child. Usually, I could depend on him for anything, but other times he seemed distant about this world.

"I want to see what you do for fun here. And where you went to school when you were younger," he informed me. "Let's go now, or are you still feeling ill?"

I couldn't help but laugh at his eager attitude. "Wait, what about Tony?"

"I told you, Jay is dealing with him."

"Is Colton here?"

"No."

"No?"

"I believe he is with the woman he claims to hate."

"His mate..."

"I don’t know if he is still trying to kill her. He’s confused, but he wants to deal with it alone for once."

"I feel bad."

"There is no need to feel bad, Cal."

"How did the meeting with the pack go?"

"Oh. I forgot about all of that since I came here and ran into my girlfriend being kissed by a rat."

"Xavier." I placed my hands on my hip.

"I will tell you tomorrow—I want to chill tonight. Now let's go down memory lane. Do you need me to carry you?"

"No and no. I'm attending this opening night, and it's way too late to go out and look at places. Most are closed. We'll do that tomorrow."

"But I want to stay with you."

"You can stay—opening night welcomes everyone."

"And they are all humans here…" He didn't say it as a question, but I nodded in agreement anyway.

"Yes, I would hope so."

"Then let's go...I want to get drunk."

Oh no.

**Episode 67**

"Why would you give him alcohol?"

"I gave you alcohol, too."

"And how did that turn out?" I turned to look at Lola, accusing. I didn't blame her for what happened, obviously, but we could both agree that being under the influence of alcohol didn't help my brain comprehend what was happening with Tony.

"He can usually handle his alcohol."

"Are you sure? Even when he drinks straight vodka? Why would your friend even sneak vodka into an opening night?"

"She's fun." Lola just shrugged, and I sighed. "You should get drunk, too—forget everything that happened. I promise to be the designated sober person. I'll be the mom here."

"No, I'm going to have to babysit Xavier."

"He's not even drunk—he's tipsy."

"Babe." I had been so focused on my conversation with Lola, I hadn't noticed Xavier walking up to us. Hearing him call me ‘babe’ made my cheeks flush; it was weird and foreign to me. Xavier rarely called me that.

"No more drinks," I said.

"Why not?"

"You'll get drunk."

"I don't get drunk."

"You're already tipsy," I pointed out.

"I'm not."

"Then walk a straight line."

He arched an eyebrow at my challenge but stood straight and sucked in a breath before turning away. To my surprise, he actually walked in a straight line without tipping over at all. He was using some wolf-bear powers to do that. Wolf-bear…wait.

"Lola, Xavier called himself a wolf-bear earlier. I don't know if he even noticed, but it was funny."

"Seriously?"

I nodded slowly. I wasn't sure if he had realized what he said, but I noticed it immediately. I hadn't brought it up at the time since we were having an intense conversation.

"See? Straight line." He returned to the conversation, having missed the wolf-bear comment. "Can I have more alcohol?"

I was hesitant but only rolled my eyes. "Fine, one more drink." Lola pulled out the alcohol with a wide grin and passed it to him. He took a huge swig with no hesitation, not even wincing.

I pulled a face, disgusted. I hated the taste of vodka so much—it reminded me of poison. My eyes latched onto someone coming our way, my heart immediately jumping. "Put it away, the teacher's coming."

"Teacher?”

"Caliana, Lola! It's been a while. How have your holidays been?"

"Very eventful," Lola commented. She’d already had a lot of vodka, yet she was barely tipsy. It was honestly impressive.

"Ready for the new semester?"

I pulled a face, and of course the teacher noticed this. "Something wrong, Caliana?"

"I'm not sure if I'll be coming back for another year."

"Yes, she will!" Xavier added. I let out a frustrated sigh; I had hoped he would wander off.

Immediately, the teacher turned to look at him. "Are you a new student?"

"Nope."

"No? You're not even thinking of this place? Because we have a wide range of courses."

"I don't need it."

"We all need a degree."

"I probably have triple the amount in your bank account, and I never got a degree, plus I'm half your age..."

"Xavier," I snapped, turning to him with wide eyes.

"What? I'm sick and tired of all these old people saying people need a degree. Stressing people out while they're young, saying they won't get anywhere if they don't have one. That's a bunch of crap. Half the people are doing fine without it, and I mean, how much did you pay for studies? Now look at you." He turned back to the woman. "Stop stressing people out."

"Please excuse him, he came back from a dentist appointment and is dosed on meds," Lola said with a sigh.

So…Xavier was an honest drunk. The teacher’s face was bright red, and I could tell she wanted to kick him out, but she didn't have authority to do it. "I'll see you two in class. Teach your friend some manners." With that, she turned and stormed off.

"Now she's going to hate us thanks to you." Lola glared at Xavier.

"You're the one who gave him alcohol," I defended him before turning and giving him my own piece. "But what makes you think you've a right to crap on people who are getting a degree when you’re telling me I have to come back? You can't change your mind like that."

He blinked. "If you hadn’t met me, you would have continued getting your degree. I'm not making changes to your life."

"I wouldn't because I can't afford it! I can do what I want, Xavier, and if that means dropping out, then that's my choice. Like you said, it doesn't ruin lives."

"Stop arguing with me when I'm tipsy and can't make valid points!" He huffed like a child.

"You admit you're tipsy?"

"I’m the victim right now"

"You’re a victim? You bit the teacher’s head off for no reason!"

"She was in my business."

"As fun as this night was, I think it's time to leave." I sighed, not interested in being a buffer between tipsy Xavier and anyone else at the school.

He pouted like a child, clearly not wanting to go yet but also not wanting to annoy me.

"You are not coming back to my house tipsy, or my parents will think I'm dating some drunk. We'll go back to our place," I said before I let Lola know about our plan.

"Smart idea," Lola commented.

"Come on," I told Xavier, and he followed me like a puppy. He continued to look around the place, clearly curious, and I found it cute.

"Jay!" Lola cheered, and when I looked up, I noticed Jay at the end of the hall. His eyes lit up the moment Lola was in sight, and he ran over to her. I forced myself to look away when they started kissing. I always felt awkward when a couple kissed in front of me. I understood, though—they were mates.

Lola whispered something to him, and he nodded, responding with something I couldn't hear. "We were going to get a hotel, but Jay wants to see our place."

I nodded in understanding. Two wolf-bears under our roof...what could go wrong?

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"Your room's nice." Xavier glanced around. "Smells like you."

"That's weird." I chuckled and shut the door behind us. Jay and Lola went into her room and god knew what they were up to in there.

I held out the cup of water and passed it to Xavier. "Drink this to sober up some."

"Nope." He took it from me and left it on the bedside table.

I sighed and climbed onto the bed, glancing over at him curiously. He was an honest drunk, and there were so many questions I wanted to ask in hopes he would tell me, but I felt like it was almost taking advantage of him in a way.

But would he tell me otherwise? I had too many questions.

What was Lola on about earlier? The thing she couldn't tell me and said Xavier needed to, about how I couldn't sense him? Did they really bribe Tony to shut him up? Where was Tony?

I was pulled from my thoughts as Xavier pulled off his top then his bottoms, so he was only in his boxers. My eyes roamed his perfect torso before stopping right over his—

"I know you're my girlfriend and all, but goddamn woman, control yourself." The teasing tone to his voice forced me to tear my eyes from his body and go back to his face.

"I can do what I want." I stuck my tongue out, and he tilted his head as he climbed onto the bed. I pulled off my own clothes until I wore only my bra and panties. I opened my closet, beginning to search for a large top.

I didn’t know how, probably due to wolf-bear powers or something, but I could feel his presence behind me almost instantly. Okay, that was a lie. I couldn’t sense it, but my butt suddenly stung.

I yelped, almost falling into my closet, and turned to glare at him. "Ouch!"

"It was just a spank; you've taken harder ones before."

"I wasn't expecting that!"

"That's what you get for checking me out without permission." He shrugged, using the worst excuse possible.

I would be lying, though, if I said I didn't find it hot.

"Are you cold?" he asked.

"No, why?"

In an instant, I was lifted and tossed onto the bed, and I shrieked. “What the hell?"

"If you aren’t cold, don’t wear a top."

"It's common decency!"

"I've seen you in lewder things than those, Cali," he reminded me, causing me to blush.

"What if Jay walks in?"

"I'll be on top of you; he won't see."

"XAVIER!"

"Kidding." He grinned widely, obviously enjoying this taunting.

"Don't get my hopes up like that." These words caught his attention because his eyes immediately returned to mine, almost longingly.

"You know I would follow through if I didn't have alcohol in my system."

"I know you would." I laughed as he climbed into bed beside me. His large arm wrapped around my waist, tugging me down onto the bed, and I hesitantly slid under the covers. He adjusted himself so his head was nuzzled onto my chest.

My lips turned up, and I rested my hand on his hair, combing my fingers through it, which he never admitted to loving, but I knew he did. Immediately, his eyes shut, and he legitimately reminded me of a puppy. His hand was warm on my thigh, and he was close to dozing off.

"Xavier."

"Hmm?"

"Please tell me what happened with Tony." Silence. "Please."

"He killed him."

My stomach turned over, and my whole body froze. He killed him? Tony was dead. I could only hope this was more taunting from Xavier.

"Jay killed him?"

"No..." he said, almost asleep. "My wolf did."

**Episode 68**

I didn't get much sleep last night.

Probably because my wolf-bear boyfriend told me he had killed one of the guys who went to my college.

I let out a tired yawn and rubbed my eyes. It was only nine, but I had gotten up, showered, and brushed my teeth. I was pretty sure I was only running on three hours of sleep, so I was in a grumpy mood.

I wanted to confront Xavier more about Tony, but I knew he would probably have a hangover when he woke up. The water I left out for him last night had been finished during the night.

Although I was annoyed with him for lying about Tony, I was still going to make him breakfast. Oh my god, I never thought I'd have to think a sentence like this…

I was already up, though, and waiting for him to wake up would make my anxiety worse. I got dressed in a warm robe. I made sure to be quiet on the way to the kitchen so I wouldn’t wake anyone.

"Morning." The deep voice caused me to scream, jump away, and stub my toe on the table. Instantly, I knelt to caress the injury. The first person I thought of was Xavier, since I couldn't get what he told me last night out of my head, but the voice didn't belong to him.

"Jay? Why are you up so early?" I said, turning back to look at him as I stood. I limped to the fridge and pulled it open, getting out the eggs and butter. I shut it behind me then walked to the bread bin before glancing back at Jay.

He wore a guilty expression as he glanced at my foot. "Sorry for scaring you." he said as he took a large bite from his dry toast.

"Why are you up?"

"I was hungry, and I usually get up early to patrol." He shrugged casually. "Making your bae breakfast? Oh, maybe I should make Lola something."

"I'll make her some, and you can bring it up to her," I volunteered. "Want some?"

"I'm good. I already had four slices, so that'll fill me for now."

I nodded and began cooking for the other two and myself. I only planned to make Xavier food, but since I was making Lola some too, I might as well get some for myself.

One of the chairs scraped behind me when Jay sat. Suddenly, my eyes widened as I realized this was my chance. "Jay?"

"Hmm?"

I was too scared to face him when I spoke. "Did Xavier kill Tony?"

One second. Silence. Two seconds. Silence. Three seconds. Silence.

I turned around with an accusing look and a scowl on my face. "Jay, answer me."

"Why are you asking?"

"He told me he did, and I need to know it wasn't just him drunk and joking."

"He told you?"

"Isn't that what I just said? Now, answer me."

He bit his lip, not enjoying my questioning. I understood I was being harsh, but I was terrified and needed to know the truth. Could I trust Xavier's drunken answer?

"Yes."

Even though I expected this to be the answer, I suddenly felt lightheaded. My hand reached for the counter, and I quickly shut my eyes to stop my head from spinning.

Jay was beside me in less than a second. "Sit down, Caliana." He sounded concerned, but I brushed him off lightly and shook my head. I pushed myself away and turned to focus on cooking the food.

"His *wolf*, right?"

"Yeah." Jay's voice was low. He clearly didn't want to overwhelm me, but I was appreciative he wasn't lying to me about this. "Caliana, you need to realize he still doesn't have full control over his wolf yet."

"I get that," I mumbled. "But it’s scary."

"He was protecting you. His wolf saw that guy hurting you, and it followed its instincts. Protect his mate from danger, even if it meant killing."

"He can't always do that!"

"He won't...he was just blinded by anger. He didn't know the whole situation at the time. He was confused."

"Where's Tony’s body? Xavier said you dealt with it."

"Why?"

"Because Xavier might go to jail!"

"He won't. Humans don't know we're real—they'll think it was a bear or something."

"He ripped his leg off! People won't believe that."

The moment I spoke, Jay's expression changed, and he looked away. "Don't worry, I made it look like a bear attack." It was sinister. "It's my job as third in command to clean up after the Alpha's messes." He added that part in, thinking I was scared of him.

And for a moment I was. They casually killed; no second thought spared. "You've killed before, right? All of you..."

"Yes."

"How many?"

"I can't be exact, but this isn’t a conversation you should be having with me."

"You're right. I need to confront Xavier about it." The popping sound from the toaster made me focus back on the food. "Thank you for being honest."

"Sure."

The rest of the time cooking was spent in silence, Jay fake-reading an old newspaper that was left on the table until I finally announced the food was done. He stood and walked over as I passed him Lola's plate. "Thanks, Cal. Try not to get worked up over this."

"Yeah," I responded. He was used to this lifestyle—he had killed before. I found out my mate, my boyfriend, murdered someone. I didn’t know if I could be calm about this.

I brought the food up to Xavier, along with my own plate, and when I pushed the door open, he wasn't there. For a moment, I was a bit worried until I heard the shower running. I walked over to the door and knocked on it lightly. "Food's ready." A few seconds later, the shower shut off, and Xavier came out with a towel tied around his waist. My eyebrows rose when I noticed he looked like normal—no groggy expression or anything. "No hangover?"

"I don't get hangovers," he informed me before eyeing the food. "You didn't need to cook."

"I know."

A small smile formed on his lips, and he walked over to me, leaning down to plant a small kiss on my forehead. "Thank you." He walked over and sat on a stool near the dresser where I had set his plate down.

I crawled onto the bed and began eating my breakfast. I didn't even feel that hungry anymore, but I forced it down anyway.

"What's wrong?" he asked, turning around to look at me.

I didn’t want to say anything, didn’t want to get into this, but I knew I had to. "Do you remember what you said last night?"

"I said a few things, but I think so."

"About killing Tony."

The moment the words slipped past my lips, his facial expression changed. It contorted into a look of shame, but also one of embarrassment. "I told you that?"

"Right before you fell asleep."

"I—"

"If you lie to me, Xavier, I'll be pissed."

Silence. "It was my wolf..."

"Yeah, Jay filled me in."

"What?!"

"You told me last night, but I made him tell me the rest."

"Are you scared of me?"

"No." He seemed surprised by this, so I quickly changed my answer. "I don't think so, at least."

"I'd never hurt you."

"I know."

"I don't know what else to say apart from I'm sorry...and I don't regret it." His words made my blood run cold. "I'm a killer, Caliana. I've killed before—this isn't my first."

"I know, but you can't kill humans so *casually.*"

"He deserved it."

"Xavier! No one deserves to be killed..."

"I disagree."

I didn't know where this conversation was going, but I didn't want it to lead to a fight, so I tried to change the course. I was aware this probably wasn't the best idea, but I needed to know, and it was better than talking about Tony. "Lola said something to me last night."

"What?"

"She sensed Jay when he got here. She knew he was here and said it's a common thing between mates. Can you sense me?"

"Yes."

"Because you’re the Alpha though, right? Not because we're mates…because I can't sense you."

"I…don’t know."

"Why can't I sense you, Xavier?"

"You're human."

"That's not the reason. Lola's half-human, and with the way she talked about it, I know there has to be a different reason, too. Don't you dare lie to me."

He watched me for a moment and finished his eggs and toast before clearing his throat.

"Because…we're *not* mates."

"You said you got a second chance. Your wolf *chose* me."

"I know."

"Then how aren't we mates?"

A guilty expression formed on his face before he finally spoke. "Because *I* haven't actually chosen you as my mate."

**Episode 69**

*Because I haven't chosen you as my mate. Because I haven't chosen you as my mate. Because I haven't chosen you as my mate.*

The words kept repeating themselves over and over in my mind. Every time I thought about it, it felt like a tiny piece of my heart was breaking. I felt sick—sicker than when I found out my boyfriend killed Tony.

Boyfriend. Should I even call him that if he said he didn't choose me as his mate? Wait, *he* didn't choose me? The moon goddess did or whatever, though. That was what he had to mean, right?

I tore my eyes away from my hands and looked back at him. We had been sitting in silence for a while, and I knew he was letting me have a moment to digest what he said, but it was cruel and confusing.

My voice was shaky. "You didn't choose me, but the moon woman did, right? That's why…because I'm your second mate?" I was trying to make sense of what he said without hurting myself any further.

The expression on his face told me I was wrong, and I felt lightheaded. How could a guy make me feel this bad? Is this what love actually was? I understood why a lot of people hated it if it made you feel like this. I wanted to vomit up everything I had eaten, I wanted to shrivel up and disappear. "Then what, Xavier? What the hell does that mean?"

"I didn't properly mark you…"

"Sorry?" He didn't properly *mark* me? At the sound of that, my face heated, and my eyes widened immediately. "Oh my god...do you need to pee on me or something? I know some people have that kink, so I guess I don't mind if you need to…to mark me, since some people—"

When a rumble of laughter came from him, it cut off my sentence, and I raised my eyes to look at him. His stressed expression had contorted into something else. His hand covered his mouth as he continued to laugh, his shoulders shaking at the same pace.

From this reaction, I assumed I was incorrect. My face was on fire; I said he could *pee* on me, even though that wasn’t what we were talking about.

Ugh.

It was confirmed, all right—I wanted to shrivel up into a ball and disappear from the face of the earth. That sounded like a fantastic idea, one that sadly would not happen. I tried to hide my embarrassment by plastering a scowl on my face, showing I was still annoyed.

The sound of my phone ringing was the only thing that finally stopped Xavier’s laughter. I crawled off the bed and reached for it, raising my eyebrows when I noticed the call was from my father. I hit the green button immediately. I knew it was horrible, but since I hadn't talked on the phone much with them lately, I always thought something bad happened when I got a phone call, which was terrifying.

"Hello?" I said hesitantly.

"Caliana." My father didn't sound sad or anything, so I could only assume things were fine. Well, as fine as fine could be.

"What?"

"I just called Lola."

"Nice to know you check on Lola before your own daughter," I said sarcastically.

However, my father did not respond to that joke. Instead, he said something that caught me off guard.

"She let me know your boyfriend is here." My lips formed a thin, straight line at his words, and I choked up. "Caliana? Were you trying to hide that from me?" His voice was stern, and I assumed he was judging my behavior. He was probably thinking Xavier was some degenerate I was trying to hide so they wouldn't hate him.

"Dammit," I hissed.

"Excuse me?"

"Lola ruined the surprise."

"Surprise?"

"Yeah... Xavier was cooking, and we were planning to stop by and surprise you. That was why we came back to my and Lola's place…so we could cook it without you guys walking in on us and ruining it." Also because I didn't want them walking in on something else, but I wasn't going to say that to my dad.

The silence on the other end of the phone made me nervous, and I began chewing on my lip nervously. Did he believe me? Was he about to scold me and tell me off?

"Oh, Caliana, you're such a sweetheart. I'm sorry for ruining the surprise—I thought you were just lying and hiding him from us. I'll make sure not to let your mother know, so it'll be a surprise for her. When will you be over?"

"In two hours." TWO HOURS?! *CALIANA, WHAT ARE YOU THINKING?* WHY COULDN'T YOU SAY TOMORROW OR LATER TONIGHT? WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU?

"Wonderful, I'll see you then."

With that, I hung up the phone, not wanting to be questioned anymore in case my father changed his mind and realized I was lying. I turned to a confused Xavier, narrowing my eyes. "This whole mate thing, we're going to talk about it tonight, but for now, I need to go and cook."

"I'll cook."

"No, you won't. It needs to taste good."

He looked offended and stood from the side of the bed. "I can cook. Besides, you told your parents I was cooking, so I have to. You are terrible when it comes to lying, you know? Two hours..."

"They believed me, so I'm not terrible!"

"Maybe they are just gullible. I see where you get it from," he teased, but I was not in the mood for teasing. I was stressed and terrified of my parents meeting Xavier. Two hours...we only had *two hours*.

"Okay, I’ll trust you with this food, but if it sucks, I'm going to kill you." I narrowed my eyes, making sure he knew I wasn't playing. I pushed him out the door. "Go start, and hurry, so I can choose outfits for us."

"I didn’t bring many clothes—especially not fancy ones."

"Oh my god, Xavier, I hate you so much sometimes. Go cook, and I'll figure something out." I was stressed, and I tended to snap at people when I got stressed. He understood and left the room without another word.

I rooted through my wardrobe in hopes of finding some guy’s clothes but of course, there was absolutely nothing. After rooting through my closet for what felt like ages, I pulled my hair back and tied it into a ponytail to stop it from getting in my face. Wait...Lola might have something.

Attempting to shut my closet doors after the avalanche of clothes fell out, I rushed to Lola's room, banging on the door. I opened it after the third knock, my eyes landing on their bed immediately, and to my relief, they weren't doing anything dirty. Instead, Lola was half-naked and munching on her breakfast in delight while Jay was getting dressed.

"Morning." She munched happily. "I just got laid."

"I didn't need to know that," I groaned, shaking my head. "Lola, do you happen to have any clothes here that would fit Xavier? He's meeting my parents in two hours, and he wasn't smart enough to bring a proper change of clothes."

The toast fell from her mouth, a shocked look on her face. "He's meeting your parents?! Oh my god!" She hopped out of bed and ran to her closet. "Yeah, I have a bunch of Jay's clothes in here—they'll probably fit Xavier."

Thank god.

∞

One hour later, we were both dressed. Xavier didn't fit into a lot of Jay's clothes, but Jay had a black shirt that was too big and fit Xavier, so he wore that. And my god, did he look scrumptious.

My eyes wandered over my boyfriend's body, the black, long-sleeved shirt clinging to his muscles in a perfect way. He had black suit pants and a belt I bought a while back to whip Lola for fun…yes, I was immature.

He looked like a sex god r— *No! You are mad at him! Do not compliment how hot he is.*

The food smelled so good, too, though...

"You just gave me these clothes, but now you look like you want to tear them off and have sex." He tilted his head with a charming smile.

Would I really survive my parents meeting this man?

**Episode 70**

The aroma coming from the covered dish Xavier held caused my stomach to growl, letting us both know I was hungry again. Xavier glanced to me with an eyebrow raised. "And you said you didn't want me to cook?"

"Stop acting so friendly with me; I'm still angry at you," I snapped, using it as an excuse to hide my embarrassment about my loud stomach. He simply shook his head with a small smile, which aggravated me slightly.

Sure, I was going to have to act like everything was fine in front of my parents, but Xavier and I were going to have a *long* talk when we were home. And he was either going to mark me or get the hell out and never come back.

We left the car, and I could already see one of my parents peeking out the window. My heart raced as we walked side by side up to the house. What if they didn't like him? No, what if they *hated* him?

Oh god.

Xavier was cocky and confident, and I knew a lot of people didn't like that. He could also be extremely rude, and since he was a wolf-bear, manners weren't exactly his thing.

I was beginning to feel lightheaded as all of this flashed into my mind. As I neared the door, I raised my hand to knock, but instantly my wrist was stopped. Confused, I turned to Xavier, who held the two plates of food in his other hand while his right one held me.

His jaw tightened, and his eyes were wide. "Wait."

"Did you forget something?"

"No."

"Then what?"

"I'm nervous." The way he said those two words caused my heart to flip. How adorable.

"A wolf-bear nervous over humans?" I couldn't help but laugh, which caused him to scowl.

"No. A man nervous to meet his girlfriend's parents, Caliana."

"Am I really your girlfriend, though? After all, you didn't *mark* me," I huffed, allowing my petty side to show.

He rolled his eyes in response, and I knew it was not the best time. We had to act chill for this, and if I threw shade, it would fall through. Without any more hesitation, I knocked on the door and almost instantly, it flew open. Both my mother and father stood there, my dad supporting my mom.

They didn’t even spare me a glance. They were locked onto Xavier, studying him. I noticed them check Xavier out for a second, and I already knew they were forming some type of judgment in their minds, and I couldn't stop myself from stressing.

My mother was stubborn. What if she formed a bad opinion of him, then didn't want to change it?

"Aren't you a handsome man?" My mother hummed before glancing to me and wiggling her eyebrows. My cheeks heated, and I forced my eyes away, acting like I didn't care. This made her grin spread.

Xavier held out his free hand, offering a handshake, which both of my parents took with gratitude. I only noticed it for a second, but I saw his hand shaking slightly before they shook it. He was actually nervous around them—it was quite adorable.

"Well, come on in. We're starving." My father stood back from the door, and I followed my mother inside with Xavier at my heels. We made our way to the kitchen where Xavier placed both dishes on the countertop.

"What did you guys make?" My mom tried to pull up the tinfoil covering both dishes.

"Actually, Xavier made it, so I don't even know," I said honestly, trying to peer at them myself.

"Honey chicken stir-fry," he said quietly. "I'm not the best cook, but I hope you enjoy it."

Oh my god. He was so polite and shy—it was adorable.

"That sounds absolutely delicious!" My mom clapped her hands and began getting plates ready. My father quickly took over the job, probably concerned for her health. Even doing small things, he'd always try to take over for her.

Ten minutes later, the food was dished out, and we all sat around the table. The moment the food hit my tongue, I almost died on the spot. It was delicious. Sure, my hunger added to the taste, but it was way better than I expected.

"Oh my, Xavier! This is absolutely incredible. I didn't know she landed a cook!" My mom's eyes almost watered with love for the food.

My dad was clearly impressed, too, as he nodded

I expected more chatting during dinner, but it was clear we were all busy enjoying the food, so it stayed silent most of the time. I did, however, notice Xavier didn't finish his dish. He ate a good amount, but the rest was left to the side.

After we all finished, I told my parents to go to the living room while Xavier and I cleaned up. It would give him time to calm down and give me time to talk to him while my parents rested. My mother disagreed at first, trying to clean up, but my father intervened quickly and pulled her away.

"How are you feeling?" I asked Xavier, once my parents were out of earshot.

If we were at home, I'd be petty and give him the silent treatment, but I had never seen him act this way, so I couldn't help but be concerned.

"Good." It was a short reply, and I didn't believe it for a second.

"You didn't finish your food, which is rare, and you've been so quiet."

"Nerves killed my appetite, and we were eating, so I wasn't going to be the only one talking." He shrugged as I passed him dishes to dry once I finished washing them. "I assume you’re still upset with me."

"Of course I am, but we'll deal with that after this, okay?" I sighed, and he nodded. We worked together in silence until the dishes were done. After the plates were put away, we made our way to the living room where my parents were chilling. Now, the part I feared the most: the questions.

My eyebrow arched when I saw a bunch of cards laying on the coffee table before my mother clapped her hands. "We're playing Go Fish—you know how to play, Xavier?"

"I actually forget," he said sheepishly, causing me to chuckle. He probably didn't even know how to play.

After my mother taught him how to play, the game went underway, and the questions began.

"Where do you work?" My father began to quiz.

"I work from home, online," Xavier answered without hesitation.

"You're planning to do that for life? You must not make much money." I could see my dad was picking at Xavier to see if he was “good enough” for his daughter.

"I make enough to fly here and surprise your daughter." It was a charming smile from Xavier, but I could see he felt a bit under fire from the question.

"True." My father chuckled in response after my mother slapped him.

"You're quite handsome. And your body—"

"Mother," I cut her off.

"I'm just saying. How did someone so bold and loud like Caliana get you?"

"I’m the lucky one in this relationship." Xavier chuckled, eyeing me.

"Why can't you be like that with me?" My mother glared at my father, slapping him lightly, causing him to bark out a laugh. "I do hope you don't plan on just a quickie—"

"Oh my god, don't say that word, Mom! Do you know what that means?" I cut her off again, and she frowned.

"A short relationship."

"No, Mother...not at all."

"As long as Caliana wants to put up with me, I'm ready to be with her forever." He nudged me, causing my cheeks to burn.

"That brings me to my next question…babies! Are you going to give me grandbabies in the future?" My mother looked hopeful.

"Of course." Xavier smiled a bright smile, causing my stomach to flip.

"Xavier!" His answer took everybody by surprise, especially my father, whose jaw dropped. Xavier offered me a confused look. "You were not against the id—"

"Hush." I nudged him. Did he have to bring this up around my parents? It was the worst. I was close to them, sure, but there were topics that made me cringe when we talked about them.

The rest of the time was spent playing games, and them asking questions about Xavier or both of us. Surprisingly, I really enjoyed it—more than I had expected. I was actually willingly going to invite Xavier back to my parents so we could all hang out again.

A few hours passed, and we were now standing at the front door, saying bye to my parents. "I'll stop by before I head back," I informed them, kissing them both on the cheek.

"You better make sure he comes with you!" My mother leaned in and pulled Xavier into a tight hug. "It was wonderful meeting you."

When they pulled away, I caught the hint of a blush on Xavier’s cheeks. It was adorable.

"Of course. It was an honor meeting you both," Xavier said with a genuine smile. After a few short goodbyes, we walked back to the car and hopped in.

"Did you have fun?" I asked.

"Yes."

"I was worried they wouldn't like you, but it turned out well."

"It did, and I'm delighted." Although it sounded honest, his voice was a bit quieter.

"Something wrong?"

He shook his head slowly before starting the car, glancing at me. "Are you still mad at me?"

"I will be when we get home." I grinned, leaning in and kissing him on the cheek.

Today had been fun and great, but now it was time to find out why he hadn't accepted me as his mate...and I hated it.

**Episode 71**

Meeting my parents went way better than expected, so the car ride home had me in a good mood. I always expected the worst to happen, but I couldn't have asked for anything better. I glanced out the window, my brow furrowing when I noticed we were taking a different way home. "Are you lost already? I thought dogs had a good sense of direction."

"First of all, I’m not a dog. Second of all, you said we were going to argue when we got home, so I'm avoiding going home."

"You can't avoid it like that!" I turned to him, my eyes wide. Was this guy really trying to avoid it right now? It was kind of funny seeing him try to outsmart me, even if it was also frustrating.

"Let's go to your old school."

"It's closed."

"I want to see the outside of it." He shrugged. I wanted to pester him and find out why he hadn't accepted me, but I didn't know the next time we would be back here, so I decided to fill him in on my childhood.

"Sacred Heart School," I announced. "I'll give directions—take a right up here."

The rest of the journey was filled with me leading the way, scolding him if he tried to talk over me. The school wasn't far, only a twenty-minute drive, so we made it there soon enough.

The gates were once jet-black, but the paint faded away, as had the gold writing with the name of the school. It was late, but the bright building still stood out from behind the gates. It was, of course, much smaller than the college. But it had felt bigger when I went to this school. Now, it looked small...I supposed that was part of growing up.

"This is where—" he reached into his pocket and pulled out a photo "—little you went to school."

My eyes flew open, my jaw dropping when I noticed the photo he held in his hand. It was me, younger me. I was squinting at the camera with a large, goofy smile, my hair tied up in two high pigtails.

There was a rocket popsicle in my hand, some smeared on my face, too. "WHERE DID YOU GET THAT?!" I tried to snatch it from him, but he yanked it away just in time.

"Your mother gave it to me."

"WHY WOULD SHE GIVE YOU THAT?!" I screeched, trying to grab it from his hand again but failing.

"I really liked it, and she said she had a copy so I could keep it." He smiled. "You are really adorable, you know? I want our pups to look like this."

"Oh my god, stop talking!" My face was on fire now as he looked down at the photo lovingly.

He looked out of the car again, studying my old school. "Should we jump the fence?"

"Jump the fence to explore my old primary school? No thanks. Let's just go—it's boring."

"What was your favorite place to go to as a kid?"

"I liked the ice cream stand about a block from here, but that shut down. Or the park...there were a few places." I shrugged.

"Is the park still open?"

"I think so. I haven't been in a while."

"Give me directions."

"No, we're going home."

"Please."

I rolled my eyes. "Fine." I noticed the smile crawl on his lips and forced myself to ignore it. The park was literally a three-minute drive from here, so it wouldn’t take long. "Look, the gate's closed." I pointed, already knowing it would be. "Time to go home."

"I disagree," he said as he pulled into a parking space and got out of the car.

I narrowed my eyes and got out of the car, running after him. "Xavier, don't break it!"

"I'm not," he said and made his way to the gate. He blocked my view but suddenly, he pushed the gate, and it swung open lightly.

"I told you it's open." He turned back with a grin and walked in. I raced after him, and when I glanced down, I noticed the broken chain, causing me to roll my eyes.

"You can't casually destroy public property, Xavier," I snapped, catching up to him. "We're going to be in so much trouble if we're caught." I hated doing stuff like this; my heart was racing, and I felt lightheaded. How does someone function when robbing a store or something? We broke into a free park, and I was about to pass out.

The only sound was the crunching of the stone path underneath our feet and the rushing river we passed after going over the bridge. In the distance, I could see the playground, and beside it was a large lake.

There were probably ducks in it, but they were mostly likely sleeping. "That way." I pointed to the playground without even realizing how excited I was. I ran toward it—I could see he was surprised, but he didn't hesitate and chased after me.

Of course, he was faster than me, but kept an even pace—probably to make me feel better. "You seem more excited than me," he commented.

"Why are you even excited?"

"I like seeing what you enjoyed when you were younger." He shrugged, not even breaking a sweat from the jog. Meanwhile, my ass already slowed down and couldn't speak anymore. It felt like some demon had ripped all the air from my lungs, and I had a stitch in my side.

"How are you already tired?" He frowned.

"It's cold outside, the air is messing with me..." I used it as an excuse, panting hard, and I noticed he was trying not to laugh.

We finally made it to the playground, and everything seemed much smaller than when I came here as a kid. "This makes me sad." I frowned, glancing around the place.

"Did something bad happen here?"

"No? Why? Can you sense a ghost or something with your wolf-bear powers?"

"What are you on about?"

"You asked if something bad happened here!"

"You said it makes you sad!"

"Well, it's my childhood, and I kind of miss the old days, dummy."

"You miss the days when I wasn't there?"

"Don't be stupid." I rolled my eyes, ignoring the grin on his face from my reaction.

Deciding to ignore his comment, I pushed further into the park and made my way to the swings after exploring a short bit. "They changed the seats too," I commented.

I sat on a swing and pointed to the other one, indicating Xavier to sit over there. He obeyed, as a dog does, and let himself sway lightly.

"It's quiet here," I said.

"It's nice to see where you grew up...it gives me insight."

"Insight?"

"Knowledge."

"What did you think of my parents?"

"I love them—especially your mother. You are blessed to have her in your life, you know?"

My jaw tightened, and a lump formed in my throat. I *was* blessed to have her in my life, but I was always terrified of how long she would be around. "I know I am."

"She will get better."

"You don't know that. She was pushed down on the transplant list..." Just talking about this made my voice tremble, tears forming in my eyes. "Maybe I should stay here with her. Like you said, appreciate as much as I can before she goes."

"She won't go anytime soon, Cal. She's strong—just as strong as her daughter."

"Listen, maybe your wolf abilities help you heal faster, but we're human, Xavier. We don't get better like you do." I didn't even realize how harsh my tone was, like I was attacking him. "Sorry, I really don't like talking about this."

"Sorry for bringing it up."

"You didn't."

"Maybe you *should* stay here with her. You can go back to school that way, instead of having to transfer."

"Transfer?"

"I assumed you were dead set on not going back to that school, so I was looking into one closer to where I live. You know?"

Hearing him say this brought a smile to my face. He acted all hard and tough, but then there were moments like this where he would reveal his true self.

"I love you, Xavier, so much. I'm not going back to university, though."

"I know money's an issue, but it's not for me. Let me pay for it."

"No! You're my boyfriend, not my sugar daddy." I scrunched up my face, waving my hand. "Maybe sometime in the future, if I ever want to go back to it, I might."

"You're too stubborn." He huffed, shaking his head in disapproval.

"Have you heard from Colton?"

"No, why?"

"Just want to know if his mate's alive. She saved my life, so I can't get the idea of him killing her out of my head."

"It's the only thing that can free him, but it’ll also mess him up. I'm sure he’ll make the right decision."

"What do you think the right decision is?"

"I have no clue. I don’t know the girl, except that she tried to kill him." He pursed his lips. "Why are mates so messed up?"

"Excuse me?"

"Oh, come on. We weren't exactly healthy at the start." He chuckled. "We made a bet to kill each other, or do you not remember?"

"I do." I smiled, shaking my head. "God you were so messed up."

"Me?! Excuse you." He pushed my swing, causing me to squeal as I swung sideways toward the pole, but he grabbed me in time.

"We're over it now, so it's okay." I grinned before the expression faded. "I know I said I'd wait until we got home, but I can't. I won't be happy until I know why you didn't choose me as your mate."

"I did choose you."

"Okay, but you didn't mark me. You didn't make it official. I can't stop thinking about it. Are you having doubts about us?"

"No, not us." He shook his head. "I'm having doubts about your safety. It isn't just a mark…so much comes with it."

"Like what? Becoming a Luna? I'm prepared."

"First, you are not prepared to help run one of the most feared packs. You are just human and still not accustomed to this lifestyle. Second, that is not all that comes with it, but it is too much to tell you about from my end."

"From your end? What does that mean?"

"It’ll be easier to show you or have someone else explain."

"Show me? You're going to mark me?" My eyes lit up.

"No, consent is required, but you need to understand everything that comes with it before you agree."

"Then what?"

"I think it’s time you meet a real Luna, Caliana."

**Episode 72**

It took a few seconds, but I finally forced my eyes open, and instantly the sun felt like it was burning right through my eyes. Why did I always forget to close my curtains before sleeping?

Xavier and I may have had...angry make-up sex last night without planning on it. It just happened, and boy I did not regret it one bit.

After our conversation in the park, I told him I wanted to meet a Luna as soon as possible, but he said I'd have to wait for a bit. How can you tell someone to meet a Luna then change the topic and tell them to wait?

The whole ride home was me pestering him to take me to a Luna, only to have him argue, and it continued when we got back to the house, except it…escalated.

"Xav—" I didn't finish calling his name because when I turned over, I was greeted with an empty space. A frown formed on my face all too quickly, but the concern only lasted for a second when the door pushed open, and the smell of food filled the air.

"Yum," I mumbled, eyeing the breakfast. Eggs, beans, brown pudding, mushrooms, and toast. I didn't even know we had all those ingredients in this place. Most food had gone bad when we left unless Lola bought more.

It took me, a human piggy that favored food over everything else, to suddenly realize it wasn't Xavier holding the tray. It was Jay.

"Are you in the wrong room?" I asked. It was the first thing that came to my mind. Why was he here and not bringing it to Lola?

"Xavier told me to bring this up to you, but I brought up Lola's first. It's still hot, though." It was cute how he admitted he brought Lola her breakfast first.

"Is Xavier still downstairs?"

"No, he had to go and do a bit of work."

"He flew home?"

"No, just work around here."

"How? He doesn't live here. Are there more of your kind here?"

"I'm not sure—you may have to ask him when he comes home."

"Okay, thanks." I nodded, and he placed the tray on my lap and left the room.

I was disappointed it wasn't Xavier who delivered the food. I had nothing against Jay, but I wanted to talk to Xavier. Sure, one of the reasons was to nag him about taking me to a Luna, but also every time after we did the *deed*, I felt more attached to him.

Was that unhealthy? Probably…but who cares?

But…I was still wrecked after last night's activity, so a nap wasn't the worst idea…

∞

I sat up too quickly, causing my head to spin.

"Someone's finally awake."

"Xavier," I yawned his name, not even realizing he was in the room with me. "I was already awake."

"You woke up to eat, then fell back asleep," he commented, scrolling through something on his phone. I ignored the shade he threw and pushed myself up from the bed and walked to the bathroom.

I picked up my phone along the way and brought it with me. Holy cow, it was after one in the afternoon...I had slept in super late. I used the toilet then cleaned myself up, which included a shower and brushing my teeth.

If I hadn't been so tired, I probably would’ve tried to be kinky and invited Xavier into the shower with me, but it slipped my mind. I did, however, remind myself to question him on what work he had been up to while I was asleep. "Where did you go?"

"Out."

"To where?"

"Just explored."

"Jay said you were working. If you were exploring, why didn't you wait for me?"

"You seemed to be tired after last night. I didn't even know if you could walk today."

"Oh, shut up, you stupid, cocky dog."

He wore a proud smile in response, probably because I didn't actually disagree. Damn it—I should have...but I probably would be on the verge of lying.

"I'll have to go back to the pack soon."

"You never told me how the meeting went. Did they accept you to come back as the Alpha?"

"I told you a bit, but you were kind of drunk," he mumbled, and it felt like he was almost throwing shade, causing me to stick out my tongue. "They're wild and messed up and haven't had any proper leadership in a while. A lot are gone, like I said, but there are still some remaining, but they're closer to being Rogues than a pack."

"Will they accept you back?"

"Colton went before me and explained everything. I thought I'd have to explain myself more, but they were willing when I went back…but they're so out of control, so I don't know. I don't even know if I want to work with them. It’d be so much effort."

"Or is it because I'm human, and you're nervous to have me around them?"

"No, it's because I'm lazy." He frowned, probably thinking I would get upset.

"Is there any way I can become a wolf-bear?"

"Will you ever stop calling us that? That's not the correct term."

"Well, I'm soon to be a Luna, so I'll make it a term." I shrugged, drying myself off and picking out clothes for the day. I chose a black off-shoulder crop top and high-waist jeans.

"You look hot." Xavier eyed me, examining me from head to toe, making me blush.

"You look hotter," I commented, my face heating from a small compliment like that from him.

"As good as those clothes look on you, I kind of want to tear them off..."

"You won't because I'm broke and can't waste clothes. Do you know how much jeans cost?"

"I'll buy you more."

"Stop saying that!" I paused. "Hey, Xavier."

"Hmm?"

"Rogues are like the bad version of lone wolves, right?"

"I mean lone wolves are usually bad news anyway, but, yeah, Rogues are worse."

"Would you accept Rogues into your pack?"

"Nope."

"Why? You and Colton counted yourself as Rogues, right?"

"Yeah, well most Rogues don't have a good reason for betraying their pack or being kicked out for whatever they did wrong."

"You wouldn't even listen to their side of the story?"

"Rogues are often killed on sight. Why are you so concerned about them?"

"Got to get my Luna on, you know? Know the difference."

"IF you were to become a Luna, you would not be dealing with dangerous things like Rogues."

"Why? Because I'm a girl?" I scowled.

"No, because you're human."

I wanted to be salty, but I understood his point. A human going up against a wolf-bear, especially a Rogue, probably wouldn't end well. If I hadn't had Maya on my side with that last wolf-bear fight, I'd be dead by now. "Make me *not* human, then."

"This isn't a fairytale where I magically change you. Besides, being human is much better than a wolf-bear."

"You said wolf-bear."

"Because I'm so used to you saying it." He rolled his eyes, obviously embarrassed he had been caught saying my phrase. This made me smile—I always found it cute when someone's saying rubbed off on another person

My phone buzzed on the nightstand. I swear, I didn't get this many calls when I was away from home, but I was famous when I got back here. I walked over and picked it up.

My father.

My stomach flipped, and my heart began racing instantly. Not answering would be worse, though. Taking a small breath, I hit the green button and brought the phone to my ear.

"I'm going to grab some food," Xavier mouthed, and I nodded. He probably just made me food and not himself.

OR HIS WOLF-BEAR SENSE TINGLED AND KNEW SOMETHING BAD WAS HAPPENING SO HE WAS LEAVING ME ALONE TO TALK TO MY FATHER?! OH NO.

"Caliana, you there?"

"Yes."

"I got— Wait, why is your breath shaky? Are you out right now?"

"No, just…came back from a jog."

"You...jogging?" My father snorted a laugh and immediately, I relaxed. He wouldn't be laughing if something bad happened, so I could only assume everything was okay.

"What's up? Did you need me to get anything for you or Mom?"

"No, we're well capable of getting things ourselves. In fact..." he took a breath, "I have amazing news."

"Amazing news?"

"Your mother was moved up on the list! She's first to get the transplant, which means it'll be pretty soon."

"What? How? Please tell me you didn't borrow more money."

"No, it was an anonymous donor! They said some millionaire was going around doing good deeds, and he paid the whole bill—all of it, covering the operation costs, too. Even some recovery money. I thought it was a scam at first, but the hospital confirmed it's not!"

It was all a shock at first. I was wondering who would do such a thing, out of all the people and hospitals, why would a rich guy choose this one place? And my mother, who was far down on the list? I got my answer when I put two and two together. Xavier had gone out this morning, Xavier left the room when my father called. He knew what the call was about...because he was the donor.

**Episode 73**

My face was on fire. I was so angry, but at the same time, I was crying. Not with sadness but with relief, even though it might not last long. The thought of my mother being moved up on the list, being able to have the transplant, filled me with joy.

She dealt with so much. She had cancer when she was young, then it came back, and now she needed a transplant. How could so many bad things happen to a good person? It was one of the reasons I lost my belief in a god.

Terrible people in this world get by just fine, but then the good people die or get horrible problems. So much for someone up there looking out for people.

My mother didn't question faith, however, and she'd probably call this a miracle. I knew this *miracle* was called Xavier.

Knowing my mother had a chance instantly brought tears to my eyes. If she pulled through surgery, I wouldn't have to stay to watch over her—she could care for herself with help from my father. She could live a happy life, and she could come to my wedding—if I had one—and see her grandbabies grow up eventually.

But at the same time, Xavier had done this without asking. I told him not to—I didn't want to be a charity case. I hated pity money so much, but now what? I couldn’t shout at him to take it back and break my parents’ hearts.

"Xavier!" I yelled after hanging up on my father, telling him I'd call him back. He probably thought I was in shock or over the moon and wanted to tell Lola. Which I did—if it happened—but right then, I was about to argue with Xavier.

He was piling one thing after the other, with no cares in the world. I was already mad he wouldn't explain more about meeting a Luna, or why he didn't accept me as his mate, and now he went behind my back after I said I didn't want charity.

"Xavier!" I yelled again, not at all caring if Lola and Jay heard me. However, when I glanced to the side, the door to Lola's room was open, and I couldn't see them.

"Hmm?" Xavier glanced up the stairs, trying to act innocent.

"Don't you *hmm* me," I snapped, charging down the stairs. My face was red with anger, and I was crying. Usually, he'd be asking me what was wrong or be confused, but he knew why I was crying, so he didn't need to ask. It was stupid mistakes like these that made me see though his lies. "You know who was on the phone, right?"

"Your father."

"And how'd you know that?"

"Caller I.D." He blinked.

"Where's the food you said you were making? You aren't making any. You lied to leave the room, and you know why."

"Why?"

"I know where you were this morning. You're not even asking why I'm crying. If you lie to me when I ask this question, you're digging a bigger hole for yourself—do you understand?"

He didn't answer, only stared blankly back at me. His jaw tightened and after a moment, he forced himself to look away from me.

"Are you the mysterious donor?" Silence. It was almost as good as getting a *yes*. "I told you not to! Do you know how much that operation costs?! I'm not with you for your money or your pity, Xavier."

"I didn't do it because I pity you, Caliana."

"Okay. You pity my mother, whatever. I don't want your stinking money."

"Stop thinking this is about pity! I am planning to be with you forever, and I know humans. When we get married, she will become my mother, too."

"Mother-in-law."

"Same thing." He waved his hand. "Your mother was so kind to me, so caring. She raised you. She's an amazing woman, and since she's your mother, she's now a very important woman to me, too. If you can't accept me giving the money because you feel bad, then don't. I'm doing it for myself. I'm not okay with losing another woman I care about, Caliana. Especially someone who deserves to live."

He was clearly upset and worked up because his voice rose a tiny bit, and instantly, I nodded. He lost his mother once, and it had hurt him in a way that took years to heal as much as it ever would. Then this new woman came into his life that almost reminded him of his mother, and he was scared of losing her too. I was so worked up thinking it was pity money, I didn't want to take it, but hearing that...

"I'm sorry for assuming," I mumbled. "But still—this might break your bank. It costs a lot, and you even gave them recovery money." I knew my father would use some of the recovery money to pay back debts, and I understood that's what Xavier's plan was for it.

"Look...that money…the reason Colton and I are so well off is not a positive thing. Because we’re strong, people hired us for jobs to do bad things, but they paid well. Not only that, but as Alpha, I also get paid from the packhouse and from my mother's will. I have enough money to keep me going for a long, long time..."

"Doesn’t the bank question where you get it from?"

"I'm a wolf-bear, I don't use a regular bank." He shook his head like I should already be aware of this.

"Let me guess: more illegal things, right?"

He shrugged in response to this, obviously not wanting to tell me more, and frankly I didn't even want to know. "I'd rather you tell them it was you over some mystery donor."

"And have them ask where I get money from?" He arched an eyebrow.

"They're not that nosy...but on second thought, you're my boyfriend, so they might ask."

"It's better to stay a mystery so they don't feel like they owe me anything.”

"This was too kind of you, Xavier." I felt tears already forming in my eyes again. "It's so surreal, you know. I planned to stay here with my mother, but if she gets better, I can come back with you."

"I'd still rather you go back to school, though." Xavier pulled a face, and I shook my head.

"No, and don't offer to pay. If I need to study, I'll do an online course or something."

"Online courses aren't even good unless you find proper ones. Some are fake ones that make you think you're qualified, but it won't send out a certification."

"How do you know this?"

"Basic knowledge, and a lot of people in the pack used to do it, if they dropped out of school."

"A lot dropped out?"

"It was a bad pack, like I said."

"At least I know where you got your manners from."

"Excuse me, I'm polite a lot of the time."

I pulled a face to let him know I disagreed. Although he *was* polite around my parents. I got goosebumps because the moment I thought of them, my phone began buzzing in my hand with another call from my father.

"Answer it." Xavier smiled; he seemed glad I was going to accept the donation. After losing his mother and going through that heartbreak, he didn't want to see it happen to my mother, didn't want me going through it.

"Hey, Dad."

"We're ordering Chinese tonight to celebrate! It's a miracle. We called again to make sure it's not a scam, and the hospital confirmed. I just…it’s amazing! You and Xavier must come over tonight to celebrate."

I raised my eyebrows, surprised my dad was the one inviting Xavier. I was glad he was invited—don't get me wrong—but I assumed he'd only want me there since it was my mother, and he didn't know Xavier was the person who donated the money.

"Sure, I'll let him know." I grinned. "Is Mom happy?"

"She's in disbelief, but when that passes, she will be. She just wishes she knew the name of the guy who gave us money."

"Let's just thank our stars we were chosen, yeah? No need to investigate it if he doesn't want to be known."

"That's weird, coming from you. You're all about those mysteries usually. I thought you'd want to know the person saving your mother."

"I mean, sure, I'm curious, but if he's giving us this, and his one wish is to stay anonymous, then I'm not going to look into it."

"I suppose that is true, but even if we could give him flowers or something…"

"I'm pretty sure he'll go back to the hospital to check on the person he’s helping. If you want, I can buy flowers and chocolates and ask the people in the hospital to give it to the person if they return."

"Oh, you are so smart! That's a wonderful idea."

"I'll drop them at the hospital before I come tonight, okay?"

"Great, we'll give you the money for the flowers and chocolate when you come."

"See you later, and tell mom I said congratulations!" When I put down the phone, I wore a beaming smile. They weren't going to investigate who gave the money, and they were all happy. As long as the operation went well, everything would be perfect.

"I need to go out for something," I told Xavier. "I'm calling an Uber, and I'll be back soon."

"I'll come." He returned from the kitchen, and I shook my head.

"No, you won't. You stay here and behave. Oh, also, my father invited you to come have a celebratory Chinese dinner today, since my mother's top of the list now. It's a huge day for them."

He paused for a moment, his eyebrows pulling together in wonder before a small smile appeared on his face. It wasn't his attractive smirk or grin—it was a genuine happy smile, almost shy, but he shook his head.

"Thank them for the invite, I really appreciate it, but I'm going to have to decline."

"Why?! It's a huge thing. If you have work, can't you skip it? Or are you flying home tonight?"

"No, I'm flying back tomorrow," he told me. "But this is a family thing, and I'd rather you go alone. You've been away from your family for a while."

"You are part of the family now. We're mates—we're together forever, which means you are their family, too."

"I love hearing you say that, Cal." He walked over and pulled me in for a quick surprise kiss. It was only a peck, but the fast movement took my breath away, and when he pulled back, I was speechless. Luckily, he hadn't finished what he was saying. "This is something you need to do alone with your family for now—have family time. Get their opinion of me, and I’ll come to some sort of event with them later, okay?"

"But—"

"But nothing." He shook his head, shushing me, and I gave up. He made this happen for my family, and I wanted him to be there, but I understood his point. This was new to him so maybe he needed a break, too.

"Fine, okay," I huffed, letting him know I wasn't too happy with the decision, but I wasn't going to drag him there. My phone buzzed, causing me to glance down. That was fast. "Uber's here, so I'm going to head out."

"You sure I can't come?"

I was pretty sure he was one of the only guys that wanted to come shopping. He was a weirdo sometimes, but damn, I loved him so much.

"I'll see you later, Xavier." I couldn't help but laugh at the puppy dog look on his face as I waved goodbye.

"Later," he grumbled, letting me know he wasn't happy. I would let him come any other time, but I had to buy these flowers and chocolates. I know I told my parents I would drop them at the hospital, but since I actually knew who threw the money at us, I'd give them to him in person.

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"I'm back!" I yelled, shutting the door behind me. There was a slight change of plans...instead of getting flowers, since he wouldn't really like them, I got chocolate and whiskey. The moment I announced I was home, I heard footsteps coming down the stairs.

And, yes, it was Xavier.

"Did Lola and Jay go out?" I asked, having not seen them since this morning.

"I think they went on a date..." Xavier suddenly paused, his brow furrowing. "Have we ever been on a proper date?"

"Depends on what you consider a date. Meeting my parents and going to the park afterward was a date, so, yeah."

"No, I mean a proper one, Caliana. Dressing up, taking you to a fancy restaurant, or something like that?"

"Xavier, the price and place doesn't make it a proper date." I laughed. "Any date is a proper date. Whether it's a picnic, the cinema, staying in…"

"Something elegant, then. Something romantic. Don’t girls love that?”

"That’s a bit sexist. I know some guys who are all about romance, and girls who aren't," I pointed out.

"You know what I mean." He scowled at my accusation. "I don't think we have."

"It could be nice, I guess," I mumbled, thinking about it. A romantic date with Xavier would be very nice, but even the thought of it was making my cheeks warm.

"We'll go on one soon, then."

"Maybe, but before that, I want a date with a real Luna." I paused, deciding to bring out my petty side. "But why would I go on a romantic date with someone who didn't truly choose me as his mate?"

"You're starting that again?"

"I'm not stopping it until I get an explanation."

"I will when we're home."

"We are home."

"This isn't home."

"You tricked me; you said when we got back here!"

"I said *home.*" He shook his head, causing me to scowl.

Deciding not to fight on like one of the best days ever, I pushed it to the back of my mind for now before pulling out the blue bag. It was one of those gift bags you buy when you're too lazy to wrap things. "Here, by the way. From my family."

His eyebrows pulled together, but he hesitantly took the bag from me. "Why?"

“They told me to buy flowers to send to the hospital, so if the anonymous man who saved my mother came back, they could give it to him, but since I know him personally, there's no point."

"These aren't flowers."

"I changed it to suit you. I know you probably wouldn't care for flowers."

He pulled out the chocolates and then the whiskey, and a warm smile appeared on his lips. "This is what you went out for? You got an Uber for this?"

"Do you not like them?"

"No, I love them. Especially since they're from you and your family, but there was no need to rush out for these. You could have gotten them grocery shopping or something."

"I wanted you to have it before I went to my parents'."

His hand went to my cheek, his thumb and forefinger slid to my chin to tilt it up before he leaned in and planted two soft kisses on my lips. "Thank you, I appreciate these so much."

"It's not much," I grumbled, embarrassed because he seemed so grateful. It was such a lousy gift compared to what he gave us.

"I love you."

"I guess I might love you, too," I muttered, saying the forbidden L-word.

"I was talking to the chocolate, but thanks." The handsome smirk appeared on his face, and my eyes widened before I slapped his chest.

"I'M GETTING READY FOR TONIGHT, GOODBYE!"

As I stormed up the stairs, I could faintly hear him trying to shout through his laughter that he was kidding.

How *embarrassing*.

**Episode 74**

"If they see you in the car, they'll drag you in. I could have gotten an Uber, like I said," I grumbled for probably the tenth time.

"I wanted to drive you." He frowned. "I'll just drop you and drive off; they won't see me."

"So you're flying home tomorrow?" I wasn't going to lie, I was disappointed he was going. I would’ve been happy for him to stay a while longer.

"I wasn't even supposed to come here, remember? But luckily, I did."

"Not *luckily*. You killed someone because you came here." Saying those words out loud caused my stomach to flip, and I genuinely felt sick. It took me a while to wrap my mind around it, and I understood it was his wolf, but it was still hard to think about.

"He deserved it." His eyes focused dead ahead, and I could tell even talking about Tony would trigger Xavier. Seeing this look in his eyes, I could only assume he would do it all over again, which concerned me.

"You can't kill guys who try to flirt with me in the future," I warned him, not wanting any more blood on my hands. That wouldn't happen; I had a rare case of *guysareneverinterestedinme,* so hopefully we'd be fine. I had to put that warning there just in case, though.

"He wasn't flirting with you, Caliana," he snapped.

I decided to change the subject. "I know he wasn't, but I'm warning you for the future. Anyway, what are your plans for tonight since you declined my invite?"

He arched an eyebrow at the end of the sentence and offered me a sideways glance for a few seconds before speaking. "You shouldn't sound so salty about me declining your invite. Just enjoy the family night."

"Whatever. So what are your plans?"

"I might just hang with Jay or explore your childhood places again. They were interesting to see."

"That's all you’re doing?" I questioned further, making it obvious I didn't believe him.

"Yes, before my flight tomorrow. Is there a problem?"

"Nope, no problem here," I announced in a purposely high-pitched voice as he pulled up on the sidewalk.

"Good, I'll see you later."

∞

The doorbell was basically the announcement that the food was here. We ordered from the local Chinese restaurant, Thanh Loi. It was something else that reminded me of my childhood. If I had only told Xavier that, there was a chance he would have come.

My father hopped up from the couch, and there was a skip in his step. This was probably the happiest I had seen him since I was a kid, and I was unable to wipe my own smile off my face.

My phone buzzed in my pocket, and I pulled it out. An unknown number that neither myself nor my phone recognized was on my screen, notifying me of a message. Confused, I opened the message, raising my eyebrows. At first, I was confused as I read through the text. It said:

*Hi, Caliana. This is Jaime, the nurse from the hospital, who you dropped the flowers to. I thought I'd notify you that the donor dropped in and was able to pick them up. He is delighted with the gift and says there was no need and wishes your mother the best. That was his act of kindness and to pass it on.*

I reread it twice, totally lost. I didn't know any Jaime, and I hadn't actually dropped flowers off at the hospital. Unless it was...

Another text suddenly buzzed from the same number.

*P.S. By act of kindness, I mean maybe offer your boyfriend a blowjob.*

I was right. Immediately, I knew who it was, and I had to bite back my smile. Had he really texted me from a new phone to give my parents closure that the “donor” received the flowers? Whose phone was this?

I held down the second message and deleted it before passing the phone to my mother beside me. "Hey, a message I think you'll want to see."

She took the phone from me and pulled her reading glasses from the table next to her. Her eyes squinted as she began to read the message, and instantly a smile grew on her face. Her hand raised, and she held it over her heart.

"I'm so glad he got them...it's too bad he won't give a name."

"A random act of kindness. He probably doesn't want to take credit for it. I think he's happy enough with the flowers and chocolate."

"Oh, I'm so delighted. Do you mind if I write a message back?"

"Sure, but I’ll type it because I'm quicker."

She passed the phone back to me. "Say: *If you see him again, please let him know I'm delighted he got the flowers, and I wish him the best also. I'll definitely pass on the act of kindness for the rest of my life, and I can't thank him enough.*Let them know it's from me, too."

I typed out what she wanted to say. I showed her the message and after receiving a nod of approval, sent it to “Jamie,” which I knew was Xavier.

My dad appeared around the kitchen door. "Food's on the plates!" I hadn't even heard him close the front door. My stomach grumbled on cue and after helping my mother up, we made our way to the kitchen.

We sat in our usual seats. Both adults at either end of the table, myself in the middle. Except now, I was an adult too, and it almost made my heart heavy. When I thought of the past, I tended to miss it, but things were looking up now.

We dug into the food. "So, Mom, Dad, I was thinking..."

"Yeah?" My dad didn't even look up from his food.

"I was really happy with Xavier, on holiday. I was going to stay here until I heard the news about the donor and…I was thinking of moving back with Xavier."

Now both my parents looked up.

"He seems like a good guy." My mother tilted her head, always an open-minded person.

"Cal, you barely know him. And you're in the middle of college, and you couldn't leave Lola behind. All for one guy."

"I've talked to him online for ages, so I've known him way longer," I lied. "Besides, I was thinking of dropping out. I already got some qualifications from school and—"

"I don't like this idea."

"Dad, think how much money it'll save."

"We don't need to save now—a miracle has happened."

"You still have debt, and besides, I'm not enjoying the courses. There's a place I was looking at near him that's cheaper that I could go to. I'll just transfer schools."

"He might be a murderer, Cal."

"He's had several chances to murder me. He’s not a murderer." Technically, that was another lie. He *was* a murderer, but I was safe around him, so it didn't really matter that much.

"Honey," My mother spoke up and at first, I thought she was talking to me, but she faced my father instead. "After living with this for so long, I think you should always make the choice for new experiences. I have Xavier's phone number, and we've met him. This is the happiest I've seen our daughter in ages, and he seems to have brought luck with him. If this is what you want, Caliana, I support your decision."

"But—" My father started.

"It's temporary if I don't like it. A trial run. I live in a tiny apartment and eat pot noodles here, but there…it's nice food and a big house. The school is close to it, too—it's perfect." There was silence for a moment. "I'm not a kid anymore."

My father stared at his food for a moment before raising his eyes to me with a weak smile. "I suppose you aren't, and I cannot stop you. As long as you are safe, and you come back soon. I'd also like to talk to Xavier again, even if it's only over the phone."

"Yes, of course." A wide smile grew on my face, and I looked at my mother with relief. I knew her opinion had a large impact on my father.

"Now, eat up." She winked.

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The meal was wonderful, bonding with my family was amazing, and knowing my mother was going to have a future was the best part. She told us she still didn't have a set date for the operation, but that didn't matter. It would come soon.

"Thanks," I said, leaving the Uber and passing the money to him. I didn't bother calling Xavier to pick me up because he might’ve been busy. He told me he was going to look at all my childhood places, and if that were true, he should be home by now.

After all, I was with my parents for almost three hours, and even if he explored the whole small town, he would surely be done in less than two. Especially for him—he wasn't exactly a patient person who enjoyed standing around.

I finally got to the door, unlocking and entering it as quietly as possible. I didn’t even know why I tried to be quiet, but something felt off. My eyes scanned the place, and sure enough, the lights were on. I always turned them off when I left the house, which probably meant Xavier was back.

I pulled off my coat and threw it onto the back of one of the chairs after taking my phone from my pocket. It was very chilly in this place for whatever reason, so I quickly put on some tea, adding enough hot water for two.

Xavier might want some coffee...then again, it was late, and he only drank it when he needed to stay awake, which was unnecessary right now.

"Xavier." I raised my voice loud enough to where he should be able to hear it if he were in my room, but no response. Was he already asleep? Seriously?

I walked around the open floor plan, inspecting the place. "Xav, you awake?" I shouted again, a bit louder this time.

My brow furrowed when I got no answer, so I began to climb the small stairs, turning the corner at the top. Instantly, it was even colder up here, like a window was open, or someone had air conditioning on.

I walked into my room, the door already opened, and instantly my eyes widened. The window was open, but that wasn't what shocked me. It was smashed. Like someone had punched the glass to unlock and open my window.

And Xavier wasn't here.

My stomach turned over a million times as my eyes scanned my room. A lot of things were out of place, some even overthrown, like they were searching for something...or someone had gone into a rage.

Yet nothing valuable was stolen—this wasn't a normal robbery.

Maybe I'd be leaving this place sooner than expected.

**Episode 75**

Today was officially the strangest day ever. There was a huge wolf-bear standing in my small room, sniffing around like a dog would in a new house, interested in new scents, marking his territory. However, that wasn’t exactly what this dog—or wolf-bear—was doing.

He was searching for who had broken into my room...and he was my boyfriend.

"Try not to shed, if that's something you can control," I mumbled, and he raised his large head, and I received a glare from this beast. In response to my comment, he shook his body, proving no fur fell to the ground.

He continued to search the room, his large nose going to every corner. "I know if I get pregnant with your child, it'll be a baby, but if two wolf-bears had sex in wolf form...would they come out as puppies?"

His large ears fell back on his head—probably a reaction to my question—but he didn't even look at me.

"Does Xavier have control of you or is this all you, Wolfie?" Once again, he lifted his head and let out a loud whine that sounded like a grumble, and I raised my hands. "Okay, fine, no more questions."

When I raised my hands, the wolf almost seemed concerned… or sad, in a way. He turned without any more actions or sounds, continuing to search the room. I watched him closely the whole time. It wasn't often I was able to see Xavier's wolf, but I found him really cute and fascinating to watch.

Suddenly the hair on his back rose slightly, and his ears twisted, flattening against his head. A low growl rumbled from his throat as he sniffed my bed. My heart began pounding, and my palms were sweating. The last time I heard such an upset, menacing growl was right before he killed...

*No, don't think about that.*

I shut my eyes, which was a terrible mistake. I saw the image of this large wolf ripping Tony’s leg off. No hesitation, no mercy. Had he lost control?

Could he lose control with me?

I was suddenly petrified, thinking of such terrifying and disgusting thoughts. When I heard a small whine, it made me open my eyes, and I finally swallowed the lump in my throat when I saw how close he had gotten.

Except now, he had a different emotion on his face. His ears were pinned back but not flat and not in an aggressive way. More like he was guilty. His tail was between his legs. He was also smaller than me now, crouching like a submissive dog...something Xavier was *not*.

He wiggled his big head toward me, letting me know he wanted to nuzzle me, but he didn't want to frighten me, and it pained my heart. He knew why I was scared—whether he could sense it, or Xavier was telling him.

I lifted my arms, giving him permission to approach, even if my hands were shaking a little bit. His snout instantly rested on my shoulder, and he nuzzled into my hair, soft, broken whines coming from him.

"I'm not scared of you," I whispered. "I'm only scared of that memory."

It was partially true. I felt safe with him right then, and I knew he wouldn't hurt me intentionally. He was simply protective...

"Do you know who broke in? Is that why you got upset?" I asked. He wiggled his head, and I didn't understand if it was a yes or no since it was neither a shake nor a nod. "You might want to switch back to talk to me."

The wolf immediately disliked this idea, running in a circle before rubbing back into me.

"If you change back, you and I can go on our own little adventure sometime, but you need to give Xavier control. You are his wolf—you guys are one, and you need to work together."

The wolf slowly bowed its head, and the cracking of bones rang through the air, causing me to look away, not wanting to see him shift. It was strange to me and, honestly, a little creepy.

"You have more control of him than I do." Xavier chuckled. "He really chose you as his mate."

"He's cute." I turned back, and although I had seen this man naked before, my cheeks suddenly caught fire. However, I was more confident not to look away this time.

"You know, this would be the perfect time to give me the reward that nurse mentioned earlier…"

"That nurse was you, Xavier. I'll think about it, though...but not *now,*" I teased, and he looked like a hopeful pup. "Catch any scent?"

"Whoever was here was human, or if he wasn’t, he wasn't in his other form. Which is strange. If he was trying to find something, it would make more sense to not be human..."

"The fur," I hummed. "Wait, what did you growl at on the bed?"

"His scent was on it, and the thought of another man on your bed triggered my wolf."

"Was your wolf mad at me?"

"No, he was mad at the intruder. He'd wouldn’t be angry at you—you don't need to fear him."

"I don't...I just get nervous when I think about what happened, you know?"

Xavier walked over and picked up the joggers he took off before shifting, pulling them back on. "I want you to come back home with me tomorrow."

"What? No. I can't leave so soon. Didn't you want me to stay for a bit?" I arched an eyebrow.

"Not when some man broke into your place. Whether he’s my species or human, he took nothing, so he had some other goal. I don't trust you alone here, and we both know Lola wants to go back with Jay, too."

"Xavier."

"Then I'll stay longer with you."

"No, you have duties back home as Alpha. You can't abandon those for some stupid reason."

"This is not some stupid reason, Cal. What if he planned to take you...or kill you?" His jaw tightened, and his fists balled up, clearly not fond of the thought. Neither was I, though.

"I talked to my parents about leaving with you, at least for a while."

"What did they say?"

"I had to argue with my father at first, but they said it's my choice, and they support me. He does want to talk with you one more time, though."

"Yeah, that's not terrifying at all."

"Calm down, you're the wolf-bear here. It's not like he's going to kill you." I laughed.

"Then come home with me tomorrow."

"I haven't said bye to anyone yet."

"Tell them in the morning. Your mother should have her operation soon, so you’ll come back for that. It's not like you're going to be gone as long as you were last time.”

"That's true. And I would feel safer..." I know the moment Xavier left, I'd be super paranoid. I'd probably want to move back with my parents, but that might give the intruder the idea to break into their house, if I were the actual target. If I were with Xavier, my family would be safe, and it wasn’t likely the intruder would fly just to get to me.

"Good. I'll let Lola and Jay know tonight."

∞

I reached up my hands and rubbed the sleep from my eyes, momentarily debating whether I should go back to sleep or not. It would be so easy to shut my eyes and fall asleep for another few hours, but that wasn't the plan, so I pulled the covers off and forced myself out of the bed. "Xavie—what the hell? Again?" I grumbled, noticing he was already gone.

"Xav!" I yelled as I got to my door, but there was no response.

I called my parents last night, and they had been pretty upset at the fact I was leaving so soon, but finally agreed after I told them I was going to come back for the operation, which would hopefully be soon enough. There was no certain date at the moment, though.

Not taking any chances, I typed in his number and called. I lifted the phone to my ear, and after two rings, the line cut off. Meaning the son of a bitch ignored my damn phone call. I knew he wasn't kidnapped—honestly, anyone who was able to kidnap him would have to be a god or something.

He was either on important business, which made no sense, or he was ignoring me. He wasn't on a call because the phone dialed for a tiny bit. Deciding to be patient, I pulled out my suitcase and began packing, excited, although I didn't know how long I'd be staying.

∞

One hour later, I heard the door open. Packing was almost done, and I knew we were leaving tonight, so I wanted to finish quickly. I exited my room and hopped down the stairs, peeking between the banister to find Xavier.

"Where the heck were you and why did you hang up on me?" I scowled, not happy.

He held a box in his hand, offering it for my forgiveness...and it worked. My eyes glued to the Papa John's pizza box, my stomach growling. I ran over and took the box, placing it on the table.

"Where were you?" I asked, pulling out a slice and chomping down on it.

"At your parents’ house. Your dad wanted to talk to me."

"How did it go?"

"I was questioned at first, but I gave them all the numbers, the address—things like that—so they know you're safe."

"Oh, good. I was kind of worried in case they were still iffy on the whole situation."

"They seem okay with it. Lola and Jay will be back in half an hour, ready to leave."

"I'm excited to go back."

"I have even better news then, too."

"What's that?"

"When we get back...I've arranged a meeting with an official Luna."

Oh my word... Now I was nervous.

**Episode 76**

"We thank you for flying with us and hope you have a lovely—"

"Oh my god, they say the same thing every damn time," Xavier huffed, interrupting the flight attendant who spoke through the speaker.

I hit his arm lightly, letting him know it was rude to speak over others, but he barely noticed.

We had just landed, and it honestly felt like I was *home*. Even though I had left my hometown, I felt safe here.

"Wake up! I told you not to take four sleeping pills, you stupid wolf." Lola was hitting Jay's forehead lightly with her hand in an attempt to wake him up, yet he barely budged.

It looked like he was dead, and the amount of sleeping pills he took genuinely concerned me. "Should I call for help?"

Xavier shook his head. "He probably took more because his wolf was fighting to stay awake. We usually need double the amount humans take."

"You're only supposed to take one, though."

"Look, he's fine." He pointed back to the couple, and sure enough, Jay was slowly waking up. He was clearly groggy, and his eyes barely opened. A weak, zombie-like groan came from his mouth as he pushed himself up in the seat.

"How you feeling, babe?" Lola asked, brushing her hand through his hair. Jay was not fond of flying whatsoever.

He turned to make eye contact with her and slowly nodded with a small smile. "Sleepy." Even for a wolf-bear, he probably took more pills than necessary.

The passengers began to leave their seats and pull their suitcases down from the cabin. Xavier pulled our luggage down since Jay still wasn't functioning properly. I glanced over and noticed him playing with Lola's hair while lying on her shoulder—almost like a child.

Deciding to give Jay time, once Xavier got the overhead bags, he sat back down and patiently waited for everyone else to leave first. He was probably nervous Jay might cause a scene or people would figure he was drunk. Although all they could really do was kick us off the flight, and we were getting off anyway.

It was finally our turn to leave, and I kept my eyes on Lola, aiding a loopy Jay off the plane. He kind of seemed drunk, and it made me want to get all the wolf-bears drunk one night, including Colton, if he was there when we returned. Xavier hadn't talked much about him, and as much as I hoped Maya was alive, I was also hoping she hadn’t hurt Colton.

Sure, I cared about him the least, and he could be annoying as hell, but he was still Xavier’s brother, and if I became Luna, he would be my Beta. Ugh, that kind of sounded creepy...my Beta. I knew there were some weird people in the world that would think it was some weird kink since they didn’t know anything about wolf-bears. Sometimes, I thought about how humans could be way scarier than wolf-bears.

"Be careful," Lola hissed, scolding Jay, who was gently hitting all the above cabins for no specific reason. She tugged on him slightly, trying to get him to calm down, but he barely budged.

Instead, he let out a small giggle. "I want to shift."

"No, you don't."

"Yes, it will make this faster."

"No, Area 51 or something will capture you and run experiments," Lola hissed, slapping his forehead lightly. Jay pouted, clearly unhappy being scolded by the love of his life.

"Here, babe." Xavier passed me one of my bags and slung the other over his shoulder. It took me a second to realize why my body felt like it had been shocked. Once again, he used the word *babe*—it killed me every goddamn time, and I loved it.

"Thanks," I muttered, trying to hide my emotions from him.

About twenty minutes later, we collected the suitcases from baggage claim and were now in an Uber. Strangely enough, Xavier purposely guided me into the back of the Uber. Usually, he offered the front, but this time he asked me to sit in the back, and I was immediately uneasy. Normally, he’d sit in the back with me, but there wasn't enough room with Lola and Jay.

Something was up. Was he trying to hide something? Maybe—

I knew the answer when I met eyes with the Uber driver in the rearview mirror. His eyes were locked on me, but the moment I glanced at him, he pulled his eyes away and fixed them back on the road, like I hadn't caught him staring—glaring—at me.

"Do you know this person, Xavier?" I wasn't going to sit back and bite my tongue. I wanted to know the reason he put me in the back, and why this creep was staring at me.

"She's very curious, isn't she?" the driver spoke, glancing to Xavier in the front seat.

"When did you become an Uber driver?"

"A lot of us had to get a job to survive after our Alpha left us, you know."

"My father was a terrible man, yes, but that doesn't mean one of you couldn't step up."

"Nobody could. The two people next in line also abandoned us."

"Abandoning is leaving and not returning," I spoke, catching on to what was happening. "Good leadership is stepping down when you know you are not in a position to lead and returning to the role when you're ready. If you have bad thoughts about your Alpha, maybe you should leave."

Usually, I would be terrified of confrontation, especially with a wolf-bear, but the moment he talked smack to my man, I couldn't help myself. Especially when I knew why Xavier left.

I expected an outburst of anger from the driver since I was a human talking down to a wolf-bear, a race who thought they were above humans. "Not as weak and scared as other humans...that's interesting." The driver chuckled. "You must feel protected by Xavier, or you wouldn’t talk back to me."

"Not true. Seeing as I took down one of your kind by myself *and* managed to escape a member of the pack that tore your pack to shreds, I can handle you myself."

The car swerved slightly, and I thought he lost his temper. He turned back to look at me, but instead of anger, I saw shock. "That was *you*? That messed them up."

"This was what I was planning to tell everyone at the next meeting." Xavier sounded proud.

"I didn't take them all out. Only one by myself, and I escaped them, but Colton and Xavier easily took down the rest. Imag—"

"Stop, Caliana," Xavier said, causing my brow to furrow.

"Why'd you stop her? She was way more persuasive than you were..."

"Exactly," Xavier mumbled. "I'm scared if she keeps talking, I'll want to bring her to the next pack meeting."

"Would that really be such a bad idea?" I asked, hoping he'd let me.

"Probably." Only probably? Great, then I could easily persuade him to let me come. I was going to be a spokesperson at the next wolf-bear meeting...

And I was terrified.

**Episode 77**

It was good to be home. Or back in Xavier's house, at least. Maybe it was a bit too soon to call it home. I couldn’t believe the first time I came here, I thought they were both human, and I was planning to sell my virginity. To think Xavier got it for free...

If we ever had children, we definitely needed to make up a different story of how we met.

"God, I missed this bed. It's so much better than mine." I fell onto the satin sheets. They still had Xavier's scent on them, too, which made them even better. "So that Uber driver...why did he collect us?"

"I guess he's driving for extra money. After all, Colton and I *did* abandon them, so they had to find a way to survive."

"I don't believe that for a moment, but he didn't seem to hate me, at least. I definitely think you should bring me to speak to your pack."

"Not at the next meeting—maybe a few ones after that."

"You heard how good my argument is. What if they feel like you're hiding me because you're scared they'll hate or hurt me?"

"I am!"

"Then they'll think I'm weak. The sooner they meet me, the better. Please just think about it. We'll bring Jay and Colton too, so if they try anything, I'll be fine."

"They won't try anything when I'm there, but I'll think about it."

"When's the next meeting?"

"It was supposed to be today but since we just got back, it’ll be tomorrow. We might, however, have a few visitors today since they know I'm back."

"Have they been here before?"

"No, they won't actually come to the door. But there will probably be a few trying to lurk on the borders to get a glance of their new human Luna."

"That's a bit creepy, right? Isn’t that trespassing?"

"It would be in the human world, but since they're my pack, it's not like I can do anything. I'll talk to them about privacy tomorrow."

"You used to act like you'd kill someone for trespassing—you're a bit softer than expected."

"Only because you're around. Remember, I'm trying to change for you, Cal."

"I needed to talk to you about that, actually. If dimming your attitude will affect how you are as an Alpha, I'm okay with you doing things I don't agree with, as long as I don't know about them—and as long as the person's not innocent..."

"I appreciate you letting me know that you don't mind me killing peo—"

"On second thought, now that you say it out loud…" I grimaced. "Why do you wolf-bears have to be so violent?"

"We're protective."

"I'm protective too, but if a girl flirts with you, do you think I'm going to kill her? No."

"You might."

"Maybe." I shrugged, and he grinned in response to my joke. I threw my legs off the bed and sat up. "You hungry?"

"A bit."

"I'll make some food, if everything isn't already expired."

"Okay, I'm going to go for a shower," he said.

I nodded and left the room. Jay and Lola were in the other room, where she was attempting to get him back to sleep, since he was still loopy from the medication. I knocked on the door before opening it, peeking around the corner. "You guys want food?"

"Food!" Jay sat up in bed, his eyes lighting up in pure excitement. Lola turned to me with a scowl, and I quickly slapped my hand over my mouth.

"I'm trying to get him to sleep off the medicine."

"Sorry!" I couldn't even say I forgot—I didn't—but I thought if I had only cooked for Xavier and myself, it would have been rude.

"We'll get something later." Lola nodded, and immediately Jay pouted, clearly not happy with this idea.

"I want food now, though!"

"If you sleep now, I'll make you my special Oreo truffles later."

His eyes landed on Lola now, and he looked like a child on Christmas. Without any more words, he lay back down in bed, causing a smug smile to appear on Lola's face.

She glanced to me and spiraled her finger around her pinky finger, mouthing, "Wrapped around it."

I chuckled and rolled my eyes before turning and leaving the room. I made my way down to the kitchen and began cooking a simple meal. Bacon, eggs, mushrooms, and sausages. Even though it wasn't morning, and it was more of a breakfast meal, I was craving it. It only took a few minutes before the delicious aroma of bacon filled the room, making my mouth water.

My eyes rose, glancing out the window where the sun shone through. It wasn't especially hot, and there were few clouds in the sky, but it was still a nice day. I was about to look away from the window before my eye caught something in the distance. I brought my hand up to shield my eyes from the sun, squinting as hard as I could to see what it was. Instantly, my heart skipped a beat when my eyes landed on a large wolf-bear, or what I thought was a wolf-bear.

Its eyes were piercing through me, trying to stare into my soul. I hadn’t met this wolf before, and it didn't look friendly in the slightest.

I wanted to run, wanted to break the gaze and call Xavier. For some reason, I was petrified of the beast, even though I was in the safety of the house. I was about to flee up to the bedroom to warn Xavier when a thought suddenly hit me.

This could be a wolf from the enemy pack or one from Xavier's. He did say they might visit, but this one was letting me see him. It was kind of creepy. If this one was from Xavier’s pack, running to get him would make me look like a wimp. They wouldn’t want someone so scared as their Luna.

Taking a deep breath, I walked away from the sink, but instead of heading toward the bedroom, I walked to the sliding glass door. I drew open the curtains, watching as the wolf ventured closer, nearing the edge of the woods. His piercing yellow eyes narrowed when he saw me, probably expecting me to run to Xavier.

I grabbed the handle but didn't open it, hesitating. This could be the wrong choice. If this wasn't someone from his pack, if this was an enemy, I was walking into a trap. I glanced to the right and grabbed a large knife from the block, taking a deep breath before I opened the door.

My eyes barely caught it, but I saw the large wolf's head tilt to the side like a confused dog. I brought the knife from behind me to the front, where the sun reflected off it, and he must have immediately known what it was, yet he gave no reaction.

He didn't seem to fear it at all—instead, he trotted closer. Not in a way that looked intimidating, but he seemed wary. His head and tail were low, and the closer he came, the bigger he grew.

My heart started speeding up. Was he going to attack me? Was I going to have to fight another wolf-bear? Would I be hated if it was Xavier's pack and I injured him? Was it an enemy trying to kill me?

When the large wolf was less than twenty feet from me, his head snapped up. Its eyes finally left mine after what felt like an eternity, and he looked up toward the house behind me, directly at one of the upstairs windows.

I didn't want to follow his gaze in case it was a trap, but I almost couldn’t help myself. Before I could turn back, the wolf's ears fell, and a low whine came from him before he turned on his heel and sprinted off the other direction. He was gone within seconds, disappearing from sight.

I stood there, staring after the empty space for ages before I finally looked up to where he had been looking, but nothing was there. I turned to walk back inside but had to grab the wall immediately, my legs shaking. I dropped my eyes to look at the knife in my hand—it was trembling, too. I hadn't realized how scared I was...

Could I really be a Luna if I couldn't stand up to one wolf-bear?

I didn't want to let down Xavier; I didn't want to make him seem weak. What if they tried to overthrow him? A human Luna would be laughed at.

If only there was a way I didn't have to be human...

**Episode 78**

Xavier’s burning stare made me want to shrivel up and disappear into the floor. To avoid eye contact, my gaze stayed glued to my plate full of food. I popped a forkful into my mouth, trying not to flinch when I realized it was too hot. To keep my dignity, I munched on it as fast as I could before swallowing, burning both my tongue and throat.

I snatched my glass of water from the table before gulping down half of it to calm the burning sensation and finally look toward Xavier.

He was no longer watching me, now eyeing his own plate as he shoved food in his mouth. He waited to swallow it before speaking. "This is tasty." Based on the tone of his voice, the compliment was fake.

I looked back at him. "You sound like you're lying...or you're annoyed," I commented, trying to sound nonchalant.

"You think so?"

"I wouldn't say it if I didn't think it, Xavier." My voice was cold. He was dragging this on; all he needed to do was tell me why he was annoyed.

"Why the hell would you go outside? When there was a wolf-bea— One of my kind who could have easily killed you!"

"I had a knife."

"*One* of their teeth would snap your knife in half."

"I managed to escape that other pack and take down a wolf-bear."

"With our help. With a lot of help."

"You were proud of me before..."

"That’s not the point, Caliana. Don’t go out alone without someone guarding you."

"I don't like that idea."

"Then you don't like the idea of being a Luna. All Lunas are required to be guarded, whether they are able to protect themselves or not."

"I'm not a Luna yet, am I? Besides, that wolf ran away. What if it was one of your pack coming to see if I was scared? If I stayed inside or called you, what type of message would that send?"

"That is not the point, Caliana. Your safety is important—this isn't a stupid game. This is life or death. That wolf ran because he saw me in the window, not because of you."

"At least I showed him I wasn't scared."

"No one cares if you're scared! What does that matter if you're dead?" He slammed his fist on the table, causing the plates and cutlery to rock, the loud noise ringing through the whole house.

In the past, I would have jumped and probably peed myself from fear, but he was my boyfriend, and I knew he would never hurt me. "Can you not almost break the table?" I grumbled, shoving more food in my mouth and chomping on it.

"Can you not make stupid decisions?"

"You don't control me," I grumbled, glancing out the window. "I assume you knew that wolf. Is he part of your pack?"

"Why would you assume that?"

My shoulders shrugged as I played with the tomato on my plate, squishing and rolling it as its juice spread around my plate. "He bowed his head before he left. One of the wolves did that to the man who kidnapped me, so I assume it’s a greeting for the Alpha. But this wolf barely bowed, like he was almost reluctant or unsure, which makes me believe he's one of your pack. He also looked a bit angry."

When I finished my explanation, Xavier's eyes were locked onto mine. The expression he wore was a mix between confusion and surprise. His lips pressed in a straight line, and he pushed himself up in his chair with a small sigh.

"How can you go from one of the dumbest humans I've met to the smartest in a matter of seconds? You're a strange woman, Caliana."

"Thank you for the worst compliment ever." I rolled my eyes, and finally a smile broke out on his face—the only thing I could do was return it. I couldn't help it. "Does this mean you're not annoyed anymore?"

"Nope, I'm definitely still annoyed." He put more food in his mouth and swallowed before he spoke again. "But I want to enjoy this delicious food without arguing."

"You didn't answer my question about the wolf-bear."

"You answered it yourself. Also, can you not call them wolf-bears to their faces?"

"It's cute."

"They don't like cute." He sighed. "Which is why they'll probably hate you."

"You're calling me cute?" I grinned, causing one of his eyebrows to arch.

"Really? That's what you got from that?"

"Why didn't that wolf want to bow? He doesn't want you back as Alpha? He's unsure if you're going to be Alpha again? Or was it because of me?"

"Stop being so interested. I don't know."

"Well, I have to be if I'm going to be Luna."

The door behind Xavier flew open before he could respond, causing a huge bang as it hit the wall. I jumped from the loud sound, and it even seemed to startle Xavier as he whipped around. In the doorway was Lola, panting heavily like she had run a marathon.

"Is Jay okay?" I knew she had been helping him go to bed after those sleeping pills or whatever made him loopy.

"Rogue..." she breathed, pointing outside.

"The wolf? No, he was one of your pack." My brows tugged together, but her eyes weren't on me. They were glued to Xavier, and they looked frantic—terrified.

"Rogue?" Even Xavier was confused as he stood, wiping his clothes down. "He's an idiot if he's coming onto my territory. He'll die like the others."

"No." Lola put a hand on his chest, shaking her head. "Our Rogue..."

Every muscle in Xavier's body tensed, allowing me to see his gorgeous jawline even better...which was something I shouldn't be focusing on right then. My man was so cute, though, it was hard to not focus on how gorgeous he was, even in situations like this.

Wait, wasn’t a Rogue a solo wolf? If he tried to attack, we could easily take him down. Well, Xavier could.

"Are you sure?"

"Certai—" Her words were cut off as a loud banging came at the door.

Xavier looked to me with wide eyes then back to Lola. "Hide her, take her to your room, and, if possible, wake Jay up."

"What the hell is going on?"

Lola grabbed my arm roughly, pulling me toward the stairs before freezing as the front door crashed open, causing both of us to jump. I had never seen Lola so frightened before.

"Beautiful Luna," a deep voice bellowed from the door. "It's lovely to meet you." A large figure stood in the doorway, almost the exact height as Colton.

With no hesitation, Xavier moved past me, shielding both me and Lola from this man's view. "Thought you said you'd never come back, Greyson. Truly a man of your word, I see." Even though I could tell Xavier was nervous, he held a good front. His voice didn't falter for a moment.

"Oh, but I had to—word spreads fast. Had to see if it was true that big, bad Xavier fell for a human. This is a moment in history. I mean, we do only get one mate...and you ripped your last one to shreds, so this was shocking news."

He stood in the light now, and as I peeked around Xavier, I got a better glimpse. His eyes were a dull grey—they almost looked silver. His hair was dirty blond sand swept back. Why were all the scary men good-looking? Or maybe it was a wolf-bear thing.

"You came to see the new Luna, here I am." I didn't walk in front of Xavier, but I did move so I was beside him. This guy was clearly trying to intimidate me, and I wasn’t going to let that happen.

"The brave act is cute." He grinned, showing off his teeth like he was going to take a bite of me. "I'd like to see it when you're not standing next to Alpha Xavier."

Arching an eyebrow, I stepped forward but instantly felt a tight grip around my wrist, stopping me in place. I turned back to look at Xavier, and his expression hurt my heart. He wasn't telling me to stop—he was *begging* me to stop.

If Xavier was this worried, I knew it was time to behave. I turned back to the man at the door, raising an eyebrow. "If you think I'm scared of a pretty boy like you, a Rogue…the *lowest* of your species…well, it’s comedic."

The Rogue, Greyson, blinked. He tilted his head, a huge smile growing on his face. "Oh, princess, you're making me so excited right now."

This obviously ticked Xavier off because his grip on my wrist tightened, and I was pulled behind him instantly.

"You're making a mistake, Xavier." Greyson chuckled before stretching his muscles. "You got any spare clothes I can take with me? Had to kill an Uber driver to get these so I could shift."

"Get out before Colton returns."

Greyson tilted his head, his piercing eyes lighting up with delight. "Oh, Xavier, you really must be terrified if your senses aren't working properly."

I craned my neck to look up at Xavier to see if he understood what Greyson meant, and instantly, his face contorted. "Shit!" He let go of me and ran forward, his bones beginning to crack and distort, causing me to look away for a moment.

When I turned back, I expected him to be on top of Greyson, ripping him apart, but no. He raced straight past him out the door before a thunderous clap rumbled the ground. It was the sound of two huge wolf-bears colliding at full speed, but it could easily be mistaken for an earthquake.

Greyson chuckled and walked forward, stopping right beside me and Lola. "Lovely to see you again," he said to Lola then turned to me, nodding. "Luna." With that, he continued through the house and left out the glass doors in the back.

Lola fell to the ground, breathing heavily. I still didn't fully understand the situation. Why were they so scared of this one Rogue? Why had Colton returned just because of him, and why hadn't he tried to kill me when he had the chance?

**Episode 79**

You know that feeling of shock where everything around you goes quiet for a minute? Where, for a second, it doesn't feel like real life. Lola was stuck in that as I shook her furiously, trying to get her back to reality.

"Who was that? Lola...Lola get Jay!" I was yelling now, louder than I should be. I was scared, not because I didn't know who Greyson was, but because if Xavier was intimidated, it was a bad sign.

I probably shouldn't be screaming at a girl in shock either, but I had no clue what to do. I glanced to my right, and sure enough, Xavier's wolf was fighting Colton's, trying to stop him from chasing down this stranger.

I didn't want them to hurt each other anymore than they already had, and I knew I could probably stop Xavier since his wolf had a soft spot for me. But if I stopped Xavier, Colton would chase down that Rogue. Although we didn't see eye to eye, that might end in him getting seriously injured…or worse.

"Dammit!" I hissed, pushing myself up and running upstairs to Jay. I slammed through the door, yelling at the top of my lungs for him to wake up. Instantly, he shot up like a bullet. I had expected it to take a bit more seeing how he was high as hell on medication, but his eyes darted around the room before focusing on me.

"Xavier needs you!"

He squinted his eyes, blinking several times before humming. "Huh?"

"Xavier needs you! Right now. Get up, come on!" I groaned, noticing he hadn't slept off the drugs completely, which was understandable since he barely got any sleep. "Your *Alpha.*"

He frowned and kicked off the covers, getting out of the bed and wobbling toward me. "What does that idiot need now? Is he not capable of doing anything himself?"

I would have found him talking smack about Xavier funny had it not been a serious situation. Usually he was on his toes, instantly there for Xavier when needed, but clearly, he wanted more sleep. He trudged along, and if I didn't know he could shift into a wolf-bear, I'd think his ability was to be a freaking slug. I wanted to grab him by the wrist and drag him down the stairs.

"The Rogue is here—your Rogue." I didn't know if he'd understand that, since I had no clue what it meant, but his half-closed eyes snapped open, and he sucked in a breath before darting past me.

Okay…that seemed to sober him up.

I turned out the door, chasing him before hearing a loud crash. My eyes widened as I saw Jay miss a step and tumble down the rest of the way, landing flat on his face.

My heart stopped for a moment, thinking he was seriously injured until he stood and held up a hand. "I am not dead."

Okay, maybe that hadn't totally sobered him up...

I followed after him, but he was already running toward the door. Lola, who was in her shocked state, suddenly seemed to come back to life when he ran past her. "Jay, wait, no!" She yelled, reaching out her hand, and he turned back.

"Are you alright?"

"Yeah…be careful, please," she breathed, pushing herself up from the ground weakly. I quickly aided her, letting her use my arm as support.

"Stop it, stop now. Sit!" I raised my eyes toward Jay as he yelled at the wolves and sighed. I probably should have left him in bed.

The two brothers refused to stop. Xavier was trying to pin Colton down, and Colton was fighting back to chase after this Rogue. Jay placed his hands on his hips, clearly frustrated he was being ignored.

"Oi, you ugly mutts—you both have fleas. And Caliana said you have a small dick, Xavier!"

Xavier's wolf turned to Jay and snarled. Colton also seemed distracted by this, but I could see the eyes of his wolf light up as he stumbled back and sat down, his tail wagging. Xavier's wolf turned to Colton, growling furiously before glancing over to me.

I held up my hands instantly and shook my head. "He's lying—I said nothing!"

"You told me the other night that you wanted to check out Colton's to see if his was super small as well."

Colton's wolf let out a surprised whimper, his ears perking up as he tilted his head.

"Liar!" I screamed, letting go of Lola and charging at the drugged-up Jay. "Xavier is big, so he knows you're lying."

At these words, Xavier's tail started wagging, and if a wolf could look smug…well, that was the expression he wore.

"Now I'm going to kill you for making me say that!" I dove at Jay. and even in his drugged-up state, he managed to move to the side, causing me to tumble forward. I let out a scream before Xavier's large head ducked down, and I landed against it.

I sighed as I pushed myself up, petting Xavier as I did so.

"What a Beta, being petted by your girlfriend." Jay chuckled.

Xavier growled, causing my whole body to vibrate from the rumble. I stood up straight, letting out a sigh of relief. "I'm going to kill you later, Jay."

A few moments later, Lola came out carrying two pairs of trousers, and the boys knew instantly to shift, but Xavier struggled. I made eye contact with his wolf and arched an eyebrow, letting out a disappointed tut, and before I knew it, he was shifting back.

"It's been a while, Colton," I mumbled, glancing back once I was sure they were clothed.

His hair was a bit messier than usual, and his smirk was on his face. “Did you miss me?"

"Not at all. Have you had any contact with your mate? The girl who saved me?"

The smirk wiped from his face, and he arched an eyebrow. "Why? You worried I killed her?"

"Not really…more worried you fell in love." I grinned at the surprise on his face.

He rolled his eyes and nodded over to Xavier. "Nah, I'm just finding out a way to kill her without my wolf rejecting me like his did."

"You two are so messed up in the head," Lola said, glancing between both brothers.

"Does anyone want to tell me who that was and why everyone is terrified of this random Rogue? If he's alone, he should be easy to take down, right?" Everyone's face went sullen, and I knew instantly he wasn't a normal Rogue. "Well?"

"He was from our pack."

My eyebrows rose in surprise. "You kicked him out, and now he has a grudge?"

"No. You could say he was…the devil of our pack. He would constantly fight others, reject the Alpha, but we kept him around because he was one of the strongest. He hated it and wanted to leave, but you can't leave until you hit eighteen."

"Couldn't he have run away?"

"The Alpha probably would have hunted him down."

"That's terrifying. But the Alpha, your father, at the time was horrible...so why was Greyson in the wrong for wanting to leave?"

"He realized he wouldn't be able to leave until he was eighteen or he'd be chased down. So...to get himself banished from our pack, he killed one of our other members."

My lips parted, and my mouth went dry.

"There was no remorse either. He took one of the younger members out, then came back a few hours later and told the elders where to find the body. Killing another pack member is taboo for us. He should’ve been killed for that."

"But he didn't die because he was young? He just got banished?"

"Not even that. The Alpha ignored it, decided he wanted Greyson even more—a ruthless killer, one of the strongest in the pack."

"One of the strongest? Almost as strong as you, Colton, and Jay?" I asked Xavier.

"Stronger than Jay. Almost as strong as us, if not on the same level," Xavier mumbled, dropping his gaze now. My brow furrowed. Was he ashamed someone was as strong as him?

"Aren't you stronger because you have Alpha blood?”

Colton walked past me now as if he were tired of this conversation, not wanting to hear anymore. I turned back, my eyes following him as he stormed into the house, making sure he wasn't chasing the Rogue, but he turned to go upstairs.

I looked back at Xavier, and his eyes had darkened. "He has Alpha blood, too."

"Alpha blood? He came from a different pack?"

Xavier shook his head, brushing a hand through his hair. "No. He's our half-brother, Caliana."

**Episode 80**

"Excuse me? Did you say half-brother?!" I choked on my own spit, coughing and spluttering.

Xavier nodded.

"What the hell? You didn't think to tell me you had another brother?"

"*Half*-brother. I don't count him as blood. I didn't know he'd ever return—he's been gone for years."

"You share the same father?"

He nodded again. "And you know how disgusting he was, like he wasn't cheating on my mother every other day, whether or not she cared. She had no love for that cruel man."

"You could have more brothers or sisters?"

"No, my father would have hunted them down. Or the women could have had an abortion before he found out. He wanted to breed the strongest pack…he was an actual animal."

"Why don't you get along with Greyson, if you both hate your father?"

"We hate him for different reasons. My father stole him from his mother's pack and banished her. Greyson didn't like anyone in ours. Just because we have daddy issues doesn't excuse the fact he murdered one of our pack members in cold blood." He swallowed. "He clearly takes after our father."

"Not to mention," he continued, "the fight that killed my mother…he was on the other side. He fought some of the enemy pack *and* some of our pack. He's insane; he only wants to kill."

"That's terrifying..."

"We never heard anything about him after, so we assumed he died in the fight or had run off to destroy another pack. I should have been more careful, should have expected him to come back if he heard his old pack was forming again."

"Why do you think he’s here then? If he hates you all so much and wanted to escape for years, why come back now?"

"I don’t know—probably because he's psychotic. He also seemed curious about a human who might become a Luna."

"*Might*? You mean definitely." I scowled, placing my hands on my hips. "It's you and Colton versus him, though. You shouldn't be too worried, right?"

"I know the pack hates him, but I don't want him to get to them first and persuade them against you."

"Then take me to them tomorrow…or now."

Xavier suddenly froze, his head turning toward the woods in the distance. He narrowed his eyes, and in an instant, there was the sound of snapping twigs, and I swore my eyes caught sight of a creature running away.

"From your pack?"

"I don't know, but it feels like there's a lot of them gathering lately."

"Isn't that disrespectful? To their Alpha?"

"Can't be certain it's my pack. I'd only catch their scent if I shifted," he mumbled before glancing back inside. "Colton will probably stick around for a few days now that he knows Greyson's back."

"Then you shouldn't worry too much. Three wolf-bears in the house feels safe."

"Yeah, maybe." He didn't even seem to hear what I said, his mind clearly elsewhere. I pursed my lips, concerned with the distant look in his eyes. I knew he was already stressed about me meeting the pack, but now with Greyson being here, I couldn't imagine how he was feeling.

"Let's go inside," I mumbled, wrapping my hand securely around his and squeezing it tightly. He didn't move, so I walked forward and led him inside the house, shutting the door behind us.

We walked toward the kitchen but paused as we heard clunky noises to our right, by the stairs. I glanced over and saw Lola trying to drag Jay up the stairs.

Every few steps, he'd give up and sit down, trying to fall asleep there until Lola would tap his face several times or do something else to wake him. It would have been a very amusing thing to watch for all of us if the tension in the house wasn’t so thick after what happened.

A sideways smile still worked its way onto my face as I shook my head before continuing to bring Xavier to the kitchen. Colton was finishing any leftovers on both our plates. He glanced up just for a second, not even caring that he had stolen our food, before returning his eyes to the plate and continuing the almost finished meals.

"Pig," I muttered.

"Wolf, actually," he responded as I let go of Xavier and let him sit down.

"You've calmed down." I kept my eyes trained on Colton, seeing if he would show any reaction.

"I'm pretty sure you'd be upset too, if you knew what he was like."

"I'm not judging you." I shook my head. "You just seemed more worked up than Xavier."

He didn't respond, only shoved another forkful of food in his mouth, chewing loudly. It was obviously a sign that he wanted to end the conversation with me, but I wasn't having it.

"So…your mate?"

"Soon to be ex-mate."

"You've been with her a lot. Surely, the more you hang out with her, the stronger the bond will get?"

"What?"

"Well, I wasn't even Xavier's original mate, yet his wolf still wanted me. The more you’re around her, the harder it will be."

"What makes you think I've even seen her since the fight? I'll have you know, I've been finding myself and venturing."

"Oh, I thought Xavier said something about her." My right eyebrow arched, and I tilted my head. "Finding yourself? What do you mean by that?"

"None of your business," he huffed, pushing the now-empty plate away.

Footsteps caught my attention, and I turned around to see Xavier leave the room with a vacant expression. It looked like he wasn't even here—he was miles away from everyone. I decided not to follow him and let him have his alone time. I understood he needed isolation when he was deep in thought.

I turned back to Colton, who also had his eyes on his brother until the kitchen door shut, then he turned back to me. "Maybe you should push back meeting with the pack," he suggested, dropping the fork down lightly.

I picked up the empty plate and walked over to the stove where some leftovers were hidden under a pan. "Still hungry?"

He nodded, and I served the rest of the food on the plate before walking back over and setting it in front of him.

"Maybe we should," I conceded. "Or maybe now is the perfect time. If Xavier's pack fears Greyson as much as you do, they'll want a strong Alpha to return. It might be the best course of action to meet them tomorrow and let them know, but only if Xavier's up for it."

"Maybe you won't be the worst Luna out there. You do have some brains," he mumbled, shoving food in his mouth.

"Wow, thanks, Colton. That's the nicest thing you've ever said to me." There was sarcasm in my tone, but when I thought about it, it probably was the nicest thing he had ever said to me. "So what's all this about finding yourself?"

"I said it was none of your business."

"I know, but I'm curious. It doesn't seem like you..." I sat across from him again.

"Things will be changing." Colton sighed, glancing up at me. "That's why."

There was no point asking him anymore. Getting this much out of Colton was already a miracle, so I should be happy. I nodded and stood. "Enjoy the food…and don't leave without saying goodbye."

"I wasn't going to, but I think I'll come to the meeting now...for support."

"That's a good idea," I muttered and left the room. My mind was a mess, and I needed my own time to think. I was curious what Colton meant by things changing. Also, they had a half-brother, and I was going to be meeting the pack soon...

Tomorrow was going to be a long day.

**Episode 81**

Xavier's soft snores next to me were relaxing. Whether it was a comfort thing or because he had been stressed all day, it was nice to see him finally look peaceful.

Resting my hand against his forehead, I brushed his hair back away from his face. His forehead twitched, and for a moment, his eyes flicked open. He mumbled nonsense before shutting his eyes again, his lips parted slightly. He looked so innocent and cute, I couldn't help the huge smile on my face. I was lucky I found him; I was lucky he was mine.

He was mine...*Things are changing...*

I turned away from Xavier, lying back down in bed and staring at the ceiling. My eyebrows pulled together as I thought about Colton's words again. Suddenly, they started to make sense.

The reason he was “finding himself” or whatever was because of *me*, and I guessed it wasn’t necessarily a good thing. Before Lola and I came along, it was just Xavier and Colton. They’d left their pack—left everything behind to start over. It was them against the world. They supported each other, had each other's back, and weren't exactly welcoming of newcomers.

Then we came along—well, Lola came back—and I was a newcomer. I planted myself in their home and essentially stole Xavier from Colton.

I instantly felt bad because I had never thought of it like that before. Xavier constantly spent time with me, protecting me, leaving Colton behind. I had come along and changed everything in Colton's life.

Did he feel like he needed to leave the house because of me? I didn’t know if he was trying to figure out who he was because he wasn’t a duo with Xavier anymore, but that was what it seemed like.

He meant it when he said things were changing.

I was all right being a Luna now. Originally, Xavier and Colton were supposed to be the ones to run the pack, but with me in the picture…

Oh my god. Did Colton seriously hate me? I knew I would have bad feelings toward anyone who stole Xavier from me, so I didn’t think I would blame him.

Why did I care so much even? Colton and I had never been close...yet it made me upset if I had really caused this distance. "Dammit," I hissed through my teeth, knowing I'd be stressed about it for the night. I jumped as a large arm wrapped around me, and Xavier pulled me toward his body. I glanced to my side, expecting to see him awake, but his eyes were still shut.

“It’s okay," he mumbled softly. "I love you." At least that was what it sounded like he said, but once again, I couldn't fully understand since he was half-asleep.

A weak smile formed on my face—this man was adorable. He was even trying to make me feel better in his sleep. Rolling onto my side, I sat my head on his chest, shutting my eyes. We had a long day tomorrow, so I needed rest too.

"I want to change, I want to get better, I want *love*..." a female voice spoke weakly. I could barely see her, but I knew the figure. I knew the voice, too, but she seemed more like a silhouette in the distance.

I didn't even realize I was walking until I was practically running to the girl. Just as I was about to ask who she was, a male voice appeared. I blinked in confusion before my eyes focused on another figure next to her; a larger one—clearly a well-built man.

"You do?" the male questioned. Colton. "That doesn't seem like you."

"I do. I'm lonely. I don't like the life I've chosen for myself...I want *you*." The girl’s voice was quieter now, almost shy. My eyes widened when I realized who it was, even though I shouldn't be surprised.

Maya. The girl who rescued me. Colton's mate.

A small smile appeared on my face—she seemed to have changed a lot since then. She looked almost more human now, or like she had something to live for now.

Colton's hand raised to her face, his head tilted slightly. "I can't tell if you're being serious..."

Instantly, her expression changed from shy to almost angry. She glanced away, playing with her hands. “I’m not going to repeat myself," she grumbled.

"Good." Colton chuckled, standing back. I heard bones crack, and then a huge wolf-bear appeared where Colton had been standing. He just seemed to vanish, not even shift...

Why would—

A piercing scream left Maya's throat as the wolf lunged and bit into her neck. I fell back, my hands flying to my mouth as I tried to hold down the rising bile, and Maya’s blood spurted everywhere. The wolf shook its head side to side before throwing the girl to the ground roughly.

Her scream turned into gurgled whimpers as she tried to reach up to her neck with shaky hands.

I rushed over to Maya even though my legs felt like they were about to collapse. "You'll be fine! We'll get help." I tried to reassure her, but she didn't even look at me. She wasn't looking at anyone—she couldn't.

My stomach turned, and I fell to the ground as I stared at her blank eyes—eyes that no longer had life.

"This is all your fault." Colton’s voice was haunting. I couldn't even turn to face him now.

"No...it's not."

"All your fault." It wasn't Colton speaking anymore. I almost vomited as Maya's mouth moved like a puppet, blood spilling from it.

My eyes flashed open, and I realized I was clinging to a pillow. A nightmare. I pushed myself up, my hair sticking to my face from the sweat. I pushed it back, terrified from the dream. I needed a shower to clear my head. I glanced up to the door, but it was closed and now that I listened, I realized the shower was already running. Xavier must be in there.

I let out a soft sigh, forcing myself out of bed and out of the room. Today I was going to meet Xavier's pack, yet the nightmare was stuck on my mind.

"You look horrible," the voice made me freeze, and I looked straight ahead to see Colton walking up the stairs, munching on some toast.

"You don't look any better," I retorted.

He instantly arched an eyebrow. "You seem upset. Xavier break up with you?"

"No!"

"No comeback for once?”

“Do you hate me?”

“Yeah."

I should have expected that, even if he was saying it as a joke...

"Okay," I said, not able to deal with this now. I began walking again, trying to duck around him without even touching him, but he grabbed my arm quickly.

"What’s up with you? Nervous about meeting the pack?" The joking tone was gone.

"No."

"What is it then?”

"I'M SCARED YOU'RE GOING TO KILL MAYA BECAUSE OF ME, BECAUSE I STOLE YOUR BROTHER, AND THINGS ARE CHANGING FOR YOU, AND YOU THINK YOU HAVE TO GO AND BE ON YOUR OWN NOW, AND NOW YOU HATE LOVE BECAUSE LOVE IS WHAT CAUSED THIS, AND NOW YOU'RE GOING TO KILL THE GIRL WHO LOVES YOU BECAUSE OF ME." I said it in one breath so quickly, I didn't even know if he caught my words.

He watched me closely, his forehead creasing and eyebrows pulling together for a few seconds before he burst out laughing, dropping my hand. This continued for a good minute until I saw tears forming in his eyes. I wanted to storm off, embarrassed, but I needed to hear his response.

"Are you serious?" he choked out through his fit of laughter.

"Yes. You said things are changing!"

He wiped his eyes and stood up straight, clearly holding back more laughter.

"You’re an idiot. Things are changing because Xavier's going to be Alpha, and you're going to be Luna, which means more packs will come to this area to investigate. Meaning wars or alliances could happen, and I need to strengthen up and decide if I'm staying or going." He chuckled. "God, you're an idiot."

"I had nightmare you killed Maya after she said she loved you, and you said it was *my* fault."

He bit back a smile. "No, I'm killing her because I don't want a mate...and also because I don't want her to kill me first."

"That reminds me of how Xavier and I were at first..."

"Except you guys failed, and I don't fail." He winked before raising his hand and patting my head. "Don't worry yourself about stuff like that—worry about meeting your new pack, *Luna.*"

He didn't let me respond, leaving me alone with my crazy thoughts. My pack.

Luna.

**Episode 82**

"There was no need for this." I scowled, staring at my reflection in the mirror. Makeup was one of Lola’s hidden talents.

"Now lipstick!" she cheered, rooting through her bag.

"No, thank you. I can't eat properly when I wear lipstick, and it's always too much. I'll probably lick it off before we even leave the house."

"Lick it off?"

"Yeah, it annoys me, so I have a habit of trying to lick it off."

"You're so weird." She sighed before pulling out a tube of lipstick and waving it around. "Please, this color would look so good on you. It's not an obvious shade, but it'll suit your look."

"Fine, but if I don't like the feel or look of it, I'm licking it off."

"Whatever you say, butthole lips."

"Butthole lips?" I arched an eyebrow as I sat back down on the bed and pursed my lips slightly so she could apply the liquid lipstick. A wide grin formed on her face when she realized I didn't understand what she meant.

She squinted her eyes slightly, focusing as she applied the lipstick. "Butthole lips. When you lick the inside bit of it off, and it makes your lips look like a rectum."

"Ew, th—"

"DON'T TALK WHEN I'M APPLYING!" she snarled, instantly making me shut up. I glanced away, sulking until she finished putting it on after instructing me to pose my lips in different ways.

"Now wait for it to dry," she instructed, putting the lipstick into her pocket. "I'll take it with us just in case you need to reapply. Look in the mirror."

Rolling my eyes, I pushed myself off the bed and made my way to the mirror. My eyebrows rose instantly. I always thought lipstick was too much, but this shade was actually nice.

"See? I told you it's pretty. Suits your skin tone, too."

"Getting made up to meet my pack was a terrible idea. They're going to think I'm some girly-girl who only cares about makeup."

"People always judge on looks first. You look badass with this outfit and makeup."

I kind of agreed. This outfit was nice. High-waist navy jeans with a tight top that hugged my figure in a complimenting way. I always had a love for leather jackets, especially wearing black high-heeled boots with it.

"You look so hot." Both Lola and I looked up to see Xavier leaning on the door frame, his eyes slowly investigating the outfit.

"Thank you, baby." I smiled, walking over and wrapping my arms around his neck.

"Ew," Lola grumbled. "I'll leave. See you guys downstairs." She pushed past us, and I nudged her head as she walked by.

"Oh, please. Like you and Jay don't do this whenever you’re in the room together. You're worse than us."

"Yeah, but we're cute when we do it." She stuck her tongue out with a cheeky grin, then turned and skipped out the room.

My body jolted slightly when Xavier's larger hands gripped my ass, squeezing it softly. "You look too good in this." He frowned.

"What does that even mean?" I chuckled, standing back a bit so I could examine his expression. He had a playful tone in his voice, but something about how he looked at me clearly made him uncomfortable.

"Nothing."

"Tell me."

"I don't want the pack to stare at you like a piece of meat. If they see how hot you are…what if they think I went for you because you're fuckable?"

"Because I'm *fuckable*?" I arched an eyebrow.

Instantly, he shook his head. "Not like that! Obviously, you are…but not just that...like..."

"I think I get what you mean—you don't need to stress." I couldn't help but laugh when he seemed to panic, probably thinking I was annoyed with him.

I did understand where he was coming from. He had made me aware the majority of his old pack were males who weren't very...polite. The fact that Xavier had a mate, one who hadn't been his original mate, probably made it look like I was just around to be a side piece or something.

"Are you nervous?" I asked, resting a hand on his cheek gently. I could see there was concern there; he was obviously stressed.

"A bit." He sighed, allowing himself to be honest for once. "Are you?"

"A bit." I nodded. "But more excited than nervous."

"Excited?" He arched an eyebrow, expecting a different response.

"I've never met a pack before, apart from the one that's tried to kill me. To see where you and Lola were raised will be interesting. Kind of how you were interested in looking at my hometown."

"I'd say this is different. Your childhood place couldn't kill me, and you probably had better memories there."

"That is true, but also not the point. How and where you grow up can shape your future. It'll just be interesting to see, you know?"

"You're weird,” he mumbled, chuckling before leaning in and planting a quick and gentle kiss on my lips. "I love you."

"I love you, too," I murmured as he pulled back.

"Okay, love birds…can we go before you guys start ripping each other's clothes off?" Colton came around the corner, not amused at our exchange.

"Maybe if you weren't trying to kill your mate, you'd find happiness, too." I stuck out my tongue, but he was right. It was time to go and meet the pack.

Colton left to gather Lola and Jay while Xavier and I made our way to the front door. I managed to sneak a sideways glance at him when he wasn't focused on me, and sure enough, he looked scared.

It was kind of unsettling when Xavier was tense or nervous about something. It was probably because of me, though. He was probably scared they'd try to hurt me, but this was the time to prove myself. I wasn't going to be scared off by these wolves.

Maybe then, he'd see me as more than a frail human.

"Are you ever going to make me your mate?" I didn’t know where the question came from, but it slipped out before I could stop it. I had the worst timing.

"Obviously, but—"

"You're right, we'll talk about it when we're back. Sorry." I didn't want him to try explaining himself when he was already stressed out.

Xavier unlocked the car, and right when I was about to open the door, I noticed his head snap around, like a watchdog on full alert.

Lola, Jay, and Colton were coming out of the house now, so whatever caught Xavier's attention from the woods wasn't one of them. What if it was their half-brother trying to kill us right before we met the pack? That would make him the new Alpha…

My mind was racing, thinking about the intruder and what they wanted, as a figure came into the clearing.

Oh my god. I wasn't sure whether they were friend or foe. My eyes left the person who emerged from the woods and darted over to Colton—he had spotted her now. He didn’t look as surprised as I did, but he was still obviously stunned, his eyebrows pulling together in obvious confusion.

"Maya."

**Episode 83**

"Maya, what are you doing here?" Colton was clearly surprised.

"Maya," I mumbled, walking around the car door. "How are you?" Completely ignoring the question Colton asked her, but I was sure she'd get around to that.

Her wary eyes darted between me and Xavier, almost as if we were a threat, before finally landing back on me. She didn't answer for a second; instead, she kept her lips pressed together in a thin line.

No one said a word, and judging by her stance, it looked like she wanted to turn on her heel and run away. I couldn't tell if she was angry or scared—it was probably her being cautious more than anything.

"Shouldn't I be asking you that?" she replied, and I was unsure if it was her trying to be rude or nice. I wasn’t sure she knew the difference either.

"If you're referencing the last time we met, I'm fine. I'm tougher than you think." I offered her a kind smile. "I mean, I should thank you. After all, you did save me."

Her cheeks tinted rose, and she glanced away, scratching her arm, obviously feeling awkward. "It was for my own benefit. I wasn't saving you because I wanted to."

"Well, I appreciate it anyway." I shrugged and walked back to my side of the car. Xavier watched Maya closely, his eyes narrowed, warning her with a glare, yet she paid no attention.

"You didn't answer my question," Colton reminded her, walking in her direction. He didn't stop when he got to her; he walked past and kept going until he was out of sight.

She stood still for a moment, glancing over her shoulder, and after a moment's hesitation, she turned and followed him. Confused but not wanting to disturb them, I hopped into the passenger side of the car and rested my hand on Xavier's arm. "You're too tense."

"I don't trust her."

"She saved me."

"She was also part of the pack that wanted to torture you. You heard her—she saved you for her own benefit."

"Well, I like her. I think there's more than meets the eye."

"You don't have the best instincts, Cal," he mumbled, turning away and looking out the window. The doors in the back opened, letting us know Lola and Jay were now joining us.

"*I* don't have the best instincts? You wanted to murder me when I first got here! And now look, I'm your beautiful, perfect mate." I could see my words worked when the corner of his lip twitched.

"What was that all about?" Jay asked after closing the door a bit too roughly behind him. "Is Colton not coming with us anymore? He's probably going to kill her if we leave them alone."

"That's not necessarily a bad thing," Xavier huffed, ignoring the dirty look I gave him.

"It will be for Colton." I could see Lola’s frown in the rearview mirror. "Besides, she helped Cal. You should be a bit grateful."

"She did it for her own benefit. I don't know why you're all siding with this crazy girl; she wanted to torture Caliana at first.”

"Because she's Colton's mate, and you know how mates work."

"They don't always work out. I think our family is just cursed." Xavier sighed.

"Excuse you."

"Okay, we get cursed with a terrible first mate but blessed with the best mate any wolf-bear could possibly imagine the second time around." Xavier glanced at me with puppy dog eyes and an innocent smile.

"Disgusting and sappy—I love it." I patted his head. "You even said wolf-bear, too."

"Because I know you love that weird term." He chuckled. "But I'd advise not calling the pack that name. They probably won't take to it kindly."

"Like you, at first."

"I have a feeling they'll never grow to like it. They'll probably be offended and rip off one of your limbs as a warning."

"Xavier!"

"Kidding! Maybe." He grinned, nudging me lightly. A knock at the window caught our attention. Colton had returned with Maya standing next to him.

Xavier rolled down the window, arching an eyebrow. "Are you getting in the car?"

"She's coming."

"What did you say?"

"Maya's coming. We're going to shift and run there."

"Why the hell is she coming?"

"I need to keep an eye on her right now." His eyes grew dark; the way he said that didn't sound good. "She promised she'd behave, and we could use more strength if anything bad happens"

"I think someone from our rival pack will make things way worse, Colton. Are you thinking straight?"

"Oh, please. Nothing will be worse than bringing a human and trying to introduce her as future Luna."

"Watch your mouth," Xavier growled, and both brothers suddenly seemed on edge.

Not trusting where this conversation was going to go, I interfered. "Let her come, Xavier. I trust her."

"Cal..."

"Please."

He raised his hand, pinching the bridge of his nose before letting out a frustrated sigh. "Fine. Colton, if she does anything out of line, I'm killing her."

"Be my guest.” Colton grinned widely before hitting the top of the car. “We’ll see you guys there.”

My blood ran cold. Colton wasn’t joking about letting Xavier kill Maya. Why was he even bringing her? Did he know she would act up? Maybe this was part of his plan…Xavier kills her, so he wouldn't have to do it himself.

He wouldn't possibly be that selfish, would he?

I couldn’t think about this right now. It wasn't my business, and it was obviously not the best time to get stressed.

"You okay?" Lola's hand landed on my shoulder and squeezed tightly, and I couldn't help but smile that she noticed I was on edge.

I turned back with a tight-lipped smile and nodded. "I will be."

Xavier rolled up the window and started the car, and almost in unison, Colton and Maya ran off into the woods, shifting.

"Won't they need a change of clothes?"

"They'll probably remove them before shifting," Jay chimed in. "Sorry, I don't trust Xavier driving while talking."

"Shut up or I'll crash on purpose," Xavier snarled, which only made Jay and Lola burst out laughing in the back. I was too stressed to find anything funny at this moment.

My eyes wandered out the window, watching the scenery pass. I acted confident all this time about meeting the pack, but now I was terrified.

This was the pack Xavier's father had run. His father, who had done those horrible things to his mother, killed so many people, and abandoned his pack. If I thought Colton and Xavier were bad when I first met them, this would be ten times worse.

They would definitely judge me for being human, too, and Xavier even said some might try to kill me. If one of them did try to kill me, it meant they were challenging the Alpha; I knew a war could break out if someone tried to kill the Luna.

Then again, could I even be Luna, if I wasn't officially Xavier's mate?

What if they tried to overthrow Xavier because he wanted to make a human the Luna? Or because he had gone soft? Or because he abandoned his pack when everything happened?

I understood why he was worried about me meeting them. Realistically, I'd probably drag them down in a fight. Was there some self-defense class against wolf-bears? Could I look up a YouTube tutorial that could help me or something?

Although I was stressed and not really finding this funny, I couldn't help but smile at my own thoughts. Imagine that: a YouTube tutorial against wolf-bears. I mean, there could be. I was sure I wasn't the only human who knew about them. In fact, there were some people who probably hunted them.

"You've been very silent," Xavier observed.

"Tired, I guess."

"Or worried?"

"Hardly." I offered him a confident smile, which he returned. We were both trying to act tougher than we felt, but I felt safer knowing Colton, Lola, and Jay would be there, too. Hopefully Maya would have our backs, but I wasn't going to expect much.

Xavier and I didn't say much to each other after our small exchange, but there was no awkward silence due to the two loud ones in the back. Of course, the time passed way quicker than expected—probably because I was starting to dread meeting the pack. We took a left up a narrow, windy lane that looked overgrown.

The car rocked and bumped so much that I had to hold onto the handle to keep myself steady. Based on this scary path, I expected we were driving to an abandoned haunted cottage or something. "This place definitely is haunted."

"Some of the pack are buried out here."

"WHAT?!"

"Kidding." Xavier responded in a monotone voice, which made me question if he was telling the truth or not.

From the corner of my eye, I could have sworn I saw a flash of grey—a *large* flash of grey. The color could have been mistaken for lightning if I didn't know the territory. Xavier took a sharp right. My eyes widened, my mouth slipping open when I saw a three-story house come into view.

In the past, it would have been a nice place. If someone had put love and care into it, I had no doubt it would still be gorgeous, but now it was just…eh, I guess. Not abandoned but not exactly a home either.

I had been so distracted by the house that I hadn't noticed a man standing outside the door with a group of three others. I instantly recognized him, and my face scrunched up. He actually came. Of course he had gotten here before us.

Greyson.

This was going to be one hell of a first meeting.

**Episode 84**

"We should wait for Colton to get here, especially now that Greyson is here," Xavier announced to everyone in the car. There were several pairs of eyes on our car now—obviously knowing it was us—momentarily distracting the group from whatever argument they were having.

"Look." I pointed over to the woods in the distance, and two large pairs of eyes peered out." I think that's them."

"Why aren't they coming out?" Lola inquired, leaning between the two front seats to get a better look.

"I don't know. They obviously know we're here. Maybe they're waiting for us to get out," Jay chimed in, leaning back in his seat. "I'm starting to get nervous."

"Wow, third-in-command is such a baby," Lola teased, causing him to nudge her. "I'm the half-breed here, and I'm not scared at all."

"You weren't here for the worst of it all," Jay pointed out.

I zoned out from their conversation, turning my attention to Xavier. His eyes were staring out the windshield—it seemed he and Colton were staring at each other.

I wanted to ask him what was going on, or what we were supposed to do, but his intense expression told me to wait. I didn’t know if he was communicating with Colton with their wolf-bear mind thing, or whether he was trying to figure out what to do next.

"It doesn’t seem like they’re welcoming Greyson." I turned back to Lola and Jay, focusing my attention on them.

"I'm not surprised."

"Do you think they'll act the same way with us?"

"Probably not as hostile. Well, not that obviously, anyway." Jay seemed to be in deep thought now. "Maybe to the girl with Colton. I might be wrong, and they might be planning to kill us on the spot."

"That's comforting," I grumbled, turning back to face out the front window. Colton and Maya had disappeared, making me assume they retreated into the woods.

"What's the plan?" I decided to ask Xavier. He turned to me, as if he were still thinking about it.

"You wait here for a moment. Lola, you too." He hesitated. "Jay, come with me."

He didn't wait for any questions, or to see if anyone went against this idea, and jumped out of the car. Right before he shut the door, he peeked around, making the most intense direct eye contact possible. "Stay."

I held up my hands, showing my innocence. "I will, I will."

With that, the door slammed shut, the sound echoing as Jay followed suit. I turned back to Lola, a scowl on my face. "I hate just sitting around here."

"It's the best plan right now. Especially with Greyson here."

"They're not even walking toward them, though." My eyebrows pulled together, trying to determine what their plan was as the guys walked the opposite direction. My eyes stayed glued to the mirror, watching them. They stood a good few meters behind the car, closer to the side of the road.

Finally, I saw three figures instead of two; oh, that made sense. They waited for Colton to join them.

They talked among each other, probably forming the best way to go into this. Greyson clearly toppled the original plans. I focused my eyes back onto the house.

Greyson had a wide smile, not seeming to fear anyone around him. I really wanted to know what was going on. Although I couldn't hear much, it was obvious there was a disagreement.

One of the men raised his fist and punched Greyson in the face, causing him to stumble back. He managed to catch himself right before he fell. His head turned to our direction momentarily, allowing me to see the blood that dripped from his nose.

That wasn't even the first thing I noticed. I noticed the look in his eyes; I had seen it in Xavier's eyes before, when I was scared of him. *Bloodlust*. Greyson's goal was to get revenge, whether it was for the punch or something from the past, he was perfectly okay with killing someone. Happy about it, even.

Everything seemed to happen in slow motion, but at the same time, it happened so quickly that I made the mistake of blinking and missed it. There were now two wolf-bears in front of the house, ripping into each other.

Then another one appeared—one I recognized. Colton's wolf was in on the fight now. He must have sprinted past the car without me noticing. Close behind were Jay and Xavier—chasing after him or running to the fight, I didn’t know—however, they were still in their human forms.

"Should we do something to help?" I asked.

"We can't help. Besides, this is pretty common."

"*Common*?"

"In wolf packs, they shift and fight each other. It's usually a dominance thing, but in this case, it seems like an actual fight. Nothing the boys can't handle, though."

The car door opened behind us, and both Lola and I screamed in unison, not knowing what to expect.

Maya. She returned to her original form now—a human. "Colton told me to get in the car." She sounded annoyed.

"You seem like you could handle yourself," Lola muttered. I couldn't tell if she was trying to be nasty to Maya.

"I can. Obviously."

"Then why send you to the car?" Lola retorted.

"Colton's pack doesn't like me. If you don’t remember, the pack I was in before was the enemy who kidnapped your future Luna." Maya narrowed her eyes, catching on that Lola was being rude. "What a disgrace to not even know your pack’s history."

"At least I'm loyal to them!"

"Both of you, stop it," I cut in. "Jesus, you're like guys trying to see who has the biggest dick."

"Then tell your snobby little friend to stay out of my business," Maya snapped before sitting back in the seat. I gave Lola a sideways glance, a warning to tell her to behave, and she rolled her eyes.

Although I didn’t think she would, Maya could probably kill us both in an instant.

"So…you and Colton—"

“Hate each other," Maya interrupted.

"Then why are you following him? What did you guys talk about in the forest?" Lola turned back to look at her accusingly.

"Why, are you jealous? Didn’t know you’d be low enough to have a crush on someone who's not your mate," Maya sneered.

Lola glared at her. "No, but I don't want an outcast infiltrating our pack when we're trying to get it back up and running."

"Wouldn't be too hard with the state it’s in."

"Oh my god, can you both stop? Lola, she saved me—what's your issue with her? And quit being a bitch, Maya, it’s a sign of weakness," I snapped at them.

"You're right. I'd rather try to fight those lunatics out there than deal with you two." Maya opened the door and got out, ignoring my cries to tell her to get back in the car.

She would probably make the fight even messier, and this was supposed to be a civil meeting. Then again, were wolf-bears ever civil? Probably not. After all, Maya was an enemy to them.

My body acted on its own accord; I didn't even realize what I was doing until Lola yelled at me to stop, to get back in the car. Once I slammed the car door shut, all fighting stopped.

It was strange that one noise caused this whole mess to freeze, like I’d pressed a pause button.

Now, another problem was at hand. All eyes were on me—some glaring, some curious, some with disgust written on their faces.

Time to introduce myself: Caliana, the person who makes the dumbest mistakes, and also…

Their future Luna.

**Episode 85**

I was terrified. Not because several wolf-bears were staring my way, but because of how judgmental they were. I could understand why they didn't like me, or why they wouldn't want to accept me.

This was once the strongest pack of them all, and there was no doubt humans were weaker than wolf-bears. *Note to self: don't use that word around them—they might get offended.*

My heart skipped a beat when the man who had been fighting Greyson moments ago shifted back to his human form. I turned my eyes away, hating the sight of their bodies morphing and their bones changing shape, even though I could still hear the sounds.

By the time I looked back, I sucked in a breath. The human male was now sauntering toward me with a look that could kill...and he was very naked, although he didn’t seem concerned about that part.

He stopped a few feet away from me and Maya. He looked between us before his eyes landed on her, clearly not impressed. "I know what pack you're from. Say one thing wrong, and I'll crush your skull. Why the hell would they bring you here?" He snarled, spitting in her face, making me cringe. I was surprised she didn't attack him immediately. "Which means you," he turned to face me, eyes narrowed, "are Xavier's bitch."

Not even a second after he finished his sentence, he was pinned to the ground. Xavier stood above him, his eyes dark and menacing as he glared at the man below him. "I won't hesitate to kill you, Coby."

"You don't have the balls," Coby retorted, showing zero respect for Xavier. "Killing a pack member is taboo." There was a beat of silence. The rest of the pack was waiting to see how their Alpha would respond, and Xavier was clearly trying to find the right words.

Maya made her way over, slamming her foot right on Coby’s groin, causing the man to cry out. "Remember when you asked why I'm here? I'm *not* in your pack, and you know what that means? It means I'm allowed to kill any of you if you disrespect your Alpha." I wasn’t sure if that was the actual reason she was here or if she was just trying to get back at him.

"You can't do shit."

"You wanna bet, mutt?" She dug her foot harder into his crotch, and I could see Xavier cringe even though he wasn’t being tortured.

Coby let out a roar of pain, and a terrifying smirk crawled on Maya's face. I could see the humane part of Xavier wanted to stop her, but he didn't budge. "Okay, Maya. That's enough." I cleared my throat, putting my hand on her shoulder. Her whole body tensed, but she slowly removed her foot.

"Weak." Coby glared at me, saying the words through clenched teeth.

"Don't confuse kindness for weakness." I narrowed my eyes. "Or do you want to be humiliated more in front of your pack?" My words obviously caught him off guard, and he had no clever reply for once. Instead, he pushed himself off the ground, wiping his naked body down before limping over to his pack mates.

"I'm surprised you're walking around so confidently." Maya chuckled. "With a dick that size, I'm sure you'd want to hide it from public view."

A low growl came from our right from Colton’s wolf. Maya seemed surprised by this but immediately recovered and just responded to it with a glare. His wolf was…jealous? Colton was going to be embarrassed. I'd have to make sure to hold that over his head.

"Greyson, you're not welcome here." Xavier grabbed everyone’s attention again.

"Doesn’t look like your human is welcome here either.” Greyson nodded toward me. "If I promise to behave, will you let me stay? Only fair, *brother*, right?"

"No." Xavier shook his head.

"Alright then, how about this?" Greyson walked close to Xavier so the rest of his pack couldn't hear. "How messy would it look, Alpha, if the first day you come back with your Luna, blood was shed? You know I can take a lot of these weaklings down before you stop me."

The hesitation in Xavier's response made it obvious Greyson wasn't bluffing. How strong was this man?

"Why would you want to stay?" Xavier arched an eyebrow. "I'd understand if you were in a pack, wanting to spy or something. But you're alone...so why?"

"Oh, but, brother, you're the only family I have. You wouldn't believe it if I just wanted a nice family reunion?" Greyson pouted, tilting his head like a puppy.

"Not at all."

"What if I said..." Greyson hummed, thinking of another response to mess with Xavier, his eyes darting around until they landed on Maya. "What if I just wanted to pick up a hot piece of meat?"

There was fury in Colton's eyes at Greyson’s words, yet he didn't do anything. The same couldn't be said for Maya.

"I'm not into scumbags," she responded, and she almost sounded bored.

"I wouldn't believe that either. Come clean, Greyson, do you want to die? You're bored of life—is that it?" Xavier was getting angrier by the second, and if it wasn't sorted soon, blood was definitely going to be shed. Like Greyson said, that probably wouldn't look too good.

"I'm curious." Greyson offered a wide, sadistic grin. "Promise."

"If you think for a moment we'd ever welcome you back in this pack after what you did—"

"Like I'd ever want to return to this pack." There was pure disgust in Greyson's voice as he spoke. "Besides, you're one to talk. Killing your mate—that's the most taboo thing you could possibly do."

Xavier had no response, but his jaw tightened, and he swallowed.

Greyson noticed this, noticed he had his half-brother in his claws. He glanced at me. "Are you not nervous, dear Luna, that you'll be next? Not by one of these pack members, but by your own mate."

"Not one bit." I shook my head. "Are you?"

"Someone's mouthy." Greyson chuckled. "Besides—" His sentence was cut off, his brow furrowing.

It wasn’t just him, though. Xavier's expression changed, and he turned around, facing the driveway. Everyone else did the same, too, except for me and Lola.

"You've got to be kidding me," Xavier grumbled, turning his back on Greyson and facing the other direction.

I turned to finally face the way he was looking, my heart dropping to my stomach. My jaw wanted to open from the shock, but I couldn't let it—I couldn't look weak.

But fear was all I felt.

There, emerging from the trees was, not one, not two, but more than a dozen wolf-bears. I couldn't count. The more I stared, the more eyes would appear, and large, furry bodies started walking toward us.

"Are these our pack?" I whispered to Lola.

"No..."

Oh no.

**Episode 86**

Could anything else possibly go wrong?

Greyson, who had killed a member of their pack, showed up. Their pack hated me and probably wanted to kill me. Maya, who the pack also hated, was here. Anything else?

Oh, let's bring in dozens of random wolf-bears who outnumbered us, and were probably there to kill me. Could I ever catch a break?

All I wanted to do was hide behind Xavier—hide behind anyone—but how weak would that make me look? How would they ever respect a Luna that cowered in fear? I asked for this, I told Xavier I wanted this, and he warned me of the horrors that would unfold, and I accepted them.

"Who are they?" I glanced over at Xavier, who didn't take his eyes off these wolves. They weren't attacking us yet, and nobody was growling so maybe—just maybe—they were friendly. But when were random wolf-bears friendly?

I tried to think of the most logical reason they were here. Xavier's pack was once the strongest. These wolves heard rumors the pack was coming back, but they were aware they would have to rebuild. Maybe they came to attack at their weakest point. They probably knew the pack wouldn’t accept Xavier straight away.

Or the more positive option: they heard there was a human Luna and wanted to come check if that was true. If that were the case, why would they send so many? Not to toot my own horn, but I did take down a wolf-bear by myself. Maybe the rumors of *Caliana, the mighty wolf tamer,* had spread. I couldn't help but chuckle at my terrible joke. Maybe it was fear that made me laugh, but the moment the noise left my mouth, all eyes were on me.

Even Xavier's.

I could see the confusion in his side glance and the arch of an eyebrow. He was probably thinking I'd lost my mind. My heart dropped as two wolf-bears began walking toward us. One had a dark brown pelt, its eyes unkind. It was not amused by my random laughter—probably angry because it wanted me to be scared. The other one was smaller. It had an auburn pelt, the shiniest I had seen. I wanted to reach out and touch it, feel its texture.

There was a different emotion in this one's eyes. More like...curiosity or concern…and its eyes were glued to me like there was no tomorrow. I didn't break the gaze. As much as I wanted to, I knew in dog language, holding eye contact was a form of dominance.

The larger wolf let out a low ferocious, unwelcoming growl. My attention snapped back to it, and I expected it to be glaring at me, but its eyes were on something else. Xavier?

No, not Xavier. It was looking past him at Greyson.

"Kill him if you want; you'd be doing me a favor," Xavier finally spoke up, breaking the silence. The smaller wolf nudged the larger one, letting out its own growl, causing the larger one to huff and shake his large head.

"Justin, fetch some clothes." Xavier turned back, talking to one of the pack members. I didn't know which one. Whoever it was clearly hesitated, like they were unsure whether they wanted to take orders from him. "NOW!" The bellow made everyone in the pack jump, and the man with light blond hair turned on his heel and ran inside.

Wait, get *clothes*? They weren't here to kill us? I really wanted to ask Xavier what was going on but looking clueless in front of everyone was a really bad idea.

A few moments later, the blond man returned with two pairs of clothes. He had a baby face, although his body was well-built. I guessed he was around eighteen years old. He passed the clothes to Xavier, who offered them to the two large wolf-bears that stood in front of us.

He glanced to the smaller wolf, who nudged into him. Without any other noises from either of them, they turned in sync and ran off into the trees. The other wolves that had been standing far behind them refused to take their eyes off us—it made my skin crawl. Xavier crept closer to me now, causing me to jump as his arm slid around me. It made me feel safe, but a bit of warning would have been nice.

"You okay?" he whispered low so only I would hear. Although knowing these wolf-bears, they probably had supersonic hearing.

"Fine."

"You sure? You seem nervous."

"Who wouldn't be in this situation?" I responded calmly. "Even you are on edge."

He only chuckled in response. Bones cracking tore my attention from the wolves in front of me, the sound behind me. I turned in confusion to see what was going on, expecting another fight, but no.

Maya's human form was gone, and she now stood as her tall, beautiful wolf. Her eyes weren't on Xavier or me—they were focused on something, someone in the distance. Then they weren't. It happened so quick—a flash of her colored fur, and then she was gone, bounding off in the opposite direction. I turned back to the newcomers, and a few of them watched as she sped away at an incredible speed before returning their eyes to us.

"What was that about?" Xavier muttered and at the exact same time, we both turned back to look at Colton. He was still in his wolf-bear form, and his eyes were staring longingly after Maya. He seemed as confused as us, and I could tell his wolf was torn. He wanted to chase her down, but Colton was probably fighting it. All the times he used to make fun of Xavier about mates and now look at him—he was in the exact same boat.

I tapped Xavier lightly, and he glanced down at me. "What's up with all these wolves? Are we under attack?" I was repeating myself, and I felt like I was being whiney. I was already stressed enough about meeting Xavier's pack. If a war was about to break out, I'd rather be prepared for it.

"Well—"

"Do we attack? Are they friendly?" The voice came from one of the men behind us, and as I glanced back around, I noticed it was the same guy who fetched the clothes. Justin. He looked nervous, no...*everyone* looked nervous. Just moments ago, they were talking back, and now they looked like nervous little puppies.

Some had their eyes on these newcomers, others were focused on Xavier, searching for guidance. They had been deprived of an Alpha so long, I almost felt guilty. Checking over the group, I noticed more had emerged from the house, one of which was a woman who looked to be in her early to mid-thirties. She had dark brown skin with piercing black eyes, but she looked tired and worn out.

Unlike most of the males who looked ready to attack any moment, she rested against the wall, not bothered by the random pack of wolves. "Well? Do we? You want to be the Alpha, tel—" Justin tried to act tough, but it was too shaky. He didn't get to finish his sentence before Xavier interrupted.

"You know who they are. Don't attack. Don't even question me on something like that without my order.”

“They aren’t acting friendly, th—"

"Did you not hear me?" Xavier turned back, his eyes a shade darker with anger. I didn't even need to look back at Justin to sense the genuine fear radiating from him.

If Xavier knew who this pack was, why did they seem so hostile? And why would they come on such an important day if it wasn’t for a negative reason?

We were *screwed*.

**Episode 87**

*Stop playing with your hands—it shows you’re nervous!*

I told myself that over and over. How was I supposed to act calm in this situation, surrounded by monsters? I wasn’t sure if the pack behind us stood with us or against us; they could turn on us at any moment.

My eyes snapped to the two naked humans walking toward us. Xavier walked forward, handing them the garments Justin brought.

I couldn't stop myself from feeling a slight pang of jealousy as my eyes traveled down the woman's body. She had the perfect figure, and Xavier was right in front, giving her clothes. I couldn't help but glance up and look at his face. To my relief, his eyes stayed straight, proving he wasn't checking out her body. He probably wanted to, though.

I couldn't stop shooting daggers at the woman. Xavier turned back and walked next to me, an eyebrow arching, and I swore I saw the corner of his lip twitch.

"Calm down, girl," a teasing whisper left his lips, which I returned with a roll of my eyes.

"What is this about?" Xavier dropped the teasing tone as he spoke to the two human members of the new pack.

"Not a very warm welcome," the woman said with a wide smile. "You're not excited to see us?"

"More confused than anything. I might be more welcoming if I knew why you were here."

"We used to be partners, Xavier. There is no need for hostility."

Partners?

"*Used to*." Xavier tilted his head. "Why are you here?"

"Watch your tone." The man spoke up, his eyes narrowed slightly. Could we pause this conversation and backtrack? PARTNERS?! SHE WAS HIS *PARTNER*? COULD ANYONE ELABORATE ON WHAT THAT MEANT?!

I wanted to grab Xavier and yell at him to explain what the hell was going on, but I knew I had to keep my cool. I couldn't overreact, even if that was all I wanted to do right then.

"We came to welcome back the Alpha."

"When I'm introducing the future Luna? Who told you I was back? I don’t see your Alpha." He wasn't letting his guard down, and rightfully so. They brought their whole pack—why do that unless war was the goal?

The woman's eyes left Xavier's and flew toward me. A bigger smile grew on her face, and she glided over to me. She was extremely elegant and very dainty. My heart fluttered when both of her hands clasped at the sides of my face. Soft, warm hands intruding on my personal space. Yet I didn't push her away; maybe this was some formal greeting, and I didn’t want to be disrespectful.

"Amazing," she said with awe, her eyes darting around, searching for something on my face. "A human Luna...a woman who managed to tame Xavier. Do you have secret powers? Maybe you’re not fully human. A banshee, maybe?"

The crazy words that came from this woman's mouth had me stumped, and I could only glance up at Xavier, completely clueless on what to do. She leaned in, and for a moment I really thought she was going to kiss me, but instead she began...*sniffing*. "Completely human," she mumbled.

"Calm down, Tulip," the man said, sighing. The woman, Tulip, frowned, turning back to him. She dropped her hands from my face and took a step back.

"I want to see your mark." The woman smiled brightly, but I didn't know how to respond. My mark?

Xavier cleared his throat, causing both of us to look at him. "Are you going to explain why you are here?"

"To celebrate, of course."

"Celebrate? We were about to have a meeting." Xavier clearly wasn't letting his guard down. It was understandable, though. This woman said they were here to celebrate, but wouldn't they have said that straight away? Why bring all their pack in their wolf form if they didn't want to look threatening?

"The union of our pack," the man spoke with a bite in his tone.

Xavier raised his eyebrow. "Moving a bit fast, don't you think?"

Tulip spoke next. "Our pack had an alliance with the Redwood pack. We were unstoppable. That alliance fell when your pack went to ruins, but now that the Alpha has returned—"

"Alpha? What does an Alpha matter if we won't follow him?" Someone from behind us scoffed, but I didn't turn in time to see who it was.

Tulip glanced up at Xavier now. At first, I thought it was to see what he was going to say, but a sly smile crept on her lips. When Xavier saw this, he let out a small chuckle then turned to his pack to face the man who had spoken out of turn.

"If you don't want to follow me, that's fine." His voice was calm. "But you won't be part of my pack anymore. After all, I need mutual respect."

A tall man stepped forward, his shaggy hair almost covering his eyes. "That's the best you got? You really have been *tamed*, Alpha." He was clearly challenging Xavier.

"Like I said, you won't be part of the pack anymore." Xavier turned to Tulip, who finished the sentence.

"Which means you won't be part of the alliance with us, the Blue Blood pack." Tulip raised her finger slowly in the shape of a gun, aiming toward the shaggy male. "And you'd be close to our lands. We might feel threatened and..." She made a poof noise with her mouth.

Before I realized what was happening, two wolves from the Blue Blood pack sprinted forward and sped toward the shaggy male, baring their fangs and growling, snapping at him with their huge canines.

The man, caught off guard, stumbled back. He was either scared or playing it smart, knowing he had no chance if he tried to go up against them. Two would always beat one, and I didn’t think anyone from his pack would try to help him. They weren’t a pack built on loyalty. Not yet anyway. This pack, the one I had been told was once the most feared, was now unorganized, and it was obvious many had left over the time.

"Do you understand, Shaggy?" Hold up. His name was actually Shaggy?

I bit my lip to hold back the laughter. It was obviously a nickname, but funny nonetheless. I noticed Tulip glance to me from the side with a curious smile on her face, and I made sure not to turn her way. For some reason, she intimidated me. It wasn't even because she was a wolf-bear, either.

I couldn't stop myself being jealous over Tulip. The sly grin she and Xavier shared before they made this move—the cunning look in their eyes. My brain couldn't stop itself from thinking she was better suited for him. He left the pack when he was young, so maybe at the time, he wasn't interested in girls, and that was why they hadn't clicked then. After all, she was already Luna of the Blue Moon pack, so she had way better qualifications than me. She was also a wolf-bear, so she was strong as hell and could clearly handle herself.

*Stop!!*

I heard my inner voice yelling at me to stop insulting myself, or else I'd second guess myself during time spent around her. I know she came here with another male, but the way he acted was more like a third-in-command than an Alpha. I could only hope they were together so I didn't have to worry about her stealing Xavier.

"You okay?" Xavier's voice pulled me from my train of thoughts. "You look like you've just eaten a lemon."

"Fine," I muttered, my tone a bit too hostile, which he immediately picked up on. He didn't press any further at the moment. Instead, he reached for my hand for a few seconds to give it a tight, reassuring squeeze before turning to the newcomers.

"As I said, now is not the best time. We were about to have an important meeting where I introduce the future Luna," he announced, talking to the two in human form but loud enough for the ones that were close enough to hear. "I apologize for you all coming out here only to be turned away."

"Oh, Xavier." Tulip shook her head with a wide grin. "A meeting is *dull*. Do you think these rabid animals would want that or a party?"

"Yes, because getting them drunk is the smart option. Half of them hate me, and they would be more vocal…maybe physical with their opinions."

"How about a barbecue?" A man stepped forward, raising his eyebrows. "There were old ways to celebrate when a pack would unite. Except...we can exclude the drinks if we have to."

"We're not sure they're fully accepting me yet," I spoke up now. "Wouldn’t that be a bad idea? To party and drink, to celebrate something without giving them a say in the matter?” I heard a low comment from one of the men behind us. I couldn't clearly make it out, but it was something along the lines of *maybe she's not as dumb as we thought.*

"You are the leader of the pack. You must prove your dominance. You lead them, you order them. They have to obey you."

"What is the point of a pack following you out of fear? A pack that obeys your orders even if they can't voice their opinions? That's not a pack that would stay strong. It would fall apart," I continued to argue my point, and I was surprised Xavier wasn't stopping me.

"My Luna does make good points," Xavier said before turning back to the packhouse where some of his pack still stood. "I'm all ears to any opinions you have."

A woman cleared her throat. "I think, although unprofessional, the barbecue is the best bet. These men have been wild and rab—"

"Hey, fuck you," Shaggy interrupted her, but the woman continued.

"I don't think a civilized meeting is the best plan of action right now. A party might be the best option; it’s more relaxing, and maybe better introductions can be had. Especially if we are going to unite the Redwood pack with the Blue Blood pack again."

At least one of them was civilized.

"IT'S BEEN DECIDED," Tulip announced with excitement. "PARTY AT THE ALPHA'S!"

**Episode 88**

My hand slid over the destroyed leather. Where I was sitting must have been a lovely couch, a rich brown leather that could seat three to four people. Now, though, it was ripped to shreds—there were tears left, right, and center.

It had to be old—years old—and it was a surprise they didn't change it or get a new one. To be fair, this place was a mess in general. The door slammed open, and my whole body jolted with surprise. *Please be Xavier.*

Once it had been announced that a party would be happening, the whole vibe immediately changed. At first, it had been doubt and confusion, but then the mood switched to excitement.

They probably hadn't had something like this in a long time. I was worried. All the people here were members of the pack that was once known as the most feared. They hadn't had a proper Alpha lead them for years. For all we knew, they could be dangerous.

I wouldn't be surprised if one of them tried to kill me just so they could have Xavier to themselves, with no *weak* Luna. Maybe I was overthinking. Was it horrible of me to think like this when these were members of *my* future pack? If they accepted me, anyway.

"Oh!" The voice brought me back to reality. Someone had just entered the room, and to my dismay, it wasn't Xavier. It was Shaggy, the one who had had a lot to say earlier but got shut down immediately.

I didn't need to be Albert Einstein to know he probably did not like me. When our eyes met, he stared at me as if he had walked in on some random stranger invading his home. Technically, that was exactly what this was. In his hand, he held a huge box of beer.

"Shouldn't those go in the kitchen?" I decided it was best if I spoke up. Maybe I could have been more polite, given him a small greeting or something, but it felt weird when this was his home.

"Obviously." He narrowed his eyes, looking at me like I was an idiot. "There are too many people in there right now, and the counters are full."

He walked over to the corner of the room where an old piano sat and placed the crate of alcohol down. He reached in and pulled out one. I assumed he was about to leave, but nope. My whole face cringed as he used his teeth to rip off the lid.

"Should you be drinking before you're done working?"

"If you want to fuck somebody's ass, go to Xavier," he growled, taking a few chugs of the drink. "Otherwise, get off my case."

"What is your issue with me? Are you in love with Xavier, and you're upset I stole him from you?" I fake pouted and almost burst out laughing at the shock on his face…until it turned to disgust.

"Nice assumption." He rolled his eyes. "No, my issue with you is the fact that he chose someone as weak and pathetic as you. My issue is that he comes back after all these years, expecting us to follow him and expecting us to accept a human."

"I—"

"You can drop the tough act. You're terrified—it’s obvious. You’re putting on some heroic brave act to make us accept you. It’s cringy, and we can see right through it. We don't want you. Even if you do become the Luna, we will always despise you." His eyes met mine with pure hatred. "We will never follow you."

He didn't let me say anything else; he walked out the door. I wasn't going to lie, that did hurt my feelings quite a bit. I felt sick to my stomach.

It wasn't because he had been so rude and insulted me; it was the fact he saw through me like there was no tomorrow. Of course I was scared. These were wolf-bears, ten times stronger than any human, and I was supposed to lead them. Since they hadn’t had an Alpha in so long, they were basically wild animals, and I didn’t know how to be their Luna.

Sitting here while they were doing all the work probably didn't make me look the best either. I pushed myself up from the ragged seat and walked over to where he left the bottles of beer.

Picking them up, I left the room and made my way toward the kitchen, making sure to offer bottles to any wolf-bear I passed. Only two took it from me—others ignored or sent glares my way. I felt like the black sheep of the flock.

"I'll take one!" A chirpy voice appeared, and I turned back, stunned to find Tulip standing there with a wide smile. "I haven't properly introduced myself. I'm Pip."

*Pip*?

I thought she was Tulip. I wasn't going to question her on her name, but I held the pack of beer forward, and she easily pulled one out, cracking it open in an instant. I assumed she was going to walk off, but she didn't. She took three swigs from the bottle, burped, then looked back at me.

What a strange woman.

"You don't seem too fond of me," Pip spoke up. "Usually when someone introduces themselves, they get a response back."

"Oh, sorry. I'm Caliana. Obviously. Nice to meet you." I stumbled over my words, feeling a bit clueless on what to say. "I need to get these to the kitchen."

"*Is* it nice to meet me?" Pip tilted her head, walking alongside me now, taking the kitchen comment as an invite to come with me. Had it been anyone other than her, it would’ve been a nice gesture. She seemed nice, but something was off. Maybe I was just jealous.

"Yes, it's nice to meet new people."

"Except you were sending me death glares earlier."

Was I? I needed to hide my feelings better.

"Xavier and I have no sexual past." Pip took another swig, and although she was the one drinking, I almost choked. I sent her a bewildered sideways glance, and she had a playful smile on her face.

"I—"

"I'm not stupid." Pip laughed. "You don’t dislike me for no reason…not hard to figure out it’s a jealousy thing. After all, it is more common in human girls than it is for us. You tend to have like a bazillion insecurities."

"Excuse me?"

"Humans—you act on emotions."

"You're saying you don't? You have literal animals inside you."

"That might be true." Pip sighed. "I have no romantic or sexual interest in Xavier, so we should be friends. I have my own mate after all, and mates are forever. Unless you kill your other half…then I suppose they're dead."

I didn't answer. This woman was too open, and it freaked me out. I placed the rest of the beer on the counter. Ever since Pip walked alongside me, the glares and disrespect from the pack lessened. The house was quickly becoming less spacious with the amount of people here, so I decided to make my way out the back.

Pip followed me.

The smell was delicious. They were grilling burgers, sausages, anything you could think of that would be at a barbecue. I let out a small squeak when a hand reached the collar of my top and pulled it down, revealing my shoulder.

"What the hell are you doing?" I slapped Pip's hand away, and she frowned, attempting to investigate my shoulder blade again. *Why was she so weird?!*

"Where's your mark?"

"Mark?"

She revealed her own shoulder blade, and on it was a crescent-shaped mark. It was a light red color. I winced—it looked painful, or like it had been painful. Now it only looked like a scar.

"What's that?"

"It's my mark. Every Luna has one." She sighed. "Xavier really expects the pack to accept you when you don't have one?"

"Well, I'm not a wolf-bear. I'm a human, so I don't have one. It's not his fault."

"Wolf-bear?" Pip blinked before continuing. "You don't need to be one of us to have one. Like I said, only Lunas have them. You—" Her sentence cut off.

"What?" I coaxed her to finish her sentence.

"It's not my place to explain it to you. It's Xavier's..." Pip pulled a face. "You'll have to talk with him about it."

"Now I'm freaked out...can't you just tell me?"

"No, sorry. I didn't know that you didn't even know what a Luna’s mark was," she mumbled. "Xavier's going to kill me."

I wanted to tell her I wasn't going to tell him what she told me, but I knew I had to. What the hell was a Luna’s mark? How did he expect me to be a Luna when he didn't even tell me I needed one of these?

"He won't kill you if I kill him first," I grumbled.

Just as we spoke the devil's name, he appeared at the backdoor. My eyes met his, and he offered me a small smile, but I didn't return it. I stormed toward him, not even saying bye to Pip. "We need to talk."

"Did something happen?" Xavier asked, noticing my mood was off.

"What's a Lunas mark? Why don't I have one, and why didn't you tell me anything about it?" This caught him off guard. He looked surprised by my question. He didn't say anything back, though—he looked like a deer caught in headlights.

"You think I'll ever be accepted as a Luna if I don't have a Luna’s mark?" I pressed my finger against his chest. "I had to learn about it from Pip. How embarrassing would that have been for me if I was actually a Luna?"

I was talking rubbish because I didn't even fully know what a Luna’s mark was, but if I acted angry, it would get Xavier talking.

"A Luna’s mark has never been put on a human…that I know of. They hurt, and they're lifelong, an—"

"And you're making excuses." I folded my arms across my chest. I knew Xavier, and I knew he rambled on when he was trying to hide something.

"It puts you in danger."

"Danger?" I arched an eyebrow. "I'm dating a wolf-bear, that's already dangerous."

"Lunas tend to be targeted sometimes. It's putting a red target on your head. Alphas are targeted too. Giving you a Luna’s mark would just…put you in even more danger."

"You should have told me."

"You would have wanted it...it marks you as my official mate."

"We aren't official if I don't have one?"

"No! We are! It's just…in my species...it’s a known *ritual*. I don't know if that's the right word."

"I want my Luna’s mark."

"You're human, Caliana. You can't defend yourself like the other Lunas."

"I *can* defend myself. We're already open about our relationship. We're trying to make your pack accept me as their Luna, and that's already dangerous. How will they ever respect me when I don't have a Luna’s mark? Not to mention all the girls that will come after you because they'll think we're not official—"

"It's cute when you’re jealous."

"Shut up, Xavier. I'm actually annoyed." My eyes narrowed into a glare.

"Getting a Luna's mark is a big thing we'll have to discuss, and now isn't the time or place."

"How? If any more of your pack find out I don't have on—"

"Pip won't say anything. Please. Drop it. At least for now." His tone and words made me shut my mouth. I was between being angry and being extremely disappointed, but I bit my tongue. Arguing here wouldn't be a good look, and it was obvious we weren't going to agree on this matter soon.

"Fine," I muttered, storming past him, letting him know I was annoyed.

Xavier the wolf-bear was officially in the doghouse.

**Episode 89**

I still couldn’t believe Xavier would withhold information about the Luna mark from me. And I *really* couldn’t believe that his ultra-gorgeous so-called-FRIEND had been the one to tell me I wasn’t even a real Luna. Okay, I most likely shouldn’t have been surprised by any of it—all Xavier ever did was withhold information from me and dole out sarcastic comments. And we had super-hot sex…

NO! I was *not* supposed to be thinking about sex right now. Especially not at a shitty wolf-bear barbecue, while I was furious at my stupid mate! I could think about sex later.

“I hope you’re not mad at me about the whole Luna mark thing.” Pip’s voice shocked me out of my semi-dirty, very angry thoughts. I *was* mad at her—verymad. But I also wasn’t going to start a fight with anyone at a party full of snotty wolf-bears who had the ability to tear me limb from limb as a party game. Plus, I needed to make a good impression on them—or at least a better impression than the one I was currently making.

“It’s fine,” I told Pip coolly, not making eye contact.

IT WAS NOT FINE! XAVIER MIGHT HAVE SEEN HER NAKED!!

She opened her mouth to say something, but I cut her off.

“I’m going to get a drink,” I said and walked past her.

Boy, did I need a drink.

I wasn’t a huge fan of alcohol; it low-key tasted like poison, and if sober Caliana was a bit of an impulsive klutz (see: putting my virginity online with Lola), drunk Caliana had to be the worst hot mess in history. But screw it. Alcohol was invented for times like these. And if I got wasted and embarrassed Xavier, that would be *his* fault.

I stormed over to the kitchen and grabbed a frosty beer from the cooler, popping the top off. I took one long swig and almost immediately spat it out.

*Ew.* What the hell was this stuff? It was like if you mixed old piss and poison together in a used trash can! Gross!

“What the fuck?” a voice snarled in my direction.

I looked up and saw Shaggy shooting me death glares, even more than usual. I wanted to ask what the hell his problem was, but then I looked down and saw for myself—my beer spit, all over his shiny leather boots.

Oh no...

“I—”

He cut me off immediately. “Don’t say anything. I don’t want to hear a human voice for the rest of the night, especially your annoying shriek,” he sneered and huffed away.

Uh, rude much?!

On a positive note, at least I’d pissed off someone who *already* hated me. I hadn’t made a new enemy from the pack trying to make a deal with my boyfriend’s. Just the one with the stupidest name. Optimism, right?

Feeling crappy about the whole situation, I turned to see Pip sitting next to Xavier on the couch. Squinting I couldn’t make out what they were saying, but they were leaning very close together, her hand on his bicep. In that moment, I wished I could turn into a wolf; I’d tear that arm off as a warning.

AM I JEALOUS?! I didn’t think I was a jealous person, but maybe I was a bit jealous... Pip *had* told me that she and Xavier had no sexual history, but she had her filthy paws on my mate, and I couldn’t let *that* shit fly.

*Ugh, this party is the worst*, I thought with a sigh. If all wolf-bear parties were this lame, I’d be RSVP-ing ‘nope’ forever.

I just wanted to get back to Xavier and discuss the whole Luna thing in peace. But, no, I needed to be strong.

I needed to talk to Lola.

I put my beer in the trash and went looking for her. I found her in the billiards room (seriously what was this house?) making out with Jay. *Gross.*

I coughed to make my presence known. Lola and Jay made out almost constantly; they could spare five damn minutes to talk to me. “Can you please not dry hump on the pool table?” I demanded.

Lola and Jay tore their mouths away from each other, but Lola was still on Jay’s lap. *Double gross.*

“It’s not your pool table,” Jay said nonchalantly.

“Did you guys mark it as yours?” I asked, gesturing to their kissy state. “Do we have to strap it to the roof of the car now?”

“Huh?” he asked.

“What’s up, Cali?” Lola asked, clearly unfazed by the fact that she’d been grinding on Jay not twenty seconds ago.

“WHO THE HELL IS THAT TULIP-PIP CHICK?” I asked, clearly still fuming. “ALSO, DOES EVERY WOLF-BEAR HAVE LIKE TWO FREAKING NAMES?”

“Hey, we don’t mock your culture,” chimed Jay.

“THAT IS one hundred and ten PERCENT FALSE,” I shot back.

Lola rolled her eyes. “Hush, you two. Pip is the Luna of the Blue Blood pack.”  
 Well, that explained her Luna mark. I took a breath. “So if she’s a marked Luna, where’s her mate?”

“That would be Mace—he’s the Alpha of the Blue Bloods.”

I couldn’t hold back my laughter. I mean, *Mace?* What was up with these wolf-bear names? I’d always thought *Caliana* was bad...

“Mace?” I said, still snorting. “What’s his brother’s name? Taser?”

Jay did not find the name as amusing as I did. “Yeah, save your comedy routine for later. You’re not as funny as you think you are.”

“Anyway,” said Lola, trying to get the conversation back on track. “Pip’s representing her pack until Mace comes. Or maybe he’s not…but that’s how it works in the new packs. The Luna is second, above even the Beta.”

So Pip was Xavier’s equal. Even better. “Where is Mace? On vacation?”

I tried to picture it: a big wolf-bear in a Hawaiian shirt, lounging on the beach, using up his vacation days. Wait, did Alphas even get vacation days? Would Xavier and I never get to take a romantic beach getaway to a tropical island? Or would the pack have to come with us? I filed this under the million other questions I needed answers to.

Jay shrugged. “No clue, but just watch yourself with Pip. You don’t want to piss off a Luna, and then an Alpha. They can be a bit, uh, touchy.”

What wolf-bear wasn’t?

“Well, if she’s already got a man, why does she have her dirty paws on mine?” I demanded. Then frowned. “Xavier’s *my* wolf-bear even if I’m pissed at him. MY WOLF-BEAR-MAN DAMN IT!”

Lola groaned. “You got to stop adding on to that name.”

“You didn’t answer my question.”

Lola and Jay shot each other a look.

“It’s… complicated,” Jay started.

I was about to ask what was so complicated—it wasn’t like it was a Facebook relationship status—

*CRASH!*

Lola and Jay shot to their feet.

“Something’s happening,” Jay said, his body rigid and alert. He rushed out of the room.

“Let’s go!” Lola said, and the two of us followed him.

It seemed like the wolf-bears started a new fight every few minutes. Honestly, it was both annoying and unhealthy. A pack was supposed to work together, not tear each other to pieces.

*When I’m Luna, I’ll add some order to this pack*, I vowed to myself.

Well, if they actually accepted me as a Luna at all.

∞

Lola and I headed outside to discover Shaggy yelling at Pip—a twist I hadn’t been expecting.

“Why are we even here?” Shaggy growled. “To drink shitty beer and eat hot dogs? I thought our packs were supposed to be joining together, but how can we do that with a pack that has no Alpha?” He pointed to Xavier, whose hands were balled into fists. I could see fiery rage burning in his eyes. This would not end well.

Pip opened her mouth to speak, but Shaggy cut her off again. “And even if we count *that* as an Alpha, he picked a fucking *human* as his Luna.” His fat finger pointed squarely at me. “Can we really follow a leader who makes that kind of choice?”

I could feel my own rage burning inside me like a wildfire—not because he’d insulted me, though that really wasn’t cool, but because he’d insulted my mate. In public. And I could be a bit touchy too.

I may not have been a wolf-bear, and I may have not been marked as a Luna, but no one talked to my mate like that. *No one.*

“HEY!” I shouted, before I could stop myself. “You don’t get to talk about Xavier like that! Do you have any idea what he’s been through? What he’s endured? He could have stayed away, but he *chose* to come back and lead you. Don’t be an asshole!”

Before I knew what was happening, Xavier’s arms were around me. His face was still stern and emotionless, but I could tell by the look in his eyes that he was not entirely pleased that I’d stood up for him.

I probably should’ve stopped talking at that point but, in my defense, I was super pissed.

“SO IF YOU DON’T LIKE IT,” I spat, “YOU CAN TURN TAIL AND RUN LIKE THE DOG YOU ARE!”

Shaggy growled at me, deep and threatening.

“That’s enough, Caliana,” Xavier said, low in my ear. He gave my shoulders a gentle squeeze, and my chest heated. Maybe he wasn’t totally pissed. Yay. “I know you’re pissed, and I’m very turned on, but you need to stand down. Shaggy’s drunk, and we don’t need to piss him off even more.”

Logically, I knew that I shouldn’t be too pleased I was getting under Xavier’s skin. Shaggy was terrifying, and Xavier was probably right. I should stop making him angry. But Xavier was still in the doghouse. And I was not very logical.

“If I’m going to be Luna, I need to show them I have what it takes,” I protested. “I’m not going to let some loser dog named *Shaggy* trash talk my mate.”

Clearly, Shaggy heard me because he staggered toward us. “Keep your damn human mouth shut!”

He was so close to me, I could smell the beer on him. The smell was even worse: piss, poison, *and* vomit. The way he was staggering made me nervous that he’d fall on me. Instinctively, I put my hands up and pushed him. “SIT!”

Shaggy stumbled backward and onto the grass. The pack gasped.

My victory lasted only a moment because Shaggy started to howl, his skin transforming into fur.

*Fuck.*

**Episode 90**

This was *bad.* Like really, really bad.

I froze in place, too scared to do anything but stare as Shaggy’s bones cracked as he started to shift. While everyone else had the common sense to back the hell off, I stayed right where I was.

I found myself thinking of the old cowboy movies my dad loved watching. Where the good guy and the bad guy faced off in the middle of town, gun hands at the ready. But one of them wasn’t a bloodthirsty wolf-bear. I wished a tumbleweed could blow by. Or that we were all wearing cowboy hats. That would’ve at least broken some of the tension.

With a howl. Shaggy was done shifting, and I was still a human.

*Very, very, bad…*

OKAY. I had to do something quick to save myself from becoming wolf chow. I frantically looked around for something to defend myself with. Why on earth did this place not have a well-placed and clearly labeled weapons closet?

My hands darted out for the first thing I could reach for, a…

“A *SPATULA?*” I whispered, looking at the floppy plastic kitchen tool in my hands. IT WASN’T EVEN METAL!

Yeah, I was dead. Hella dead.

Well, I wasn’t going down without a fight. I started waving my spatula around, thinking of sword fights in the movies. Hey, it was better than nothing, right?

I could hear laughter from the crowd. If I hadn’t been up against a giant wolf-bear about to tear me to ribbons, I probably would’ve died from embarrassment.

“What are you going to do, human?” Maya’s voice rang out. She was laughing like the rest. “Sauté him to death?”

Everyone else howled with laughter.

So, looked like she wasn’t gonna help me out this time. Fine, I didn’t need her. I squared my shoulders and tried to not throw up as Shaggy stepped toward me in full wolf-bear mode. His large fangs glistened in the firelight. He looked ten times bigger than last time I’d seen him.

I raised my spatula as a sinister growl passed through his mouth. This was it…

BAM!

The crowd collectively gasped as another wolf-bear slammed into Shaggy, just before he could lunge at me.

I let out a small gasp myself when I saw the other wolf-bear’s pitch-black fur. That wasn’t just any wolf-bear!

Xavier snarled as he tackled Shaggy, getting on top of him, lunging for his throat. Then Shaggy’s large paw slammed Xavier across the face, knocking him to the floor.

My mind filled with a panicked chorus of *my mate my mate my mate,* and I ran into the fray, pure instinct taking over. I couldn’t leave my mate to defend himself alone.

I started swinging my spatula wildly, doing my best to hit fur, even if it was most likely Xavier I was whacking. It was the thought that counted, right?

Xavier managed to get Shaggy on his back, and I took that as an opportunity to get some shots in. I took my spatula and slammed it down on Shaggy’s wolf-bear head.

“BAD DOG! VERY BAD DOG!” I yelled.

Okay, that may have been pushing it a little. A thought that became crystal clear when his big wolf-bear foot kicked me right in the stomach.

*Oof!*

I fell backward onto the floor, the kick knocking the wind out of me. Still, even with the pain in my stomach, I scrambled to my feet. I was preparing to jump back into the fray when a rough hand tugged at my arm, pulling me away.

“HEY!” I protested, trying to wiggle away. Didn’t these animals understand that Xavier needed me?

“Hey, yourself,” said Jay as he walked us over to where Lola was standing. “I’m pulling you out of there before you hurt yourself. Or do something that makes you look even more stupid than you already do.”

“But I need to protect my mate!” I protested. “I can’t just stand by while he’s out there by himself!”

“Shaggy and Xavier have got this. You’d only be in the way,” assured Jay, cracking open a beer. “Besides, this stuff happens all the time.”

I wrinkled my nose. “It does?”

Lola nodded. “Ain’t no party like a wolf-bear party because a wolf-bear party don’t stop until everyone has taken a bite out of everyone else.”

Ugh, I really needed to learn the rules here.

Lola, Jay, and I watched the fight. Every molecule of my being wanted to get back in there. Maybe I wouldn’t be able to do anything useful, but it would be better than just watching. Though, I had to admit, watching *was* kind of hot. Watching Xavier pin Shaggy to the ground, ivory teeth at his throat, knowing that it was my man—*my mate*—in there, defending me to the death? It was very… exciting.

*Yeah, we’re totally doing it tonight*, I thought, a blush creeping over my face.

WHEN DID I BECOME SUCH A PERVERT?

“Out of my way!” a familiar voice hollered. I turned to see Pip marching over to the fight. How come *she* got to go over then when I couldn’t?

I was about to walk over there myself, but both Jay and Lola grabbed my arm. I could only watch helplessly as Pip put a graceful hand on Xavier’s shoulder.

“*Stop.*” Her voice was calm but also very direct. An order.

I thought Xavier was going to rip her arm off (kinda hoping he would, to be honest). Instead, I was completely stunned to watch as Xavier’s growling subsided, and his ears lowered. He pushed off Shaggy’s defeated body and turned away.

I made a mental note to file that trick under ‘shit I need to learn later’ and ‘EXCUSE ME WHAT’S THE DEAL WITH XAVIER AND PIP?’

Shaggy jumped up. He was crouched, ready to strike again when Pip turned and gave him the kind of icy death stare that I’d always wanted to be able to give people. Ugh, as if I hadn’t already envied Pip enough, now she was the freaking wolf-bear whisperer.

Again, this party sucked ass.

The rest of the partygoers started to lose interest in the fight now that it was winding down, and they returned to their other activities. Within a matter of minutes, it was like nothing had happened at all. Except for the adrenaline still pumping through my veins at top speed.

“Hey, loser, if you’re gonna be holding that dumb spatula, you can at least do something useful and flip burgers for us,” Maya said with a cruel laugh, making everyone giggle. I’d been so busy trying to defend Xavier, I’d forgotten just how badly I’d embarrassed myself. I mean, a *spatula?* Even I knew I was a dumbass.

Why on earth didn’t I take my dad’s advice and carry pepper spray on me at all times? Oh right—because the one time I’d tried using it, I sprayed myself in the eye. UGH.

My face burned with humiliation, and I searched desperately for a comeback. “Don’t you have a mate to bother?” I asked Maya, trying to sound tough. But it didn’t matter, no one was listening. Instead, everyone was laughing and mimicking my fighting moves.

I looked down at the table where I’d acquired my spatula. There was a knife there as well.

I smacked myself on the forehead. I could have had a *knife?*

Maybe everyone was right. Maybe I *was* a dumb, useless human who couldn’t even defend herself, much less become a Luna. I’d totally proven Shaggy right. Ugh! I wished he *had* eaten me alive—that would’ve been far less painful than becoming the laughingstock of the pack.

HOW WAS I SUPPOSED TO BE THEIR LUNA NOW?

I looked up to see that Xavier and Shaggy had shifted back to human and were looking at each other with fierce hate in their eyes. Their shoulders were tense, their breathing jagged, their hands balled into fists—it almost looked like they were about to start fighting again.

The whole image would’ve been super cool—you know, if they hadn’t been buck-ass naked.

I covered my eyes and looked down at the floor. If I ever became Luna, I was gonna make it a policy that everyone should bring a change of backup clothes wherever they went. Jesus, why were all these people so chill about being naked? It was completely gross.

Without warning, the room erupted into applause. Were they cheering for how hung Xavier was? Because to be fair, I’d clap for that too.

I looked up to see that no one was looking at Shaggy or Xavier anymore. Instead, all eyes were on a large, white man with sandy blond hair and big, broad shoulders, strolling casually out of the woods. His hands were in the pockets of his jeans, and there was a cocky grin on his face. Clearly, he was used to basking in attention. He gave me the impression that this kind of praise was only natural for him. Who the heck was this guy?!

“Looks like the party started without me.”

**Episode 91**

I looked at the stranger, trying to figure out who the hell he was—and if he was gonna start trouble.

I was about to ask Lola who the hell this hunk was when Pip turned to him. I watched her walk over to him and cup his face between her hands. She kissed him, and it was not a ‘honey, I’m so glad to see you’, kind of kiss. More like a ‘we are filming a porno, and we’ll get more money if we make it believable’, kiss. Seriously, I could see TONGUES.

Geez, what was it with this pack and an utter lack of boundaries? Ugh.

I turned away, wishing that these people could get a hotel room, or at least have the common decency to dry hump in the billiards room like Lola and Jay. Unfortunately, I turned right to Xavier, who was still naked as the day he was born. Gross. Not that *he* was gross, but his dick flopping around was not my idea of fun—especially when we were surrounded by a bunch of other people. Shouldn’t it be for Luna eyes only?!

Xavier was still shooting death stares at Shaggy, so I took the opportunity to grab one of the grilling mitts from the table and gently place it on his dick, like a little hat. Was it a great solution? No. No one looked good with a ‘Kiss the Cook’ grilling mitt on their genitals. But it was better than having his little wolf-bear out and proud for everyone to see. These people might not have had any sense of shame, but I did.

Xavier felt my hands in his ‘area’ and looked down. His anger at Shaggy was replaced by shock and disgust—at me.

“What the fuck, Cali?” he shouted, taking the mitt off his second head and throwing it to the ground, creating another round of laughter. Not exactly what I’d had in mind.

I put my hands on my hips. “Don’t get all huffy at me. I just don’t want you wagging that thing around in front of everyone. It’s silly!”

“Sillier than walking around with a grilling mitt on my dick?” Xavier demanded.

I shrugged. “You could start a new fashion trend.”

He rolled his eyes at me, letting out a huff of annoyance. “You need to learn not to insert yourself in my business, especially when you don’t understand a damn thing that’s going on,” he growled, shoving past me. He walked right over to Pip and the stranger, who were still practically dry humping. Was that just how wolf-bears said hello?

As soon as Xavier made his presence known, the two love-wolves broke apart. Xavier held out his hand for the other man to shake. “Mace,” he said. “Welcome back.”

*Ohh,* I thought. *So that’s Mace*.

Funny, I’d thought his entrance would be more… dramatic. Like getting shot out of a cannon or being carried in on a palanquin by his pack of wolf-bears. I mean his name is MACE.

As the two Alphas shook hands, I studied Mace in the moonlight. I didn’t usually go for older dudes (Xavier being the obvious exception, though he wasn’t *that* old) but this Alpha was pretty hot. Sandy blond waves that rolled down to his shoulders, dark blue eyes, strong jawline. On a scale of one to ten, he was a solid eleven. I wondered if being sexy was a requirement for being an Alpha, or if it was just genetics. Probably both.

Mace must have felt me staring at him, as he turned to meet my gaze. It was… weird, to say the least. When our eyes made contact, the feel of it penetrated me. Like he was taking a deep dive into my soul and rooting around in there. It was uncomfortable for sure, leaving me with a grimy feeling that I’d need three hot showers to get rid of.

I broke eye contact first, and he smirked. Damn.

“This must be the human Luna-to-be. An interesting choice, I must say,” Mace said, rubbing his chin.

Why was it always ‘Caliana the human’ and not ‘Caliana, Xavier’s girlfriend’, or ‘Caliana the ex-college student’ or ‘Caliana the expert scrambled egg maker’? The whole weird little human thing was getting really old, really fast.

“I’ll take my burger rare, if it’s not too late,” Mace said, eliciting a roar of laughter from the others.

*What the hell?*

I looked down and saw that I was still holding the spatula. Fuck my life.

I threw the spatula down. It deserved to be on the ground—it had caused me nothing but grief.

“I’m not your maid,” I huffed. I knew it wasn’t good sense to be huffy to a strange Alpha, but it had been a long day, and I wasn’t grilling his burgers—or anyone else’s. I’d had enough beef for tonight.

Instead of getting upset, Mace just chuckled. “Feisty little thing, aren’t you? I can see why Xavier took a shine to you.”

I turned to Xavier, but he was back at his staring contest with Shaggy. Ugh! He was like a dog with a bone. Or a wolf-bear with his bone sticking out. I didn’t care what Xavier wanted—he was putting on pants, and he was putting them on *now*.

“A feisty little thing who wants her mate to put his hotdog away before it gets bitten off,” I said. “Come on, Xavier, you are putting clothes on!” I demanded, taking him by the arm and dragging him back into the house. Well, more like he let me walk with him into the house. But I preferred my take on things.

“I have exactly one million questions,” I said, as soon as we were in the upstairs bedroom.

Xavier merely rolled his eyes. “When don’t you?”

“Maybe that’ll change when you actually *answer* my questions,” I snapped. “Why is Mace here? Where did he go? What the hell is Shaggy’s problem anyway? Is he mad because—”

“Oh my *god,* do you ever stop talking?” Xavier asked.

“Will you ever answer any of my questions?” I shot back. “Or do you intend to keep me completely in the dark, like a nice little pet you can show off and screw around with?”

Another eye roll from Xavier. If he kept that up, those eyes were going to roll into the back of his head and never come back.

He fished a pair of jeans out of the closet and put them on. “Can you stop acting like a human for five seconds?”

I crossed my arms over my chest. “You are such a species-ist!”

He scoffed. “That’s not a thing.”

I stamped my foot. “Yes, it is, and you are the biggest species-ist I know! You and the rest of these snotty wolf-bears. You know, I’m not as stupid as you think I am.”

Xavier let out a bitter laugh. “Oh really? Because you looked like a *huge* dumbass waving that spatula around like a demented fry cook who escaped from the crazy house! What the actual fuck were you thinking, Cali?”

My face flushed with embarrassment, but I couldn’t back down. “No one else was defending me, and I wasn’t about to go down without a fight! Speaking of which, what kind of mate are you? Letting everyone talk constant shit about me when all I ever do is stick up for you? Oh, that’s right—we *aren’t* mates, because you didn’t mark me. You have some nerve to tell me what do when you’ve never been honest with me, and—”

Xavier slapped the wall with his open palm, making me jump. His eyes were almost pitch black, and the sight of them sent a chill down my spine. “That is *enough*, Caliana. This is not the time or the place to get into that. *Drop. It.*”

I’d opened my mouth and was about to speak when the door opened.

“Knock, knock. Hope everyone’s decent in here… Oh wait, you actually are? Lame,” Colton said, entering the room without actually knocking.

“What is it, Colton?” Xavier’s voice was still dark.

“Uh, not to break up…whatever this is, but you might want to come back downstairs before all hell breaks loose. If you guys wanted to have a quickie, you’d better bone now.”

I shot Colton a dirty look, not in the mood for his shenanigans. “Shouldn’t you be with your mate? Oh, right, you want to rip her throat out. Seems to be a family trait around here.” It was a low blow, but I was so sick of everyone taking cheap shots at me—I deserved to make a few of my own. An eye for an eye, right?

Colton’s mood darkened. He looked over to his brother and pointed at me. “You need to put a muzzle on this one.”

“Muzzles are for dogs, fur brain,” I snapped. “Perhaps *you* should be wearing one?”

Colton slammed the door as his rebuttal. *Wolf-bears.*

I turned back to Xavier, my arms still crossed over my chest. “What are you gonna do when we get back downstairs?”

His eyebrows knitted together. “What do you mean?”

“Are you gonna introduce me as your Luna? Officially?”

Xavier ran his hand through his hair and sighed deeply. “Did you not see what happened downstairs? That disaster? You aren’t ready for this, Caliana.”

I choked down the lump forming in my throat. “I’ll never be ready enough for you, will I, Xavier? This is just another one of your lame ass excuses. Just admit it: you’re embarrassed of me. And not because I go around waving cooking utensils and running my mouth. You’re embarrassed that I’m human.”

“That’s not what I’m talking about,” he said softly.

“Stop!” I cried out, my eyes welling with tears. “I get it, and I’m tired of this sick little game. If you don't want me to be your mate, just say it.”

“Fine,” he said tightly. “I don’t want you as my mate.”

**Episode 92**

Listen, if *anyone* else had told me what Xavier just told me, I would’ve been in a puddle of tears on the floor in seconds flat. Hell, if Xavier said it a few days ago, I would’ve completely fallen apart. But when you love someone—truly, deeply, irrevocably love someone, so much that they’re in your soul—you know when they mean something and they’re bullshitting you.

So instead of crying my eyes out and storming out of that room and into the night, I laughed right in his stupid wolf-bear face. “You are absolutely and completely full of shit.”

Apparently, this was not the reaction he’d been expecting. “I mean it, Caliana. I don’t want you as my mate anymore.”

I rolled my eyes. Boys could be so cute when they were trying to play us.

“Puh-lease,” I said. “Your wolf-bear picked me! And so did you when you took my virginity. We’re in this together, lover. So man up, or wolf up, and face the truth: we’re not only mates, we’re soulmates.”

This time, Xavier’s serious face shifted. “Did you just call us *soulmates?* God, you’re such a human. Seriously, you need to stop reading cheesy romance novels on the internet.”

Now it was my turn to roll my eyes. “Yes, because there’s *such* a difference between a soulmate and a mate. God, you wolf-bears are so pretentious.”

The ghost of a smirk crossed his lips. “Who’s the species-ist now?”

He wasn’t gonna get me that easily. “A soulmate and a mate are practically the same thing—you just come with fur and fangs.”

His expression turned serious once more. “Becoming a mate is more complicated than this ‘soulmate’ nonsense. There are risks you can’t even imagine.”

“Yeah, I’ve heard this song already,” I said. “‘Risk, risk, risk. Blah, blah, blah, might end up in an early grave’. I’m gonna press skip. Remember how you wanted to kill me when we first met?”

“I want to kill you now.”

I brushed it off. “Yes, but in more of a cute way. But back when we first met, when you *seriously* wanted to kill me, I accepted the risk because I knew—at least I thought I knew—that you and I had something. Something no one else can touch.”

Xavier moved toward me. In two long strides he was in front of me, his big, strong hands on my shoulders. It was in these moments that I was reminded of how *big* he was—his height, his strong, muscular figure. All Alpha.

His dark eyes searched mine for what felt like an eternity. We were so close, our lips were nearly touching. He opened his mouth.

“I think you should go,” he breathed.

His words cut me to the bone, worse than any wolf-bear claws could. For a second, time stopped, and I was aware of nothing but my heart breaking in two. How could he say that to me? After all we’d been through, after all I’d given up to be with him? Could I really have been so stupid? Naïve enough to get sucked in by the attraction between us, to the point where I’d ignored all the red flags? Maybe he really did still want to kill me. Maybe he’d just been in this for my virginity, and he’d played a sick little game to make it more interesting. And maybe now that he’d had me, he was done with me.

*Fucking. Bastard.*

I knew I couldn’t cry in front of him—that would just make the game even more fun for him. Instead, I filled myself with anger. The asshole thought he could just waltz into my life and fuck shit up? No way, wolf boy.

I balled my hand up into a fist and raised it.

*Slam!*

Suddenly, I found myself pinned against the wall, both my hands high above my head. Xavier was on top of me, his leg between mine, spreading them apart.

We stared each other down, passion and frustration sparkling in our eyes, our chests heaving.

“What if I can’t protect you?” His voice was a rough whisper.

“You don’t need to,” I said. “I took down Tyson, for god’s sake. What more do I have to do to prove that I’m serious about this? About *us?*”

We stared at each other a second longer, and then his lips were on mine, kissing me roughly, desperately. It wasn’t like our regular kisses—there was something raw in this, something… dangerous.

*Okay, gotta focus, can’t get distracted.* My lips parted to let his tongue in. *Gotta…oh fuck, his lips are so good…*

I moaned into the kiss, arching my back as he deepened it. My hips ground against his, desperate for friction as he kept my hands high above my head. Kept them trapped. I was getting good at this.

Suddenly, he let go of my hands and pushed me down onto the bed. I yelped as I caught myself. Sure, it wasn’t the ideal time to have sex, but my head was swimming, and I was pretty turned on from the fight earlier. And wasn’t the best way to solve a fight working it out in the bedroom?

I hit my sexiest pose, and I motioned for him to join me on the bed. Instead, he turned toward the door.

“Hey!” I sat up. “WHERE ARE YOU GOING?”

He had one hand on the door as he turned back to look at me. “You stay right here. Don’t move a muscle, or I’ll muzzle you,” he growled before exiting the room, slamming the door behind him.

“BASTARD!” I screamed, jumping off the bed.

Who the fuck did he think he was, telling me I should leave and then ordering me to stay? Like I was some kind of dog? Well, if he thought I was gonna listen to him, he had another thing coming. I wasn’t a Luna yet—there was no way in hell I was gonna blindly obey an Alpha.

I ran to the door and opened it, revealing Lola.

Her face broke into a relieved smile. “Oh, there you are! I was looking all over for you.”

“Well, you found me, and now I’m going,” I told her gruffly, pushing past her and down the hallway.

She ran to catch up. “What are you doing?”

“I’m leaving.”

“Yeah, that’s what I was afraid you were going to say.” Lola sighed. “What happened?”

“Xavier is a dick.”

“That’s already been established countless times. Care to elaborate?”

I stopped and turned to face her. “He ordered me to stay, right after ordering me to leave. Like I’m a dog and he’s my master. Well, *he’s* the dumb dog. No offense,” I added quickly.

“None taken.”

“How can I ever be a Luna if he treats me like I don’t have a brain in my head? He didn’t even introduce me to everyone. Not really.”

“While I hate to side with Xavier—like, ever—he does have a point,” Lola said. “You should *not* go out there right now.”

My mouth fell open in shock. If anyone was meant to be on my side, it was Lola. Whatever happened to the girl code? Women before wolves, Lola!

“Whose side are you on?” I demanded.

“You know I always have your back!” Lola said. “And that’s why I’m telling you to pump the brakes on your storm out. There’s a lot of dick swinging going on right now.”

I scrunched up my nose. “Ew, like an orgy?”

Was that why Xavier wanted me to leave? So he could have his super-secret orgy party? But I was his mate!

Lola rolled her eyes. “No, silly. It’s just that every guy out there is trying to prove they’ve got what it takes to be the next Alpha over Xavier. Even Jay seems a little worked up, which admittedly is kinda hot.”

“Why? Isn’t Xavier the next Alpha?”

“Well…” Lola hesitated. “It’s complicated.”

I rolled my eyes. “*Everything* is complicated in this pack.”

“Well, this time it’s complicated because Xavier isn’t the true Alpha yet. I mean, he’s got Alpha blood in him, but he hasn’t been chosen yet. Things are really dangerous for him right now. If the other packs don’t recognize him as an Alpha, we could find ourselves in the middle of another pack war. And while I love you more than anything, you do have a tendency to rub people the wrong way.”

“I do not!” I shouted. “I am perfectly lovely!”

Lola shot me a pointed look.

“I’m just trying to help,” I said sadly.

Okay, yes, I had a major case of foot-in-mouth disease, and I could be more than a little impulsive at times, but my intentions were always good. Couldn’t anyone see that?

Lola sighed and squeezed my hand. “I know. But the best thing you can do to help is give Xavier some space. I don’t think he knew how hard today would be when he invited you. He needs to focus on his pack, and having a mate clouds his thoughts. He needs to be focused if he wants to keep you and everyone else safe.”

I looked at Lola. I knew she was just trying to give me advice, but I couldn’t hear it over my anger. I pulled my hand away, a little rougher than I meant to.

“FINE. IF I’M SUCH A BURDEN, THEN I’LL LEAVE,” I shouted, turning toward the stairs.

Lola grabbed my shoulder. “Wait! Everyone’s downstairs!”

I spied the window. Perfect.

I shook Lola off and raced toward the window. I opened it easily, and already had one foot out before I turned back to a horrified Lola.

“Wish me a happy landing!” I said and waved before I jumped out into the dark night.

Wait, what did I just do?

**Episode 93**

Over the course of my life, there had been many occasions where I’d been accused of not looking before I leapt. I was impulsive, emotional, and reactionary. I was a Gemini sun/Aries moon, after all. However, I’d admit that jumping out of a three-story window, just because my boyfriend was a stupid jerk, may have been taking the saying a bit too literally.

As least, that was the conclusion I came to in mid-air.

I scrambled to grab onto the ledge before gravity pulled me down, barely catching it in time. The cold night air chilled me as I dangled there, three stories off the ground. Not my brightest move. The fall would be enough to break my ankles, at least. Why couldn’t I have been born with quick wolf-bear healing?

“ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR GODDAMN MIND?” Lola shrieked, practically hanging out the window. “You are going to get yourself killed!”

“I REALIZE THAT NOW, LOLA!” I yelled back. “ARE YOU GONNA LECTURE ME OR HELP ME?”

“I’M GETTING JAY. DON’T YOU DARE GO ANYWHERE!” she shouted, and then her head disappeared.

“WHERE AM I GONNA GO?” I shouted back. And then I realized the answer: down.

A chill shot through me, but it wasn’t from the air. I’d fucked up. Like, really bad this time. Stupid Caliana. Why could I never just *chill* for four seconds? Why did I have to fly off the handle at every little thing?  
 I almost moved to smack myself on the forehead before I remembered that my hands were the only things keeping me from becoming scrambled Caliana on the ground.

In a way, my predicament was the perfect metaphor for the current state of my life. I was caught between two worlds. In my normal human life, I would’ve been at college tonight. Chilling in my room, doing my psych homework and wondering if there’d be hash browns in the dining hall in the morning.

The current version of my life was very much *not* chill. How could it be when there were wolf-bears crawling around in it all the damn time? Most of whom wanted to tear humans like my former classmates limb from limb, and were interested in serving me as an entrée at their next barbecue.

Maybe Xavier *hadn’t* been bullshitting. Maybe he really didn’t want me as his mate. And who could blame him? This was probably the most important night of my life—my debut as a Luna—and what was I doing? Hanging outside a window, blowing in the breeze. And that was *after* I’d tried to defend myself with a spatula. Honestly, at this rate, I was probably more likely to die from embarrassment than a wolf-bear mauling. I didn’t even know which would be more painful.

Tears welled in my eyes, blurring my vision. A sob was threatening to escape my lips, and my hands were shaking.

*No!* I couldn’t cry about this, like the overly emotional human everyone thought I was. I had the power to change things. I was gonnato turn this around if it was the last thing I did.

Though if Lola didn’t get back with Jay soon, I probably wouldn’t get the chance to try. My fingers were starting to ache. My human hands weren’t strong enough to hold me up for much longer. There had to be another way.

Slowly, carefully, I twisted, trying to see if there was a ledge below me. Perhaps I could just climb down.

I did feel a ledge just below mine, but it was just out of reach.

“Damn,” I cursed, wondering where the hell Lola was. Probably sucking face with Jay. She probably forgot all about me.

I looked up at the ledge I was hanging from. Perhaps I could just swing up and get back in myself. It couldn’t be that hard.

I counted in my head. *1… 2… 3…Go!*

SHIT!

I tried to swing my leg up to the ledge, but my fingers slipped. I let go of the ledge before my leg had a chance to get up there, and I fell.

“EEEEEEEKKKKKK*!*” I screamed, reaching out and grabbing the guttering that was hanging off the side of the house. I sent up a silent prayer of thanks to any deity that was listening. I was safe. For now.

I looked down, still too high off the ground. Damn it! Still, I had to breathe a sigh of relief. At least I wasn’t a Cali pancake. All I had to do was hold on until Lola got back.

*Creakkk.*

Oh no.

*Creakkkkkkkkkk.*

The gutter was starting to bend.

Shit!

*Creakkkkkkkkkk!*

Oh NO.

*SNAP!*

NO!!!!

My stomach and the rest of me dropped, along with the gutter.

My body tensed up, bracing for impact. My brain, on the other hand, was having a full-blown meltdown. I’d faced down death before. I’d even been willing to die a few times in my life. But there’d at least been some honor in that. Dying for the people you care about, for what you believe in—*that* was a worthy cause.

But being found in a bush, body broken like an eggshell, all because I’d been feeling petty and had jumped out a window? There was no honor in that. And not a cool story, either.

I shut my eyes, praying for a miracle when *BAM!* My head collided with the house’s fake stonework. But the sharpness was soon replaced by soft fur.

WHAT WAS GOING ON?!

Warm liquid trickled down my face to my eyes. I knew it was my own blood, but for once, I didn’t freak out. I was alive. No one was going to have to scrape me off the concrete. I made it! Fuck yeah!

And not only was I still alive, but I also wasn’t going to embarrass myself—which would’ve been like death, but worse.

I opened my eyes to see nothing but blood and wolf-bear fur. I must have done a number on my head—I could barely see a thing. It didn’t matter, though, because if a wolf-bear had saved my life, it could only have been one person: Xavier.

If my head hadn’t been leaking, I would’ve laughed at the irony. Just minutes ago, I was running away from Xavier, and now he’d saved my life. We were definitely soulmates—this only proved my point.

And yet… something didn’t feel quite right. But that could’ve been the headache I was dealing with. My brain was throbbing with pain. I NEEDED TO BE LESS IMPULSIVE DAMN IT!

I blinked a few times, trying to get a clear view of the wolf-bear who’d saved me. He lowered me to the ground—the same ground that could moments ago have turned me into splatter art—and promptly started licking me.

*GROSS! Ew! Ew! EW!* What kind of wolf-bear drank blood? Were there vampire-wolf-bears running around that I didn’t know about? Also, having an animal lick an open wound? Their saliva was full of dog germs! This was probably how people got rabies! Just my luck—I was probably in the process of acquiring some kind of horrible wolf disease.

I lifted my hand to slap him away, but my arm just flopped back down again. *Useless body.*

But wait a minute. Didn’t wolf-bears heal each other? I guess this was one of the perks of having a wolf-bear boyfriend. Perhaps it wasn’t the most sanitary perk, but it was definitely one of the most useful—especially with my clumsiness.

As the soft tongue cleaned the blood from my scalp, my vision slowly started to return. I reached out to pet my mate’s fur. It was at that point that I realized it wasn’t the black fur I was used to… It was silver.

I pulled away a little and saw that this wolf wasn’t the same shape as Xavier’s. This one was leaner, but just as huge. Maybe I hit my head harder than I thought.

I looked into the wolf’s eyes and gasped. I might have imagined the different size or the color fur, but there was no way a concussion would change Xavier’s eye color from deep brown to gunmetal grey.

This wasn’t my mate.

THIS WASN’T MY MATE LICKING MY FACE.

I tried to scramble away from the strange wolf who was licking me clean. God, did these wolf-bears have *any* manners?

“SHOO!” I yelled. “BAD DOG! GET OUT!”

In an instant, the wolf-bear shifted back into his human form. In the glow of the moonlight, I could make out his naked body. He was lean and muscular, with rippling abs. His hair was short and almost silver in the moonlight, a shade or two lighter than his eyes. But it was his laugh that struck me. Light and cruel at the same time. His lips were glistening with crimson liquid.

My blood.

His tongue darted out to lick the remainder from his lips, making my stomach turn.

He noticed my gaze and gave me a devilish smile—it matched his wicked eyes. “You know, you actually taste very sweet. Like raw, unrefined sugar—the kind that always tastes a little sinful. I can see why my brother fancies you.”

*Greyson?*

**Episode 94**

Honestly, I was just sick of seeing everyone’s dick. Gross.

And Greyson’s dick of all of them. I was really trying not to look, but it was just THERE. IN FRONT OF ME. REALLY NOT A LOT OF OPTIONS.

Why did everyone have to be naked when they shifted back? Maybe as Luna I could invent a little apron for them to withstand shifting. Unless…were wolf-bears actually nudists?!

My head was throbbing too hard to think properly. I squeezed my eyes shut as I slid away from the murderer, trying to get away from him and his dick.

As it turned out, I should’ve kept my eyes open. Maybe it would’ve prevented me from banging my head against the house as I tried to get away. *Smooth move, Cali.*

I opened my eyes to see Greyson looking me over with a mixture of annoyance and amusement. Or maybe my headache was clouding my vision. Perhaps it was both.

“What do *you* want?” I asked, my voice harsh and snappy. Sure, I knew I should have been grateful he’d saved my life and everything—but if I’d learned anything from the last few weeks, it was that someone saving your life didn’t necessarily mean they didn’t want to kill you.

And this was GREYSON. He probably wanted to kill me RIGHT NOW!

Greyson crossed his arms. “How about a thank-you? Or don’t humans have any manners? It’s been so long since I’ve spoken to one, I hardly remember.” His voice was dark and seductive, sending an uncomfortable chill down my spine. “Then again, the last time I talked to a human, we didn’t do much talking. And she wasn’t nearly as delicious as you, love.”

NOPE. I needed to get away and find Xavier ASAP!!

I tried to stand, but my head wasn’t having it. My body rocked back and forth as my vision blurred and my stomach jolted. For a moment, I thought I was going to throw up, which would probably be a decent defense against this naked wolf-bear.

Why did I still not have a weapon? What I wouldn’t have given to have *anything* to hit him with right then. Except maybe not a spatula this time.

This whole night was going down in the typical Cali disaster hall-of-fame. First the spatula nightmare, and now being saved by my boyfriend’s evil half-brother who probably wanted to murder me and everyone else here. WHY DID I ALWAYS FLY OFF THE HANDLE? Why hadn’t I just left with Lola or stayed in my room like a non-crazy person? Why did I always have to be so impulsive? What the hell was wrong with me?

While I was beating myself up, Greyson was smirking at me. “I know what you’re thinking,” he said.

That stopped me. What did he mean by that? Did wolf-bears have mind-reading powers? Honestly, I wouldn’t have been surprised if they did. At this point, if someone told me that wolf-bears could grow wings and fly, I would’ve accepted it. Couldn’t this asshole just let me go?

His muscles flexed.

Shit. Had he heard that thought, too?

“You’re looking at me and wondering how it’s possible that someone can be even more handsome than my dear younger brother,” he said.

Okay, so clearly wolf-bears did *not* have mind-reading powers. Small miracles.

Also, who the hell did this dude think he was? Showing up out of nowhere and talking to me like this. Talking to me WHILE HE WAS NAKED. This was so many levels of wrong.

I could feel my cheeks flushing with anger. “You’re probably the worst mind reader I’ve ever met.”

He cocked an eyebrow. “Have you met many mind readers?”

I ignored him because he was stupid. “If you had even an ounce of mind-reading ability, you would’ve known to put some pants on and get the hell away from me.”

“In that order?” he inquired.

“If Xavier so much as GLIMPSES you harassing his—”

“Don’t tell me you were going to say ‘Luna’?” he said, cutting me off. RUDE.

“And what if I was?” I was about to put my hands on my hips, but then I realized my grip on the house was the only thing keeping me upright. A fact that was probably not helping my Luna case.

“No offense, love,” Greyson said, “but given what I’ve seen so far, I’m confident in saying that as a Luna, you’d be eaten alive in five seconds flat.”

“A LOT OF OFFENSE TAKEN,” I snapped. “And if you’re gonna kill me, just get it over with already. I’m sick of you and this wolf-bear BS.”

Completely over all this naked, creepy, wolf-bear nonsense, I tried to hobble away, but the pain in my head made everything blurry and terrible. I would’ve done anything to suddenly acquire healing powers.

I stumbled and was about to fall face first onto the ground when Greyson caught me. His strong, tense arms helped me sit down. I was far too tired and injured to fight him off, though I did give it my best shot.

“Will you stop squirming?” he asked through gritted teeth as he lowered me to the grass.

“Will you stop being such a CREEP?” I spat back.

He knelt in front of me so that he could face me properly. With our faces level, I could see just how grey and deep his eyes were, the sharpness of his cheekbones. The crescent moon-shaped scar below his right eye. He was breathtaking. There was no other word for it. Why were all wolf-bears so freaking attractive?!

“You don’t need to be afraid of me,” he said softly.

I let out a hollow laugh. “Says the dude who slaughtered his own pack. Nice try, killer.”

Now it was Greyson’s turn to laugh. “My, how my reputation has grown since I’ve been gone. I’m sure every year I’ve been gone that story has gotten more fearsome and vicious. I bet if I hadn’t come back, they’d have wound up claiming I was king of the world at some point. Tell me, love, do you truly believe everything you hear?”

I narrowed my eyes. I definitely didn’t believe *him*.

WHERE THE HELL WERE LOLA AND JAY?

I thought it was pretty obvious my mistrust of him was clear, but that didn’t stop Greyson from trying to help me stand. For a split second, it was an almost noble gesture.

And then he tried to rip my shirt off.

“WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU DOING?” I screamed out as he tore at the sleeve of my shirt, tearing it clean off. My *new* shirt.

ASSHOLE.

Even with a pounding headache and a questionable sense of balance, I lunged at him, banging my fists against his chest, trying desperately to get him away from me. I knew it was a worthless effort. My fists bounced right off his chest, and I doubted he could feel a thing. Meanwhile, I could already feel bruises forming on my hands. Still, he wasn’t taking me down without a fight!

Throughout my attack, Greyson looked…annoyed. Like how a tired parent looks when their kid is throwing a temper tantrum.

“Will you please knock that off?” he deadpanned. “You’re only tiring yourself out.”

“YOU RUINED MY NEW SHIRT!” I shouted.

“You can grieve later,” he said. “Right now, let me help you.”

I took a step back and gasped. “HELP ME? YOU JUST RIPPED THE SLEEVE OFF MY SHIRT, YOU CREEP! HOW IS THAT HELPFUL?”

Greyson and his brother shared the same eye roll, which only made me more furious.

“Can you stop acting human for five fucking seconds?” he said. “You’re bleeding.”

“What?” I touched the top of my head, finding warm wetness there. I looked at my fingers and saw that they were stained with red. My blood.

WHY WAS THIS HAPPENING TO ME?!

“Let me help you,” Greyson repeated, more gently this time. He wrapped my torn sleeve around my head. We were standing so close now I could smell him; he smelled like sandalwood and tobacco and something else, something dark and alluring that I couldn’t quite pinpoint. My head injury must’ve been getting to me.

“Let me know if I’m hurting you,” he said, his voice barely above a whisper. His fingers moved gracefully around my head, applying the bare minimum of pressure. He was being… gentle. Gentler than my own mate had been all night, in fact.

Was it my head injury talking, or did I not actually mind being saved by Greyson?

My mind was struggling to stay alert. Greyson could easily use this as an opportunity to literally bite my head off or cut my throat with his teeth. I didn’t know why he was trying to act like a good guy, but I wasn’t going to trust him.

And yet…

There was something just *nice*, about someone taking care of you. Catching you when you fall, pulling you back together and mending you when you’re hurt. Just helping. Being there for you. Especially after a hard night. *Especially* when your boyfriend was being a huge jerk.

“GET AWAY FROM HER!” someone screamed from behind me.

Right on cue…

**Episode 95**

In a matter of seconds, Xavier body-checked Greyson with a force that instantly had him on the ground. Before I knew it, the two brothers were rolling around on the grass, trying to wrap their hands around each other’s throats. Then the punches started to fly.

I gasped; it was all happening so quickly. However, my shock switched to annoyance as fast as the fight going on in front of me. What was it with wolf-bears and fighting? They were like immature little boys in the schoolyard, trying to prove which one was cooler, when really, they both just looked stupid. I knew wolf-bears were *technically* part animal, but they didn’t have to act like it!

“CALI!” a voice called out among the chaos. I turned to see Lola running toward me. Finally. It was about time she got back.

“WHERE THE HELL HAVE YOU BEEN? I WAS HANGING THERE FOREVER!” I shouted, still annoyed that I’d had to dangle there while Lola was off doing god knew what. Yes, it was my fault that I’d jumped, but she shouldn’t have taken so long to get me some help.

“I’m sorry! I got distracted,” she replied, looking me over. “What the hell happened to you?” She must have been talking about my head.

“You got *distracted?*” I demanded. *Unbelievable*. “By sucking face with Jay?”

Even in the moonlight, I could see the blush on Lola’s face. “That wasn’t the only thing.”

I rolled my eyes. “Unbe-freaking-lievable.”

“Wait, so what happened?” she asked. “How did you get down?”

“I fell,” I deadpanned. I mean, what else was she expecting?

Lola gasped.

“Yep,” I said. “And then Greyson saved me and bandaged my head.”

“*What?*”

“I know,” I said. At least, I *thought* I did. My head was still blurry and fuzzy.

I heard growling behind me and turned to see that Xavier and Greyson had shifted.

This was very bad.

Without thinking, I ran into the fray, ignoring Lola’s protests.

“ENOUGH! ENOUGH! THAT IS *ENOUGH!*” I screamed, shoving my arms between Xavier and Greyson, trying to push them apart. “YOU ARE ACTING LIKE *CHILDREN!* GIANT, WOLFY CHILDREN!”

Much to my surprise, Xavier and Greyson broke apart. They were still snarling at each other, but it was something.

For a moment, I was proud of myself for managing to break up the fight. If I could get two worked-up, jacked-up wolf-bears to listen to me, maybe I could be a Luna after all.

But then I heard a loud wave of snarling, getting closer and closer. I turned to see what had *really* caused Xavier and Greyson to stop fighting—wolf-bears, dozens of them. All large fangs and hateful eyes, all stalking their way toward us.

Okay, that was not ideal.

Another snarl ripped through the pack of wolf-bears.

I took a big, deep breath and squared my shoulders. I had to say something to keep this pack from tearing itself into pieces—and me along with it.

“ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!” I shouted to the pack of wolf-bears, my voice coming out clear and mostly strong, for a change. “You’re acting like a bunch of stupid idiots! I don’t care if you’re wolf-bears, and I don’t care if fighting is traditional—right now, IT’S RUINING EVERYTHING! Seriously, this is a BARBECUE, for crying out loud! LEARN SOME FUCKING MANNERS!”

I turned to Xavier, who was still keyed up from the fight. He looked at me, his eyes filled with anger and something else I couldn’t place.

“I know Greyson has done some really messed-up shit in the past,” I told him, then shot a dark look at Greyson, who looked like he was about to cut me off. “You shut your goddamn mouth—this is not your turn to talk.” I looked back at Xavier. “But if it weren’t for him coming to my rescue, I would’ve been a pancake on the ground. He saved my life.”

I turned to the rest of the pack. “And as for the rest of you, you all need to get your shit together. All you’ve done is fight and try to tear each other apart, and it’s brought you nothing! I thought this whole stupid party was about uniting your packs, not ripping each other’s throats out. If that’s how you plan to live, then you can kiss your packs goodbye.”

Silence hung in the air when my speech was over. The only sounds were crickets and the rustling of leaves on the trees. For a moment, my heart stopped. At any moment, they could all turn against me and rip my recently saved body to shreds. Still, I didn’t—I *couldn’t*—show them that I was afraid.

Then, one by one, each wolf started to shift back into their human form. Xavier was the first.

Normally, this would have been a huge moment for me. *Normally,* I would’ve been soaking in how awesome I was. This was Luna material, baby.

If only everyone wasn’t naked.

Geez Louise! Would it kill them to keep spare clothes lying around? Pants, at the very least.

“OH MY GOD, PUT SOME DAMN PANTS ON!” I shouted, covering my eyes. Okay, not exactly the note I wanted to end on, but for real—if fighting didn’t kill off the packs, freezing off their genitals because they ran around naked all the time absolutely would. And I would *not* lose my pack because of frozen dicks.

Xavier stood next to me, putting a hand on my shoulder. “She’s right.”

*Finally!* On the inside I was gloating, eagerly awaiting to use this win against him in the future.

“About the clothes?” asked Shaggy. “Really?”

Xavier rolled his eyes. “No, dumbass.” He turned to Greyson. “If we don’t stick together, we’ll perish.”

I watched closely as Greyson gave a short, curt nod.

“Spatula woman is right,” Mace said.

Oh, come on! If that nickname stuck, I was gonna be so pissed.

Mace pointed to Xavier and Colton. “But you have to face up to the fact that your pack has no Alpha. And a pack without an Alpha is like a boat without a rudder. Eventually, you’ll crash.”

I understood about half of that. Mostly crash.

Pip came out of the group and stood beside her mate. “Mace is right,” she said. “You need to choose an Alpha. And we all know there’s only one way to resolve this conflict.” She paused, probably for dramatic effect. “The Lupo Finale.”

The pack gasped with excitement. That was never a good sign.

Oh, what fresh hell was this?

I turned to Lola, whose body was panic stricken. Also hella not a good sign.

“What the hell is the Lupe Fiasco?” I demanded. “Is it like class elections? Do we have to start writing speeches or something?” Vaguely, I remembered seventh grade, when I ran for vice president. I’d run off the stage in the middle of my speech due to stage fright. I’d lost the election. By a lot.

Lola shook her head. “This isn’t a democracy, Cali. The Lupo Finale is a ritual where the challengers fight each other to see who’s worthy of becoming Alpha.”

“WHAT?” I gasped out. Great, more fighting, the exact opposite of what I’d just ordered. Just *peachy*.

“Sometimes the challengers fight to the death,” Lola added helpfully.

“What the hell?” *Of course* it was to the death. Wolf-bears couldn’t do anything without being incredibly dramatic.

I wheeled around to look at Xavier, who was looking at Mace.

“You are next in line to be Alpha,” Mace told him. “This is up to you. It’s your call. Do you want to invoke the Lupo Finale?”

“WAIT!” I called out. We needed to discuss this. We needed to work out if this was truly the best option for us. The thought of Xavier fighting for his life, killing others, possibly getting killed himself… It was more than I could bear.

However, my shout of protest was meaningless. Xavier stepped forward. “I’ll do it.”

**Episode 96**

“That was, in fact, the worst barbecue in the history of the world,” I said on the ride home. I was sitting in the passenger seat while Xavier drove. Colton, Maya, Lola, and Jay were all crammed into the back.

“You’re forgetting Travis Fairweather’s barbecue in eleventh grade,” Lola countered matter-of-factly.

“How on earth was that worse than this?” I demanded. “There were no killer wolf-bears at Travis Fairweather’s party!”

“Alec Johnson spilled fruit punch on my new swimsuit and called me by the wrong name,” Lola said. “*So* embarrassing.”

“I mean, to be fair, I’ve apparently been calling you by the wrong name forever,” I pointed out.

“That’s different,” she said. “Anyway, it was one of the worst moments of my teen life.”

I honestly couldn’t believe Lola sometimes. If we weren’t best friends, I would’ve strangled her by now. Honestly, in that moment, I was extremely tempted to do it anyway.

I sighed and looked out the window. The only positive to all of this was that everyone in the car was wearing clothes—thank goodness. Honestly, how many outfit changes did these wolf-bears go through in a single day? What was their shopping budget like? What about the planet? Wolf-bears clearly didn’t care about the environment or sustainability.

I filed these burning questions under ‘ask later,’ which was already filled with about a thousand other questions that no one had answered. The list kept growing every day, and I was growing angrier and more frustrated right along with it.

I sighed again, annoyed with the whole situation. I turned to look at Xavier, still pissed at him for just about everything. He might have been the only person I enjoyed seeing naked, but if he kept this secret shit up, he might never get to see *me* naked again.

Xavier did not meet my gaze, his eyes firmly on the road. Oh, *now* he wanted to be a good driver? Asshat.

I turned around and realized *no one* in the car was making eye contact with me—not even Maya, who loved picking a fight more than just about anything. They were trying so hard to avoid me in the tiny space that it would’ve been funny if I weren’t so pissed off.

“Okay, so who’s gonna volunteer to tell me about this ‘duel to the death’ bullshit my boyfriend signed up for?” I asked.

Silence. Of freaking course.

“Drop it, Caliana,” Xavier said sternly.

“I’m not going to drop it,” I said. “Not until someone in this goddamn car tells me what is going on.”

“You’re such a pain in the ass,” grumbled Xavier.

“And you’re a brooding, secretive, douche canoe,” I shot back.

His eyebrow quirked up. “Douche canoe?”

I crossed my arms. “You heard me.”

He rolled his eyes. “Just keep your nose out of things that don’t concern you.”

I gasped at that, shocked at how stupid my mate was. “Excuse you? If you die in the Loopy Fantastico thing, how is that *not* my business? What happens to the poor little human in a room full of flesh hungry wolf-bears? Your MATE?!”

“Lupo Finale,” Xavier corrected.

I rolled my eyes. “Whatever, don’t change the subject.”

“Fine. If something happens to me, then I won’t be Alpha. Therefore, you won’t be a Luna. Simple as that.”

“What do you mean ‘if something happens to you’?” I demanded. “Lola said you could die!”

Xavier shot Lola a death glare. “*Thanks,* Lola.”

I heard her whimper in the backseat.

“Don’t be mad at her,” I snapped. “She’s the only one who’s told me a damn thing. Is it true? Could you die?”

Xavier didn’t answer, and his eyes stayed glued to the road. His jaw was set in a tight grimace.

“Is it true?” I prodded again.

Another moment of silence, and then a curt nod. “Yes,” he finally admitted, “but deaths are rare. It’s like in human boxing matches, where *very occasionally* someone gets killed. Honestly, it’s not a big deal.”

“Not a big deal?” I choked out. “You’re telling me there’s a *possibility* that you could get killed, and you’re telling me it’s not a big deal?”

“It’s not as dramatic as you think,” he said. “Besides, it’s only a possibility if someone challenges me.”

I put my hand to my bandaged forehead and thought of Greyson. His smoke-colored eyes, his gentle touch…the feeling that I couldn’t trust him.

“Do you think Greyson would challenge you?” I asked.

Xavier shrugged. “That’s up to Greyson.”

For the first time since we’d gotten into the car, he looked at me and saw me touching my bandaged head. “Okay, little miss honesty,” he said. “Are you going to tell me what happened to you?”

“I jumped out the window,” I said matter-of-factly. Like we were discussing the weather.

“Is that how you normally exit a room?” he inquired. “Jumping out of windows? I’d say that’s kind of a stupid thing to do if I’m being honest.”

“You told me to leave,” I replied.

“I also told you to stay,” he countered.

“Yes, but first you told me to leave.”

“But not out the window!”

“You didn’t say *not* to leave out the window.”

“Goddammit, Caliana!” he snapped. “Do I honestly have to say ‘don’t jump out the window’? What, are humans really that fucking stupid?”

“Hey! That’s not nearly as stupid as dying in the Ludo Caliente!”

“If you don’t say ‘Lupo Finale’ next time, I swear I will throw you out of this car, and you can walk home in the dark.”

A dangerous thought entered my mind as I clicked off my seatbelt. Had this man not realized that he should never challenge me?

“Don’t worry about it,” I said. “I can let myself out.” Then I opened the door.

That got everyone’s attention, real fast.

“WHAT THE FUCK, CALIANA?” Xavier screamed. The car swerved as he tried to grab for me.

*Good*, I thought. *Now* he *knows what it’s like to be scared.*

“I’m not kidding, Xavier,” I said, still holding the door open. “Tell me what this…Lupo Finale is all about. What happens to your mate if you’re killed?”

Xavier reached over and yanked my door shut, glaring at me the whole time. “Can you not do stupid shit for two seconds? What the fuck is wrong with you?”

I stood my ground. “Tell me, or I swear to wolf-bear god I’ll be roadkill,” I shouted, grabbing the door handle again.

Xavier sighed and touched a button on his door.

*Click.*

I pulled on the door handle. Locked.

“Did you just child lock me?” I demanded. “Not cool, dude.”

“Then stop acting like a child, *dude*.”

“I’ll stop acting like a child when you actually start treating me like your mate!”

We glared at each other in silence for what felt like an eternity.

Finally, Xavier broke the silence. “I’ve only seen it once, and it was a long time ago.”

“The Finale?”

Xavier nodded. “Colton and I were about seven or so. We didn’t want to go, but Silas, our father, made us. Said we were required to go because we were the sons of the Alpha—or something to the effect.”

“Who was fighting?”

“My father, naturally. He was so wildly disliked that every strong male from every pack he absorbed challenged him.”

I gasped softly. “And he made you sit through that?”

He didn’t answer, just continued with his story. “There were ten challenges, maybe eleven—I lost count after a while. All I remember thinking was that I wanted my father to lose. I wanted him to die. But he kept winning, killing everyone who had the nerve to challenge him. Ripping them apart like they were made of paper, until there were no more challengers left. I wanted so badly for him to lose.”

We said nothing for a long time as I let the information settle. All I could picture was a little boy and his brother, watching a bloodbath unfold before their eyes. How scared they must have felt, how traumatizing it must have been for Xavier to watch, hoping it would be his father whose life ended. I couldn’t imagine the pain of going through that.

I watched my mate drive, staring ahead in silence, and felt a new wave of love for him. My poor, brooding, secretive, damaged wolf-bear. Sure, I was still furious at him, but I loved him. He was my mate.

I took his free hand in mine and gave it a squeeze. “I love you,” I whispered.

I thought, or maybe hoped, that he’d squeeze back. But he didn’t. Instead, he shook off my hand and broke my heart for the second time that day.

“Just be glad I haven’t marked you,” he snapped gruffly.

Wait, what was that supposed to mean?!

**Episode 97**

Why was my boyfriend such an asshole?

That was the million-dollar question on my mind when Xavier shook off my hand and, in a sense, my love. It couldn’t just be because he was a wolf-bear—that kind of jerkiness didn’t just come naturally.

“You are legit the absolute worst,” I told him, my voice a mixture of anger, shock, and hurt.

“You may have mentioned that a time or two,” said Xavier coldly. “Can’t say I disagree.”

I rolled my eyes. “You answered one question by raising another. None of this is actually answering any of my questions, and I’m getting real sick of this cat-and-mouse game we keep playing. It’s not cool, and it’s getting really old. Why can’t you just tell me what’s going on instead of giving me jigsaw puzzles where I have to solve one piece at a time? It’s getting annoying. Not everything has to be a mystery.”

Xavier opened his mouth to say something, but Jay cut him off.

“Uh, not to come between you lovebirds, but how long has that car been tailing us?”

“What?” I turned around to look and, sure enough, there in the distance was a pair of headlights.

“I noticed them a few miles back,” Xavier said tersely. “They’ve kept their distance so far. Let’s see if they’re really following us. Buckle up.”

Suddenly, he swerved the car with a jolt. I barely had enough time to put my seatbelt back on before the car screeched off the main road and onto a bumpy, dirt track. My teeth were clacking together, my stomach was doing backflips, and it felt like my head was about to bounce right off my neck.

Great, another way I could die tonight.

It was so dark that everything was a frightening blur.

“WATCH OUT FOR THAT TREE!” I shouted, pointing to the large tree Xavier was headed straight for.

“STOP BEING A BACKSEAT DRIVER!” Xavier shot back. “I CAN HANDLE THIS.”

“I’M IN THE FRONT SEAT, DUMMY,” I told him. “AND YOU ARE THE WORST DRIVER EVER!”

He shot me a dirty look as he swerved to avoid the tree.

I smirked. HAH!

We pulled off the road and onto a rocky field. With one final hard turn, Xavier spun the car around and shut off the headlights.

“Everyone shut up,” Xavier whispered, his voice low and dangerous.

I opened my mouth to speak.

“That especially means you, Caliana,” he said, giving me a dark look.

*Rude.*

I thought about talking just to spite him, but I didn’t want some creepy car to murder me and Lola in a middle of a field, so I stayed quiet. But not because he’d told me to.

We all watched and waited, barely even breathing as the headlights in the distance approached the main road and…passed right on by.

We all breathed a collective sigh of relief. Thank goodness that hadn’t ended up being typically terrible.

“You think maybe all this talk of challenges, fighting, and dying made us a tad paranoid?” I wondered aloud.

“Paranoid or not, I gotta pee or my bladder will explode. Move or lose it, nerds,” Maya said, trying to open the door. “Fuck, who put on the child lock?”

“What? What’s going on? We’re still driving?” a sleepy Colton asked. I could feel him jerking up in his seat behind me.

“How are you asleep?” I demanded. “We just hauled ass through the haunted forest on Xavier’s wolf-bear wild ride.”

“Plus, Cali just tried to jump out of a moving car,” Jay added.

“Lots of excitement,” said Lola.

I saw Colton shrug in the rearview mirror. “Call it a gift.”

“Uh, the *door?*” Maya asked, even more annoyed than normal.

“Ugh, don’t tell me you have to pee again?” Colton said, rolling his eyes. “I swear, you have the bladder of a tadpole.”

“Do tadpoles even have bladders?” I asked.

As usual, everyone ignored me.

“Shut up, you stupid tool,” Maya snarled.

There was a click as Xavier unlocked the doors.

“*Finally*,” Maya said, practically crawling over Lola and Jay to get out. She slammed the door behind her.

Honestly, I didn’t know how other girls could pee out in the woods. It had always just seemed gross and dirty to me. But I guess if I’d been raised with wolf-bears, I’d have fewer issues with peeing in public, too. And probably fewer issues with nudity.

When Maya was safely out of the car, I turned around in my seat to face Colton. “So what’s the deal with you and Maya?”

“I wish she’d get eaten by a fucking bear, is what the deal is with me and Maya,” said Colton gruffly as he looked out the window.

“I’m gonna call BS on that one,” I told him. “There’s something going on that you’re not telling us. Everyone in your damn family keeps secrets like treasured pets.”

“It’s none of your business,” Colton said hotly.

Oh, they were totally banging.

“Colton and Maya sitting in a tree,” I sang. “K-I-S-S-I-N—”

“If you don’t shut her up, Xavier, I am going to rip her vocal cords out with my bare hands.”

Rude.

Xavier just smirked and chuckled darkly. “You’d be doing me a huge favor.”

I looked over at Xavier; my eyes were wide with shock and my mouth was open in a ‘how-can-you-let-that-jerk-talk-to-me-like-this?’ look.

He simply gave me an annoyed look of his own. “Don’t push it,” he warned.

I turned away and huffed. I crossed my arms and legs and slumped down in my seat. I knew I looked extremely childish at that moment, but I didn’t care. Everyone was being a complete dick waffle to me, and I’d had enough of it for one night. All I wanted to do was get out of that car and go home to bed. Also never talk to Xavier again.

The car door opened again, and Maya crawled back in. That was another thing I didn’t like about peeing outside: there was nothing to wipe with. It was gross.

The tension in the car hung heavy in the air, like a muggy day.

“Uh, did something happen while I was peeing?” Maya asked.

No one said anything. Xavier turned on the car and started to drive again.

*BAM.*

The car jolted as it ran over something large.

“What the hell was that?” Lola gasped out.

Xavier shrugged and kept driving, not even bothering to check behind him to see what he’d hit.

I knew I had only seconds ago vowed to never speak to Xavier again, but I couldn’t just let him get away with a hit-and-run.

“Um, what did you run over?” I asked, sitting up and turning to look behind us.

No answer. Typical.

I tried to open the door and was foiled by the child lock once again. “Unlock the door,” I ordered.

“Why?” he asked. “So you could jump out of the car like some crazy loon? No dice.”

“I want to see what you hit. It could have been an animal. Like a deer or something.”

Xavier raised an eyebrow. “A deer?”

“Yeah, you know, a deer. Cute, lives in the woods. There’s a cartoon movie about them.”

“I know what a deer is, and I highly doubt that we hit one,” Xavier said. “It was probably just a big rock.”

I panicked. “What if you hit a person, and they hunt us down and try to kill us all? Like in that movie?”

Xavier rolled his eyes. “You watch too many movies.”

“And you watch too few movies. Can you just let me out so I can check?”

The car stopped.

“Fine,” said Xavier, pressing the button to deactivate the child locks. “But hurry up. You’ve wasted enough of our time already.”

Now that was just uncalled for. Why was he being such a dick to me?

I shot him one last angry look before getting out, slamming the door behind me.

The cold fall air rippled across my skin, making me think that leaving the car was most likely a mistake. I pulled out my phone and turned on the flashlight, walking back along the path we’d taken.

There was a dark mass on the spot where we’d felt the jolt. I put my flashlight on it and saw that it was… just a big rock.

Dammit! I kicked the rock, hurting my toes in the process. The dumb jerk had been right.

With my head hanging, I walked back to the car, trying to think of a good way to spin this story so I didn’t look like a total loser—again.

Then I heard something behind me. It sounded like the wolf-bears earlier when they’d been fighting. I hadn’t really been afraid of that, but I got major goosebumps now.

I turned around to see a fully-grown bear. And it looked pissed.

Oh *shit.*

**Episode 98**

I stood there, too panic-stricken to move as I desperately tried to remember my girl scout training from when I was like ten. What were you supposed to do if a bear attacked? Were you meant to run? No, because the bear would chase you. Maybe you were meant to hit it in the nose… Or was that sharks? Play dead? How would a bear know if you were playing dead? Fake a heart attack? Ugh, this whole thing was making me hungry for s’mores—

*Growllll!*

OH YEAH THERE WAS A FREAKING BEAR IN FRONT OF ME.

And I guess I wasn’t the only one who was hungry.

*TALKING,* I thought suddenly. *Talking will help.*

“Good bear,” I cooed. “Nice bear. Kind bear. You don’t want to eat me, do you?”

The bear let out a nasty snarl, taking a step toward me. I did the only thing left to do—I screamed. Loudly. Unfortunately, that did not scare the bear like I’d hoped. Instead, it lunged toward me, claws out.

I let out another scream and tried to run away, tripping over my legs and falling ass first onto the ground.

*Thud.*

I flinched, fully expecting a fuzzy, killer bear to land on top of me… But nothing happened.

Timidly, I opened my eyes and gasped. The bear was on the ground, with something on top of it.

I grabbed my phone and aimed it at the bear, trying to get a good look at my rescuer, even though my fingers were shaking so hard that it took nearly three tries to aim it correctly.

“Can you please get that fucking light out of my eyes?” Xavier yelled, sitting on top of the bear in full human form.

I gasped, dropping my phone again. My wolf-bear was fighting a fully-grown *actual* bear—and HE HADN’T EVEN SHIFTED.

I watched, horror struck, as Xavier took on the giant bear, trying to put it in a chokehold while the bear’s fearsome mouth kept trying to take a bite out of him.

*Oh no oh no oh no oh no!* The fight was rolling my way, and I tried my best to kick at the bear, trying to get it off Xavier. It was so dark I couldn’t tell if I was kicking my mate or the bear. I had a sudden flashback to earlier that night when Xavier and Shaggy had fought.

WHY WERE BIG, FURRY THINGS ALWAYS TRYING TO KILL ME?

Suddenly, a terrifying roar erupted through the woods, followed by a blur of motion I couldn’t understand or react to. Which might have been a good thing, because in a matter of seconds, the bear whimpered and limped off into the woods.

I breathed out a shaky sigh of relief. But then I noticed Xavier’s bruised and bloodied body on the ground below me.

“Oh no, baby!” I cried out, trying to help him stand. Even in the dark, I could see the outline of deep wounds and the shine of blood that painted his body. All at once, I was overcome with a million different emotions: fear, anger, gratitude, love, confusion…

I tried to brush the dark hair from his eyes, to get a better look at him.

“Oh, honey,” I cooed, cupping his face, feeling the bruises swelling under my fingertips. “Say something, baby.”

“It was just a rock, wasn’t it?” Xavier croaked. “And where the hell is ‘baby’ coming from?”

I smacked him hard, in the chest. I didn’t care that he’d almost just been eaten by a bear, he was being annoying.

My blow only made the grin spread wider across his face. “Are you hitting me because I’m right?”

“No, I’m hitting you because the love of my life tackled a huge ass bear, in his *human* body. Why the hell didn’t you shift?” I shouted, smacking him on the shoulder, which only made him laugh more. He had to be losing blood.

Behind me, I heard the familiar crackling sound of bones bending back into place. I looked over to see Colton shifting back into his human form.

I didn’t know why I was always surprised when wolf-bears shifted back into their human forms completely naked, but as soon as I saw Colton’s junk, I groaned in embarrassment and disgust. Everyone had some things they’d never get used to, and casual nudity was apparently one of mine.

Xavier heard my groan and turned me around to face him, touching my bandaged head. “Are you okay? Did the bear hurt you?”

I grabbed hold of him by the shoulders, trying to keep him steady so he didn’t tumble to the ground. “ME?” I demanded. “You’re the one who tackled a bear!”

Xavier smirked. “I did, didn’t I?”

I fought the urge to roll my eyes and just nodded instead. “Yes, you did. And don’t ever do it again. Ever. I want my wolf-bear in one piece.”

I pulled him into a long, full kiss, and he kissed me back, slowly, easily. Unlike the kiss at the party, this one was sweet, full of gratitude and relief.

“*Ahem*,” Colton coughed, clearing his throat.

We both turn to look at him. Well, Xavier looked at him, I looked away, avoiding his nakedness.

“I believe a thank-you is in order?” Colton said. “And a pair of pants.”

Xavier tried to laugh but winced. Sitting so close to him, I could see just how badly he’d been hurt. He had three long claw marks running across his chest, a large bite mark on his right shoulder blade, and other small cuts and bruises down both of his arms. His face was also battered and bruised. There was a long gash above his eye, and another under his chin. For a moment, I just wanted to cry and get him to a hospital, forgetting he was a wolf and would heal quickly.

Xavier caught me looking and smirked. “Checking me out, babe?”

I couldn’t help but smile. “I know you’ll heal and everything, but you look awful. Sexy, but awful.”

He grinned. “You know what I love about you, Cali? You always know what to say to make me feel better.”

“At least you love me.” I smirked, leaning up to give him another kiss.

“Uh, you guys?” Colton said, sounding pained. “Pants? Now?”

Xavier took off his pants and gave them to Colton, leaving him in just his boxers. I couldn’t help but check him out at least once as we made our way to the car.

As we were walking back, Xavier leaned against me. He wrapped his arm around my waist, pulling me close and keeping me there. I couldn’t help but smile to myself. Just hours ago, he’d been telling me that he didn’t want me to be his mate, that he didn’t want to mark me, that he wanted me to leave. And now he’d just attacked a bear—in his human form, no less—to save me. Now, he was holding onto me like a lifeline. That had to mean *something*. It had to mean that he cared.

Also, it was pretty hot to have someone so sexy and strong need you, want you, cling to you…

Oh yeah, we were totally banging as soon as he was all healed up. He’d gotten me hooked on him, and I wasn’t going to stop anytime soon.

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“What in the absolute FUCK happened?” Maya screamed as soon as we arrived at the car.

“Bear,” we all said in unison.

“*WHAT?*”

Colton turned to Xavier. “I think I’d better drive.”

Xavier nodded. “Keys are in the pocket of the pants.”

Maya scoffed loudly. “Are you kidding me? Colton’s got to be a maniac on the road. I’ll drive—I’m a much better driver.”

“I’m driving,” Colton said firmly, walking over to the driver’s side of the car.

Maya rolled her eyes and got into the passenger side. “This seatbelt better work.”

“I’ll make sure it doesn’t,” Colton said. “Be much easier to get rid of you.”

They continued their bickering as I helped Xavier into the back seat. Jay was asleep, but Lola was watching me.

“Are you okay?” she asked.

“I think so,” I said, putting on Xavier’s seatbelt and settling him into the car. “I’ve just got to get this one home to rest.”

I was still worried about him. I knew he healed quickly but looking at his wounds made me feel uneasy.

Xavier was asleep by the time Colton got the car moving, arguing with Maya the entire time. I couldn’t help but smirk as I listened to them fight like an old married couple. Why couldn’t they just see that they belonged together and stop trying to kill each other all the time? Maybe that was just how this family fell in love. I mean, that was how Xavier had acted when we’d first met.

I looked over at him now and smiled. He had his head resting against my neck, still holding on to me. I moved to stroke his hair gently, trying to comfort him. Still, there was a nagging thought in the back of my mind: what if Xavier wasn’t able to shift at the Lupo Finale? What if he died? Then what?

Fortunately, I didn’t have a chance to think about it for long. My thoughts were quickly interrupted by blue and red flashing lights, and a police siren.

“Seriously?” Colton smacked the steering wheel. “Fuck!”

*Fuck* indeed…

**Episode 99**

For the folks at home keeping score, we had:

One shirtless driver.

One person with a head injury (yours truly).

One person almost naked and covered in blood.

One person so deeply passed out that he was snoring as loud as the sirens.

And let’s not forget that five out of the six of us were wolf-bears.

Essentially, we were totally screwed. I mean, how could we explain *any* of that to the cops?

“What do we do?” I whispered as Colton pulled the car over. “Can’t you guys like hypnotize him or mind control him, or something?”

Everyone looked at me like I was the biggest idiot in the world. They did that way too often.

“Shut—and I cannot stress this last part enough—the fuck, *up*,” Maya hissed.

“Rude!” I snapped back. “I mean, can’t you guys do that?”

“We aren’t vampires, idiot,” Maya responded.

I could tell she was rolling her eyes at me. “Wait, are vampires real?!”

“*Both of you* shut the fuck up! I got this!” Colton said roughly.

“Wait, you’re not going to kill him, right?” When did my life become a shitty horror movie plot?

“Seriously, we’re going to need actual duct tape to shut *her* up,” said Maya, jabbing her thumb at me.

I was reaching over to grab her by the hair when Xavier grabbed my hand and held it. “It’s going to be okay,” he whispered.

I smiled at him, giving his hand a squeeze as I settled back into my seat, resting my head in the crook of his neck. Inside, I was panicking, hoping we’d be able to get out of this situation without trouble. Or, you know, murdering anymore. Seriously, if one more person shifted tonight, I was gonna be extremely pissed.

There was a tap on the glass, and a bright light filled the car, blinding us all. I couldn’t even see the cop’s face as Colton rolled down his window. I could only hear his booming voice. “License and registration, please.”

Colton leaned over Maya and pulled out his license and registration. Honestly, I was very surprised Colton even *had* a driver’s license. The whole wolf-bear species seemed to consider themselves above the law. I couldn’t even picture Xavier and Colton waiting in line at the DMV.

The officer took Colton’s license and registration and then swept his flashlight around the interior, exposing all of us. I finally saw the officer’s face—he looked like a stereotypical cop: buzz cut hair, neatly trimmed mustache, dark sunglasses, and a completely unreadable face. The only hint of emotion he offered was a single raised eyebrow. We must’ve looked like a complete and utter hot mess to him—mainly because we were.

OHMYGOD. I WAS ABSOLUTELY GOING TO JAIL. I wouldn’t be able to survive in prison! I was too pretty, and orange was *not* my color.

I looked over at Xavier, praying that he had a good lawyer.

“Colton’s got this,” Xavier whispered.

Yup, we were totally screwed.

The cop swung his light back to Colton, shining it right in his eyes. “What’s going on here?” he asked gruffly.

Before Colton could open his mouth, I leaned forward and smiled at the cop. Lola flirted her way out of tickets all the time—why couldn’t I?

“It’s not what it looks like, officer,” I told him brightly.

Instantly, there was a bright light shining in my face, blinding me. For a split second, I wanted to tell him off for waving the damn thing in my face but yelling at an officer probably wouldn’t have helped matters.

“And what *does* it look like here?” the officer asked, his tone harsh.

I felt all eyes on me. Everyone was probably wondering what the hell my plan was.

I didn’t have a plan. Not even an outline.

“Uh… Um… Well….” I stammered, the heat of the flashlight making me sweaty and impossibly more nervous. I wished he’d put it away. “Well… I imagine that it looks like a rave gone bad, but the truth is that—”

Maya’s rough hand hit my face before I could finish my sentence, pushing me back into my seat. She shot me a pissed off glare before turning to the cop with a pasted-on smile. “Don’t mind her, officer. She banged her head on a rock earlier today, and she wasn’t that bright to begin with.”

“Hey!” I gasped, but Xavier squeezed my hand. Probably an attempt to get me to stop talking.

“We’re just a little disheveled right now—we got attacked by a bear a few miles back while we were camping, and we’re all a little shaken up,” Maya explained to the officer.

WHY COULDN’T I HAVE THOUGHT OF THAT?

The cop turned back to Colton and checked his license. “Is that true?” he asked, looking over the top of his sunglasses to meet his eye.

Colton nodded. “Yes, sir.”

The cop gave one last sweep of the car with his flashlight (what the hell was his obsession with that thing?) and said that he’d be back in a moment.

*SMACK!*

Maya’s hand hit my face the moment the cop was out of sight. I let out a cry of surprise and swore to myself that I would kick her ass one of these days. As soon as I learned how to kick ass.

“WHAT THE FUCK WAS THAT FOR?” I demanded, cradling my stinging cheek.

“*A RAVE?* ARE YOU FUCKING KIDDING ME? WHAT KIND OF MORON TELLS A COP ABOUT A RAVE?”

“WELL, NO ONE ELSE WAS SAYING ANYTHING!”

“BECAUSE THE REST OF US AREN’T COMPLETE FUCKING IDIOTS!”

“Will you two keep your voices down?” Xavier hissed. “The cop could hear you!”

“I’LL KEEP IT DOWN IF SHE STOPS ACTING LIKE A CHILD,” I said.

Maya scoffed. “*ME?* I’M NOT THE ONE WHO NECESSITATED USE OF THE CHILD LOCKS!”

In that moment, I wanted nothing more than to punch that smug expression off her dumb, pissy face. And I probably would have tried if Xavier hadn’t pulled me to him, forcing me to keep my hands to myself.

The cop returned to the driver’s side window. “Do you know why I pulled you over, young man?”

Oh god, he’d probably run Colton’s plates and license and discovered he was wanted for murder. Maybe he was on some kind of watch list or something. He definitely *should* have been on some kind of watch list.

*Yup*, I thought. *We’re so screwed.*

I opened my mouth to speak, and every single person in the car gave me a ‘shut the hell up, Cali’ look. I was not a fan of that look.

Colton shook his head at the officer. “No, sir.”

“You got a busted brake light, probably from that bear…” He gave Colton a look that clearly said he didn’t believe that story as he handed Colton back his license. “There’s a lot of them around this area. It’s not safe to camp out here this time of year. Fix that light, or next time you’ll get a ticket. Is that understood?”

“Yes. Thank you, sir.”

The officer gave a single nod. “Maybe you should stay away from raves for a while for good measure,” he told me.

I felt a flush of embarrassment spreading over my face. “Yes, sir.”

When the cop left, we all breathed a collective sigh of relief. I wasn’t going to jail. I wasn’t going to have to wear an ugly orange jumpsuit!

As soon as the cop was gone, Colton started the car.

“Well, one thing is for sure,” he said, pulling out onto the road. “This is the last road trip I’m taking with you losers.”

I couldn’t have agreed with him more.

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I’d never been happier to reach Xavier’s home. All I wanted was to crawl into bed and sleep for a thousand years. Maybe longer.

Xavier and I headed to our bedroom after saying goodnight to the rest of the group.

“Thank goodness that’s over,” I said, shutting our bedroom door.

Xavier shrugged. “Could have been worse. Actually, I think it went better than expected.”

I opened my mouth to question how badly he’d *expected* it to go, when I was caught off guard seeing Xavier in the light. Admittedly, I complained a lot about naked people, but there was something about Xavier naked that just did it for me, even if we’d argued earlier. His wounds were healing already, making him look roughed up and tough. My gaze slid over his toned, tan arms, his rippling abs, his…

“Like what you see?” Xavier’s voice cut through my thoughts.

I looked up and saw him smirking, a cocky look in his eye. Oops, he must have caught me staring.

“Your wounds are healing nicely,” I told him, trying and failing to find my composure.

He chuckled to himself. “Sure, that’s what you were looking at.” He walked over to the bathroom and turned to look at me. “You coming?”

I scrunched up my nose. “To watch you pee? Uh, no.”

He rolled his eyes. “No, to take a shower. We both need it.”

Well, he *was* kind of a mess—covered in blood and everything.

Sleepily, I followed him into the bathroom, watching him pull down his boxers and step into the shower. I stared, completely transfixed by his muscles…so many muscles… HOW WAS SOMEONE ALLOWED TO BE THIS GORGEOUS?! AND ALL MINE?!

He turned to look at me as the water ran down his body. “Aren’t you joining me?”

**Episode 100**

Excitement filled me like the steam filled the bathroom as I pulled off my ruined jeans, and I paused at my underwear. I was still getting used to this whole sex thing, and he was…STARING AT ME. THAT WAS A LOT OF PRESSURE.

“Turn away,” I said.

“No.”  
 “CLOSE YOUR EYES THEN!”

“Caliana, I’m only going to say this once,” he said, his voice a low grumble. I watched as his eyes ran up and down my body before meeting mine. “Get. In. Here.”

I flushed. *Oh. Okay.*

A thought occurred to me as I went to jump into the shower: I’d never had shower sex before. I mean, it couldn’t be *super* different from regular sex, right? Just with more standing up. And way more slippery and wet.

Oh no.

WHAT IF I FELL AND BROKE HIS DICK?

My paranoid thoughts were interrupted by a pair of strong hands pulling me into the shower. For a moment I was dumbstruck just looking at my mate, how the cascading water highlighted all the rippling muscles in his biceps, chest, and legs. His cheekbones were standing out more than usual, and his wet, dark hair framed his face in a rugged, macho way.

*Oh boy.*

Now that the blood had been washed away, Xavier’s wounds were looking much better. But how was I meant to clean them to get rid of the dirt?

“Do we have to use special soap or something?” I asked, breaking him out of his own trance. I was trying to ignore how intently he was staring at me.

“For sex?” he asked, his eyebrows knitting together in confusion.

“NO! For your wounds. You don’t want them to get dirty and infected. Do you have some special wolf-bear healing lotion we can use? Or…”

My words were halted by his hand over my mouth. He smirked down at me, a mischievous twinkle in his eye. “Tell me, do you *ever* know when to shut the hell up?”

I opened my mouth to speak when his hand was replaced with lips on mine. I eagerly leaned into the kiss. I needed this. I hadn’t realized how desperate I was to have his body on mine until he kissed me like this, deep and warm. After everything I’d been through that day—Xavier fighting for me—with me—the tension at the barbecue, jumping out the window, *Greyson*—I needed a good dicking down, and I was going to get it.

I wrapped my arms around his neck to press deeper in the kiss. I felt his dick rubbing up against my pelvic bone, and it made me giggle softly.

Xavier noticed this and grinned like the wolf that he was. “Excited, aren’t you, my tiger?”

I smiled back at him. “You bet, baby,” I said as I jumped up and wrapped both my legs around his waist. Which would have been a fantastic move if I hadn’t done it when he was unprepared, causing him to stumble back and almost slip on the wet tile.

“Christ, Cali!” He cursed, catching himself in the nick of time as he held onto me, both of his large hands grabbed onto my wet ass, creating a loud *SLAP*.

I laughed at the noise. “I’m sorry,” I said. “Just a little excited.”

Xavier smirked, removing one hand from my ass and brushing my wet hair back. “Oh yeah? You been wanting this for a long time now? What a dirty girl you are. Maybe I should clean you up.”

Carefully, he set me down on my own two feet and lathered up his hands with soap. I could feel myself getting wet just watching, and it absolutely wasn’t from the shower.

Xavier looked me up and down and licked his lips, like a predator about to consume his prey. “You look so fucking beautiful,” he breathed, his eyes full of longing. “Fucking perfection.”

A blush crept across my face as I looked down. He was on me in a matter of seconds, his firm, soapy hands massaging my breasts. Somewhat unexpectedly, instead of moaning, I started to laugh.

“That tickles!”

“You’re the most ticklish person I’ve ever met,” he commented.

“That’s not my fault,” I said, still laughing.

“Well, let’s see how much you laugh at this,” he said before moving his head down to my breast, taking the left one in his mouth and starting to suck. I breathed out a shaky moan as he continued, stopping only to move to the right one.

“Hey!” I complained when he stopped properly. “That felt good!”

“There are more good things coming, honey,” he assured me, moving his hands down my waist, careful to avoid my stomach—which I was still sensitive about—before he moved all the way down each of my legs, washing them. Wow, wolf-bears took their cleaning extremely seriously…

Xavier moved back up to my pussy, running two fingers up and down the lips and causing me to moan loudly. He put his lips over my clit and started sucking like he wanted me to lose my mind.

“Xavier,” I moaned, closing my eyes and tipping my head back.

*BANG!*

“Ow!” I cried out, rubbing the spot on my head that had connected with the wall. In an instant, Xavier no longer eating me out, but facing me instead. “Are you all right?” he asked, concern lacing his voice.

“Yes, I’m fine,” I assured him.

“How’s your head?” he demanded. “We don’t have to continue. I don’t want to hurt you.”

Actually, it only felt a little sore. Which was sort of weird. I definitely thought I’d hit my head harder. Either Greyson caught me just in time or he had magical wolf-bear powers.

“It’s fine, surprisingly. It only hurts a little. Head injuries always look much worse than they actually are. They always bleed like a horror movie effect and scab over really gross.” Oh god, why was I talking about scabs? HE’D JUST BEEN GOING DOWN ON ME!!

“Again, do you ever shut up?” Xavier asked.

I raised my eyebrow. “Make me.”

Within seconds, he had me pinned against the glass shower door, my legs spread. I was both turned on and filled with anxiety.

“Be careful!” I said nervously. “Do you have any idea how many people get injured falling through glass shower doors?”

“Why are you talking right now?”

“What if I slip, fall, and get sliced into pieces?” I demanded. “How are you going to explain that to my mom? Besides, I thought you liked talking during sex?”

“Not when you’re talking about your mother. I like *actual* dirty talk.”

I rolled my eyes. “What, like, ‘oh Xavier, pound into my tight pussy like the Alpha you are’? Seems rather unoriginal, don’t you think?”

The hard cock poking at my belly suggested otherwise.

I smirked up at him. “Well, if you're such a dirty boy, why don’t *I* clean *you* up?”

He grinned at my suggestion, taking a few steps back as I lathered up my own hands with soap.

I started at his chest, moving my hands around in his thick hair when—

“Ow!” I yelped quietly, my eyes stinging. I must have gotten soap in them.

“Are you okay?” he asked.

“YUP!” I said, my eyes squeezed shut with pain. But I wouldn’t let something as simple as blindness ruin my chances of getting laid. I moved my hands down Xavier’s body, trying to find his dick.

“Ow!” he cried out when my elbow accidentally hit something.

Found it. I was a hazard not only to myself.

“Sorry, I got soap in my eyes,” I said, trying to make my way to the shower head to rinse out the soap.

My feet slipped. I braced myself for the fall, but then I felt Xavier’s hands around my waist, catching me at the last second. The way we were positioned felt like a couple doing a dip as a dance ended.

“You’re not very coordinated, are you?”

“Rude!”

“You know, I could just drop you,” he said, letting me fall a little bit as he spoke.

I wanted to smack him, but the way he was holding me—his hands around my hips and waist, holding me up like it was nothing? *Major* turn on.

“It’s cool, I’ve already fallen for you,” I replied.

He smirked. “Now that’s the kind of talk I like.” In seconds, he lifted me up like I weighed nothing and pulled me onto him, my legs wrapping tightly against his waist. He pushed me up against the wall, right under the showerhead, and kissed me again, rougher this time, grinding his pelvis against mine, making me moan with need.

He broke the kiss for a moment, keeping his face close to mine. “May I?” he asked, his voice almost pleading as his dick circled my entrance.

“Hmm, let me think about that,” I teased, tilting my head up.

Xavier let out a strangled moan. “*Please*, Cali,” he begged.

“Fine. Fuck me, Xavier.”

I didn’t need to tell him twice. As soon as the words left my mouth, he pounded into me in a fury, getting as deep as he could. I clung on for dear life, rocking my body to meet his every thrust.

“Xavier!” I screamed into his neck, kissing and sucking on his collar bone. “I’m going… I’m gonna…”

“Me too, tiger, me too. Just hold on. I want you to come with me,” he said, thrusting harder and harder, letting his inner wolf out. I was going to be sore later. Totally worth it.

With a dual strangled cry, we came together, exhausted and wet under the shower. For a while we clung to each other, high on sex, cooing *I love yous* until we were ready to stand on our own again.

Thank goodness I’d gotten the pill before leaving home. No wolf-bear babies for this Luna.

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After we’d dried off, we collapsed into bed utterly exhausted. In the dark, I stroked Xavier’s cheek as I watched him breathe. It sounded super creepy, but I got such pleasure from listening to him breathe, knowing he was safe. Knowing he was my very own hot wolf-bear, who’d fight actual bears for me.

We belonged together. Nothing could change that.

*BING.*

I jumped and turned to my phone, sitting on the bedside table. Silencing it, I saw a new message from Alex.

*Hey, Cal, when are u coming back? The police found tony’s body… he’s been murdered.*

**Episode 101**

TONY HAD BEEN *MURDERED?* OH MY GOD!

Oh wait, I knew that already…

But Alex hadn’t known. Not until now. My stomach twisted unpleasantly as I read and reread Alex’s text. Alex’s friend had been murdered, and it was kinda my fault*.*

I turned to look at Xavier, fast asleep and snoring. Well, if I had to be awake during this crisis, he should be too—especially seeing as said crisis was very much his fault.

“WAKE UP! WAKE UP!” I shouted, shaking his shoulder roughly with no luck. What? Had I banged him into a coma?

“WAKE UP! CRISIS TIME!” I shouted even louder, waving my phone in his face.

“Hmm, what?” Xavier moaned, his voice groggy from sleep. Normally I would’ve been fawning over how cute he looked waking up in the morning. How his eyes fluttered open, how he always had this dumb, confused look on his face that was too flipping cute. How he yawned and stretched out his big old bear arms.

Except right now, we were dealing with a dead body.

“Look,” I said, showing him the text message from Alex.

He read it quickly and yawned. Then he shot me an annoyed look. “You woke me up for that shit?”

My jaw almost dropped. “*THAT SHIT?* YOU MEAN THE ‘HEY-THE-BODY-YOU-SWORE-YOU-AND-JAY-COVERED-UP-HAS-BEEN-FOUND’ SHIT? YOU’RE SAYING THIS ISN’T A BIG DEAL TO YOU?” I grabbed my phone and sent a text to Alex

MURDERED?! omg!!! I’m so sorry! How??

“How can you be so casual about this?” I glared at Xavier. Geez, he could at least be a little concerned.

Xavier scoffed. “Come on, Cali, *everything* is a major crisis for you. You’re like the girl who cries wolf.”

“Says the wolf-bear,” I retorted.

He rolled his eyes. “I told you to stop calling me that.”

“You like it. You’re just too macho to admit it.”

*BING.*

I looked down at my phone. One new message from Alex.

“He was found in the woods, dismembered, three miles from the school,” I read out loud to Xavier, who looked like he was about to fall asleep again. I smacked him in the arm. “HEY! Can you please take this seriously? What if they find out? What if the cops start coming out here?”

Xavier shrugged. “So what if they do?”

I looked down at my phone and sent another text to Alex.

OMG!! Are you okay? :)

*Shit!*

\*Sorry. I meant :( :( :(

I turned back to Xavier. “Um, have you beenarrested for murder before? It’s not like getting a speeding ticket.”

Xavier rolled his eyes again. “You think this is the first time we’ve killed a human?”

His words stopped me cold. I’d always known wolf-bears had killed in the past, and I knew Xavier and Colton had a rather shady past with how they’d made money and such. I even knew what Xavier had done to Tony. But hearing it out loud, watching Xavier show zero remorse over killing someone I knew… Well, that was totally different. Sure, Tony may have been a total creepo sleazebag, but *dismembered?* Geez. A chill ran through me, so deep I started shaking. I thought I was going to be sick.

For the first time, I was realizing that I was in love with an actual killer.

And I had no idea what he was going to do next.

*BING.*

I looked down. Another text from Alex.

miss you wish you were here. could really use a friend.

“I’m much more concerned about how much you’re texting that dude,” Xavier commented.

I looked up. “What, are you going to kill me too?”

His face switched from sleepy and annoyed to awake and concerned. “Cali, what are you talking about?”

Suddenly I felt a very strong, very real urge to run. To get away from this wolf-bear as far as I could. I slid off the bed.

“Is that how I’m going to end up when I do something wrong, or when you get bored with me? Dismembered in the woods without anyone giving a shit?” I screamed, tears filling my eyes.

“Cali,” he said, reaching for my hand.

I pulled away like it was made of hot metal. “Don’t touch me. Don’t ever touch me again!” I hissed, making a run for the door. “You told me to leave, so I’m leaving.”

Xavier was blocking the door before I could reach it. “What the fuck is going on with you?”

“I don’t want to end up getting murdered by you!” I cried out, hot tears spilling down my face.

His expression softened. “Baby, I’d never let anything happen to you. I love you. We’re mates,” he cooed, cupping the side of my face. I sniffled loudly, and he said, “*Soulmates*, too.”

“I don’t want you to go to prison for murder,” I sobbed, feeling so stupid for crying.

He chuckled softly. “Baby, nothing is going to happen to me. I know this whole thing is difficult for you to understand, but you have to trust us—we know how to protect our own. Just leave it be. For me?”

I still felt uneasy about the whole situation, but Xavier pulled me into his arms, wrapping me in a warm hug. I breathed in his scent and felt better. Maybe I was being overly dramatic.

“Let’s go back to bed,” he whispered in my ear, his hand slipping between my legs. “I’ll make you forget all about this.”

I moaned.

\*\*\*

When Xavier and I finally untangled ourselves from each other, we managed to fall asleep quickly. I woke up first and went downstairs for some coffee, leaving him to sleep. Sure, we might have banged it out upstairs, but I still felt uneasy.

I found Lola in the kitchen, alone—thank god. I really needed to talk to my best friend.

“Morning,” she said with a wink. “Coffee?”

“Thanks,” I said, taking a cup. I took a sip and immediately spat it out. “THIS TASTES LIKE ASS!”

Lola shrugged. “Yeah. The boys need to do some serious grocery shopping. All the donuts are turning green.”

“I need to talk to you about something,” I started, putting the horrible coffee aside.

“If this is about the loud sex you had with Xavier last night and why you know what ass tastes like, please be aware that we all heard everything.”

“EW! NO! Alex texted me last night.”

I quickly filled her in but, much like Xavier, she didn’t seem too fazed. We were talking about MURDER HERE. What was everyone’s problem?!

“So what do I do about him?” I asked when I’d finished my story.

“Don’t do anything,” Lola said immediately. “Seriously, just let it go.”

I gaped at her. Was she for real? “My boyfriend ripped a person’s leg off and could go to jail for murder, and you’re telling me not to do anything?”

“Don’t fly off the handle,” she said, taking my hand. “Remember, humans don’t know we exist. They’ll think Tony was killed by a pack of wolves or something.”

It finally clicked. “You know, sometimes you make perfect sense,” I said, breathing a sigh of relief. At least *that* problem was solved.

“I know.” Lola smiled, and the two of us hugged.

“Ugh, get a room.”

We turned to see Maya, still dressed in yesterday’s clothes. I thought we’d gotten rid of her last night. I didn’t really get why she was sticking around if she and Colton hated each other so much.

“What are you still doing here?” I asked. “Shouldn’t you and Colton have killed each other by now?”

Maya ignored my question and poured herself a cup of coffee. She took a sip and spat it out. “This coffee tastes like ass.”

I turned to Lola. “Told you so.”

Lola stuck out her tongue at me.

I turned back to Maya. “You didn’t answer me,”

“I don’t answer to humans,” she replied, deadpanned. “Ever.”

And yet, *I* wasthe child.

“Okay, so what’s the deal with you and Colton?” Lola asked.

“I fucked him right before I ripped his throat out,” she responded casually.

“*What?*” Lola and I gasped out. While neither of us had *heard* Maya ripping Colton’s throat out last night, I absolutely wouldn’t put it past her. Girl was cold-blooded, even for a wolf-bear.

Before we could question her further, Colton entered the room, shirtless and humming to himself. “Morning, everybody,” he said, surprisingly cheerful.

Lola and I looked at each and had the exact same thought: they totally banged.

Colton’s cheerful mood soured when he saw Maya. “I thought you had somewhere to be.”

“You were never very good at thinking, were you?” Maya shot back. “Don’t start now.”

There was a question I’d been dying to ask Maya. “What happened to your pack?”

“They all died from drinking this shitty coffee,” Maya deadpanned.

I wanted to scream. None of these fucking wolf-bears ever gave straight answers.

“Why are wolf-bears so afraid to talk about stuff?” I demanded, my frustration building up to its boiling point. “You always try to change the subject. How does anything ever get done when all you guys do is lie and hide like scared puppies?”

“Calm down, Cali,” Lola warned quietly.

I paused to take a breath and finally recognized the tension filling the room. Everyone was looking at me.

*What did I say?*

“You know what would be fun?” Lola said, with fake brightness. “Doing a little day trip. Let’s go, Cali!”

Before I could utter another word, Lola dragged me to her car and started driving. Uh, pushy much?

“So, where are we going?” I asked as she drove down the highway.

Lola smirked. “It’s a secret.”

I groaned. “Ugh! I’m so sick of secrets! Don’t keep shit to yourself like everyone else. Majorly uncool!”

Lola rolled her eyes. “If I told you, you wouldn’t believe me.”

“Okay. In the past couple months, I’ve learned that wolf-bears exist—and that my best friend is a wolf-bear. Or half wolf-bear. Honestly, I think I’ll believe just about anything these days. What are you going to do? Bring me to a flock of vampires? A coven of witches? Fire-breathing dragons?

Lola didn’t say a word. Of *course* she didn’t.

FUCK THIS SHIT.

I slammed my fist down on the dashboard and, in a blind rage, I grabbed the steering wheel from Lola and swerved wildly, driving us into multiple lanes—right into a truck.

*AHHHHHHH!*

**Episode 102**

Okay. I know, I get it. What I did was pretty stupid. I mean, swerving a car wildly around a busy highway was hardly anyone’s idea of a smooth move. However, in my defense, I was sick and tired of being left in the dark. Of having so little control over my life that it continually felt like I was losing my mind. Maybe I *was* losing my mind.

I mean, I had just steered us in front of a freaking ginormous semi-truck.

“AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!” Lola and I shrieked.

Lola pushed me off her and took control of the wheel, barely avoiding the truck. She shot me a death glare. “Are you fucking crazy? You almost got us both killed!”

I shrugged nonchalantly, even though my whole body was shaking. “So what? Your secrets are *killing me*, Lola. It’s not so fun when someone else takes control, is it? Now you know how I’ve felt the last couple of months.”

Lola sighed. “I wanted to give you a fun surprise. But since you’re being such a pain in the ass, I’ll tell you where we’re going. But only if you promise to never do that again.”

I paused, thinking it over.

“Cali!”

“Fine,” I huffed out, not really meaning it.

“We’re going to the mall.”

I gasped in disbelief. “THERE’S A *MALL?*”

Lola smiled. “I knew you’d be excited.”

“WE’RE GOING TO A MALL? THERE’S A FUCKING MALL? I’VE BEEN TRAPPED IN SOME REMOTE HOUSE IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE ALL THIS TIME, AND ONLY *NOW* DO YOU TELL ME THERE’S A MALL? IS THAT WHERE THEY BUY ALL THEIR REPLACEMENT JEANS?” I asked, rapid fire. I hadn’t known there was anything to do in Oregon besides get lost in the woods. And visit Portland—but I didn’t know how far away we were from there.

Finally, civilization. Where no wolf-bears could drop in and ruin my day. Or my clothes.

Lola shrugged at my questions. “You never asked before.”

Instantly, my mood soured. I crossed my arms over my chest and huffed. “You’re just like them, I hope you realize. You never tell me anything.”

“That’s a bit dramatic, don’t you think? You’re my best friend, I tell you everything. I told you about losing my virginity. What my natural hair color is. Everything!”

I scoffed at that. “You’ve pretty much lied to me about everything—who you are, why we came here, even your name! I still don’t even know if half of the shit you’ve said to me is true. You still owe me. *Big*.”

“What do you want? Better tasting coffee?”

“I want answers. I want the truth.”

“It’d be easier to just give you the coffee.”

“Lola!”

She sighed. “Fine. What do you want to know?”

There were so many questions buzzing around in my mind, I didn’t know where to start. Wolf-bear things? Mating? Jeans?

“Tell me about the mark.”

“Who’s Mark?”

I could have easily slapped her. I was even tempted to grab the wheel from her again. “What the hell is wrong with you?” I snapped. “I’m talking about the Luna mark.”

“Oh, *that*. It’s the mark that identifies a Luna. Kinda like a brand logo, I guess.”

“Then if every Luna should have one, why hasn’t Xavier marked me? He tells me I’m his mate, that I’m supposed to be the Luna. But it feels like he’s just saying that. Lying to me so he can sleep with me, or for whatever sick game he’s playing.”

“Can you get out of your own head for five seconds and consider Xavier’s point of view?” Lola asked. “Being an Alpha is extremely dangerous, especially when you’re not in control of your pack yet. Xavier doesn’t want you to be targeted by Rogues, or other packs. He’s trying to protect you.”

“Seems like everything’s being done for my protection. Locking me in the house is for my protection. Keeping me in the dark is for my protection. Not making me a Luna is for my protection. Blah, blah, blah. You know, I *can* take care of myself. I’m a grown-ass adult.”

“Uh, no offense, but you haven’t exactly done a stellar job lately,” Lola said. “In fact, you’ve put yourself in far more dangerous situations than we could possibly dream up.”

“Name three times I’ve put myself in danger,” I challenged.

“Getting into a fight with Shaggy and using a spatula to defend yourself.”

“I hadn’t seen the knife!”

“Jumping out a window when you could have used the stairs.”

“That was totally circumstantial.”

“Almost getting eaten by a bear.”

“What, I’m supposed to be a wildlife whisperer now?”

“*And* that was all just last night.”

Hmph. Fair point. But also a rude one.

“Have youever considered that maybe I would stop doing stupid, dangerous shit if I actually knew what was going on around here?” I demanded. “I feel like I’m drowning while everyone around me is swimming just fine, thinking that *I’m the dumb one*. You don’t understand how hard this is for me. How new and confusing everything is. Especially when I have a mate who tells me he loves me and that I’m his mate, and then the next minute tells me he doesn’t want me as his mate. And that happens constantly! It’s a complete and utter mindfuck, Lola.”

We were silent for a moment. My breathing was heavy as I tried to swallow the huge lump in my throat.

“Xavier does really care about you a lot,” Lola ventured. “You know that, right?”

“He’s got a funny way of showing it,” I mumbled.

Lola gave me a sad look. “I wish I could help you more, but I don’t really know much more about the Luna mark than you do—or about Lunas, period.”

“And I know next to nothing,” I grumbled. “Instead of the mall, we should hit up the wolf-bear library. Do wolf-bears have libraries? You know, somewhere I could read about this stuff or watch a video or something?”

“What the hell are you talking about?”

I rolled my eyes in frustration. “Don’t you guys have a special place where you learned all this shit? Like Wolf-Bear University?”

I wished my college offered a class on wolf-bear history and culture. *That* would be a valid reason to go back to college. Maybe I should check the course catalog.

Lola rolled her eyes. “You know, if you want the other wolves in the pack to take you seriously, you’ve got to stop saying stupid shit.”

I rolled my eyes. Apparently, that was a no on Wolf-Bear University. “Well, what am I supposed to do, Lola?”

“I know!” she said brightly. “We should contact Mrs. Smith. She has to know everything!”

I gasped. Oh course! Mrs. Smith had to know everything there was to know about wolf-bears. She’d be able to explain what the Luna mark was and the finale. She’d probably be able to answer every question I had. Maybe she even knew how they were able to replace their clothes all the damn time.

“What are you waiting for?” I demanded. “Let’s call her now!”

“Uh, slow down, eager beaver,” Lola said. “I’m driving. Let’s just wait ‘til we get to the mall.”

But I couldn’t wait. I needed answers. Now that they were so close, I needed them immediately.

“PULL THE CAR OVER RIGHT THE FUCK NOW OR I SWEAR I’LL GRAB THE WHEEL AGAIN!” I screeched. I probably looked extremely childish in that moment. Thank god I was only behaving this way with Lola.

Lola gave me the side eye. “Can you cool it?”

She pulled the car into an empty parking lot.

“Ugh, fine,” she said. “Let’s just get this over with so we can actually enjoy our time at the mall, instead of worrying about you doing dumb shit. *More* dumb shit.”

“Thanks, love the support.”

Lola took her phone from her pocket. “We’ll FaceTime her.”

“Do you think she knows how to FaceTime? She’s so old.”

Lola gave me a look. “She’s really not that old; she's like forty. I’m sure she’ll be fine.” She pressed the call button. Forty? She seemed so much older than that.

Apparently, operating the video part of the call was trickier for Mrs. Smith than we’d imagined. The screen was completely dark.

“Mrs. Smith? Mrs. Smith? Can you hear us? It’s Lola and Caliana.”

“Oh, hello, girls. How nice to hear from you again. Just give me a second to put these scones in the oven. I’m making some croissants next, and just have my hands so full,” she said, moving her camera around. Instead of aiming at her face, she pointed it right at her feet then a countertop with baking supplies all over it. “This is the dough. I have to work on the chocolate ganache next.”

She started giving a tour of the cafe’s kitchen, despite my and Lola’s attempts to interrupt her. After what felt like forever, we got Mrs. Smith to point the camera at her face. Finally, the screen filled with her sweet features, and she pushed her purple cat-eye glasses up. Actually, she kinda looked like that hot aunt from the new Spider-Man movie now that I was staring at her face so close up.  
 “And that's why you should never preheat your oven early if you’re frosting an ice-cream cake,” she said, adjusting herself as she sat down on the counter. “Now, how can I help my favorite ladies?”

**Episode 103**

“I should warn you, there are some things I simply refuse to talk about,” Mrs. Smith said.

My stomach dropped. What if she refused to talk about the Luna mark?

“If you want to learn the secrets to my white chocolate mocha, forget it!” she continued. “I’m taking that to my grave.”

Why were wolf-bears always talking about death? If they kept talking about it so much, it was gonna make like Beetlejuice and appear.

“No, Mrs. Smith,” I said. “We didn’t call about that. I really just wanted to know about being marked.”

Her face scrunched up. “As a Luna?”

“Yes.”

“Well, you’re a human, so it’s complicated.”

“UGH! I’m so sick of people telling me it’s complicated rather than just explaining it to me!” I burst out. “Don’t wolf-bears have the brainpower to articulate things? Geez!”

Lola smacked me on the shoulder. “Stop being rude. Show some respect.”

I blushed sheepishly. “Sorry, Mrs. Smith, it’s been rough. I’m a little on edge.”

Mrs. Smith laughed. “Oh, it’s no trouble, dearie. I remember when I was your age, and everything felt like the biggest crisis ever to have happened. Now my crises mostly involve burnt caramel,” she rambled. “I’ll tell you what I know, Caliana. But unfortunately, I don’t know an awful lot about your exact situation. As far as I know, there’s never been a human Luna. Not even a hybrid Luna, if memory serves.”

“So, what does that mean if I get the mark?” I asked. “Will it hurt?”

I knew some tattoos could hurt really bad, and wasn’t a mark just the wolf-bear version of a tattoo?

I really didn’t want to explain to my parents that I went and got some weird wolf-bear mating tattoo on my shoulder. But maybe they’d be cool with it. They liked Xavier.

“I imagine the process *would* be very painful for you,” Mrs. Smith admitted. “It’s meant for our kind to bear. And I mean this with no offense to you, sweetie, but as a species, humans are pretty weak.”

SPECIES-IST!  
 “Let’s just say it’s probably not a wise idea,” said Mrs. Smith.

“Well, not much of what I’ve done in life could be considered a wise idea, Mrs. Smith,” I said. “So that’s it, just pain?”

I thought back to all the injuries I’d sustained in my life. The unexpected benefit of being impulsive and clumsy as fuck was that you became pretty durable. Falling, tripping, almost getting eaten by wolf-bears… Hell, I jumped out of a window last night and felt totally fine today. A tiny little Luna mark? Bring it on.

Mrs. Smith laughed. “It’s more than that, Caliana. There’s also a risk of death.”

I fought the urge to roll my eyes. “Of course there’s a risk of death.”

I knew Mrs. Smith wanted me to take this seriously, but like, *everything* came with a risk of death with these people. Fuck a wolf-bear? Risk of death. Become a Luna? Risk of death. Fight off a pissy wolf-bear with a spatula? Risk of death by embarrassment. It was all white noise to me by that point, like putting a warning label on a coffee cup. Yeah, I get it, coffee is hot.

And honestly? My life had been threatened so many times in the last couple weeks alone, it almost had no meaning to me anymore. It was basically like someone asking me about the weather.

Maybe I was getting a little *too* desensitized…

“Seriously, does *everything* you guys do involve death?” I demanded. “It’s honestly amazing that you’re still around as a species. Have you tried doing some quiet activities, like jigsaw puzzles?”

Mrs. Smith laughed. “Those can get pretty intense, too. We once lost three members doing a 2000-piece puzzle of kittens in the snow.”

“Oh my god,” I muttered.

“Anyway, once you’re marked, your souls are intertwined. Which means you’ll feel everything your Alpha feels—and that kind of power can kill you. When he shifts, it could kill you. If he gets injured, it could kill you. It’s definitely a risk, especially with the Lupo Finale…”

How the hell did she know about that?

I shook off my surprise. “I know, I know, more death and junk. But why wouldn’t Xavier tell me any of this?”

“Maybe he just doesn’t know,” Mrs. Smith offered. “Nobody knows what will happen if a human is marked and becomes a Luna. Anything’s possible. It’s just never been done before. One thing is for certain, though—once you’re marked, it can’t be undone.”

“Unless I die, right?”

“Aren’t you a bright one, dearie,” Mrs. Smith deadpanned. Then she smiled. “I hope that answered your questions, Caliana.”

“Um, sort of. I guess, thank you,” I said. Though I definitely still had more questions in mind.

There was a loud beeping noise on her end of the line. “Oh no! My scones are on fire. Gotta run. Good luck, Caliana!”

She hung up before we could even say goodbye.

I turned to Lola as she put her phone away. “Well, that was a real pick-me-up,” I said bitterly.

Lola shrugged as she pulled out of the parking lot and back onto the road. “Well, now you know *something*. Which is better than a few minutes ago when you were screaming about knowing nothing.”

“Yeah, I know that no one knows what happens when a human gets a Luna mark, except that I’m probably gonna die.” I really should have expected that answer—it was basically the same answer every wolf-bear gave me about everything. Still, I’d been hoping for something a little more optimistic.

“Oh, don’t talk like that,” Lola said. “The truth is that no one knows what will happen to you, because you’ll be the first human to have taken the Luna mark. You could die, you could be fine, you could gain magical powers and be the queen of us all. Caliana Hart: queen of the wolves.”

“Wolf-bears,” I corrected. But I liked the sound of the last option. “Maybe they’ll build a statue of me in the town square,” I deadpanned.

“Maybe,” Lola said. “If you survive.”

“See, even *you’re* grim about the whole situation.”

“I’m just being realistic,” Lola said. “Seeing all sides and everything.” She was always the logical one.

I sighed. “This would be a thousand percent easier if I were one of you.”

“What do you mean?”

I rolled my eyes. “Pay attention, please? If I were a wolf-bear, we wouldn’t be having this conversation. I’d be marked, I’d be a Luna, and I’d be kicking some serious butt.”

“Yeah, and maybe you’d be more coordinated,” she said.

I glared at her.

“Sorry,” she said. “Let’s do a little retail therapy. That’ll cheer us up.”

We pulled into the mall parking lot. It was a fairly shitty mall—it didn’t even have two floors. Still, I’d never been so happy to see a piece of crap in all my life. This place represented civilization, normalcy, and actual non-wolf-bear humans who didn’t look at me like I was stupid.

My stomach growled loudly. This place also meant food, and I was starving.

Lola and I walked into the mall, finding it almost empty. I questioned why until I remembered it was Wednesday, and everyone was either at school or at work.

*Perfect,* I thought*. No crowds to bother us.*

“Okay, what do you want to hit up first?” Lola asked, excited. Like we were teenagers again.

“The food court. I need a burger, fries, and a shake, ASAP,” I told her. We were out of food at home, and the ass-coffee hadn’t done much to satisfy me. I needed some serious nourishment after two rounds of sex with Xavier.

“I was thinking bras,” Lola countered.

“For lunch?” I questioned.

“No, dummy! To shop for! How about we do some serious shopping, work up an appetite, and then hit the food court?”

I groaned. “But I’m hungry now! I haven’t eaten since yesterday. I didn’t even eat at the barbecue.”

“But I’m hungry for something else,” Lola whined.

“Bras? You can’t eat bras, Lola.”

She rolled her eyes at me “No! I’m thinking about sex!”

“I’m not following.”

“Do I have to draw you a damn map?” Lola demanded, exasperated. “Guys like sexy underwear. And now that you and Xavier are sleeping together, it’s time for you to up your game.”

Huh. Xavier had seemed to like the few sexy outfits I’d found the nerve to put on.

“Well,” I said slowly. “I guess I do need some new stuff. Xavier ripped my bra in half our first time.” I giggled at the memory.

“Tell me about it,” Lola said, rolling her eyes. “Jay practically ate mine.”

“OMG, bras are not for eating!” I yelled. Honestly, what the hell was wrong with wolf-bears? They looked at me like I was stupid, but they ate bras? Hella messed up.

Lola shrugged. “Jay gets a little carried away. Gentleman in the streets, but Alpha in the sheets, amirite?”

“Ew, gross,” I said. “But how am I supposed to pay for these fancy panties? I’m just as broke now as I was when we started this crazy scheme.”

Geez, how fucked was that? I wasn’t a virgin anymore, but I was still broke? And with how fast wolf-bears tore through clothes, literally, I was going to need a higher budget.

“Fear not, bestie, for I have us covered,” Lola said, pulling out a platinum credit card from her purse. Xavier’s name was on the front. “No limits.”

LOLA, WHAT DID YOU DO?!

**Episode 104**

Lola took one look at my panic-stricken face and laughed. “The look on your face right now is worth the bullshit you pulled in the car. I always have an extra surprise up my sleeve.” She winked.

Alarms were going off inside my head. What if Xavier got pissed and tried to call the cops on us? We could be arrested for theft! I was so sick and tired of the constant threat of going to jail hanging over my head.

“TELL ME YOU DIDN’T STEAL THAT!” I yelled, then remembered I should probably keep my voice down. Just because the mall was basically deserted didn’t mean people couldn’t hear me.

Lola laughed again. “Yes, I stole it, and I transferred his bank account into yours,” she said, beaming.

I absolutely wouldn’t put it past Lola to do just that—she was great with computers and was also a borderline evil genius. Albeit one with great hair.

“WHAT?” I demanded. “WHY WOULD YOU DO THAT?” Xavier was going to kill me…

Lola just rolled her eyes. “Girl, you have bigger problems than surviving the mark. How are you ever going to be a Luna if you keep falling for my bullshit?”

I wanted to smack her so bad. I was already having a crappy day, *and* I was hungry—why did she have to pick on me? “You are such a jerk! How did you even get that credit card, anyway?”

“Your wolf-bear baby gave it to me after I told him we were going shopping. He thought it would be a good idea. I, for one, completely agree.”

I rolled my eyes and crossed my arms, my anger rising again. “Of course he thought shopping would be a good idea. It’s a great excuse to get me out of the house so he doesn’t have to answer any of my questions. WELL, HE CAN’T BUY ME OFF!” I said, pissed off that Xavier thought he could throw money at the problem in the hopes that it would go away—‘the problem’ being me. I may have tried to sell my virginity on the internet, but that didn’t mean I was some kind of gold-digger.

Lola shook her head. “You really have a talent of making the worst of a good situation. You always complain about how you never have enough money to shop. Now you have unlimited money, and you’re still not happy.”

“Because it’s dirty money!” I retorted. “It’s ‘shut-up-and-look-pretty-Cali’ money. I’m not something he can throw money at! He’s a jerk, and I don’t want to give him the satisfaction of spending his money.”

Plus, I didn’t want him to use it against me later.

“Come on, Cali, don’t be like this,” Lola pleaded, practically chasing me down the mall as I tried to storm off.

“I’m not taking anything from him,” I snapped. “Forget it!”

“If you’re pissed at him, then make him pay—literally,” she said, waving the card at me. For a moment, I hoped someone would just snatch it from her hands and run. “Let’s buy some sexy lingerie!”

I gaped at her. “Haven’t you been listening to me? Didn’t I just say I was mad at him? Didn’t I just say I wasn’t going to take any of his money?”

“Yes, but lingerie isn’t for you, nerd. It’s for him! Guys love it when you wear sexy lingerie.”

I looked at her skeptically. “Really? Because from my very limited experience, we’ll spend all this money buying the stuff, and then all that time getting ready, and for what? So they can literally rip it off? Sounds pointless.”

“Yeah, but the look on their face when they see you is one hundred percent worth it.” She winked.

I sighed. “I can’t even think about having sex with Xavier-master-secret-keeper right now.”

Well, that wasn’t completely true—I always wanted to have sex with Xavier. And did last night. Loudly apparently…oops.

“Then we’ll thirst trap the bastard!” Lola declared, taking my arm and leading me into the depths of the mall.

And that was how we ended up at Madame Maxine’s lingerie shop, and how I ended up in the most ridiculous outfit I’d ever put on my body in my life. I could barely look at myself in the mirror without feeling a hot rush of embarrassment. I was in a white, lacy push-up bra with thick white satin straps, and a pair of white lacy bottoms that barely covered me. It was just two lace fabric scraps, but it cost more than a fancy steak dinner. And honestly? I would have preferred the steak right then.

It wasn’t that there was anything wrong with the lingerie itself—it was just that I was the one wearing it. The first thing my eye was drawn to when I looked in the mirror was my stomach, and a wave of disgust washed through me. Ugh, those ugly red marks… I wanted more than anything to just rip out my stomach and get rid of those evil marks once and for all.

But Xavier liked them. He called me his tiger.

But what if he was just saying that? What if it was another lie he was telling me, another thing he was keeping from me?

I didn’t want to be at the mall anymore. I could feel tears welling up in my eyes, and I wanted to cry for like an hour. I wanted to be in a quiet place where I never had to look at my body again.

Lola called out from the other changing room. “How does it look? Hot as hell? Let me see!”

“Um, I don’t think so. I don’t like it,” I said, my voice coming out small and strained as I wrapped my arms around myself to cover my stomach. The red marks on my stomach together with the white panties was not a good combination. “I look like a candy cane.”

“Even better! Boys love candy!”

“Stop it. Now,” I said tightly. Why couldn’t Lola just take a damn hint sometimes?

“Why don’t you send Xavier a pic and see what he thinks? Tease him a bit.”

“You want me to sext him? Gross.” How was I meant to take a picture of myself when I looked so awful?

“You say that like I asked you to eat a dumpster meal,” Lola said. “Haven’t you ever sent a sext before?”

I hadn’t. Why would I ever have taken a sexy picture that would have: a) shown my stretch marks; b) featured me; c) featured me nearly naked in a format that could be on the internet forever; and d) put me at risk to receive a dick pic in return. Honestly, the sexiest thing I’d ever done was manage to not drool on Xavier while I slept.

“GROSS, NO!” I called back.

“Well, now’s a great time to start!”

“Just drop it, Lola, okay?” I groaned, not wanting to be half-naked anymore. All I wanted was to put my clothes back on and go eat some lunch.

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Apparently, Lola couldn’t drop it. Because seconds later, she opened my changing room door without asking, in typical Lola fashion. She never could take no for an answer.

“GET OUT!” I screamed.

Lola rolled her eyes. “Chill out, it’s not like I haven’t seen you naked before.” Then she noticed the tears in my eyes. “Are you okay?”

“I’m just not really loving my body right now,” I admitted, looking down at the floor.

“Oh. Why? You’re super-hot.”

I gestured frantically to my red marks.

“*Oh*.” Lola sounded surprised. “Because of your stretch marks?’

“Do you have to be so loud?” I hissed. “Do you want the whole store to hear you?”

“Girl, you are so sexy,” Lola said firmly. “You don’t have to hide that. And I promise, no one cares about your stretch marks except you. I highly doubt Xavier is thinking about them as he goes dow—”

“—Isn’t that enough?” I said harshly.

Her expression softened, and she hugged my shoulders. “I know you aren’t in love with your body, but maybe taking a sexy selfie will boost your body image? It always does for me.”

I looked at myself in the mirror. I guess one picture couldn’t hurt.

“Okay,” I said slowly. “But not with this outfit.”

“Oh! I know the perfect one!” she told me. In a flash she was gone, closing the door behind her. She returned a moment later with another outfit. This one was red and black with black lace covering the stomach area. “How about this one?”

“Perfect,” I said. “Now get the hell out.”

What *wasn’t* so perfect was the matter of taking the photo. My selfie skills were pretty poor. I didn’t do outfits of the day. I didn’t take selfies. In fact, I only really used my front-facing camera to check my hair and teeth.

So naturally, sexting was an experience of trial and error. Mostly error, considering I kept dropping the damn phone. I almost got the perfect photo—until I tripped over myself, ruining the shot.

“KEEP IT SEXY!” Lola told me, from the other side of the door.

“NOT HELPING!” I shouted back. Ugh, I felt so silly doing these dumb poses. And for what? To have Xavier send a dick pick back? Gross.

Still, one photo wouldn’t hurt…

I managed to get one photo—mostly of my face, with one shoulder visible. Yeah, give him a little mystery. At least it would shut Lola up.

I hit send before I could talk myself out of it. Almost immediately, my phone started buzzing.

Incoming call from: Xavier.

Whoa! That was quick. I clicked the answer button and tried to put on my sexiest voice.

“Hello?”

“Come home,” Xavier’s voice rumbled on the other end of the line. “Now.”

**Episode 105**

Wow, that was fast. Maybe Lola had been right about the whole sexy photo thing…

“Did you hear me?” Xavier repeated, his voice animalistic.

“Yeah, we’ll be back soon. Can’t wait to see you,” I said and hung up. How was that for being a tease? If he got turned on from just seeing a picture of my face, wait ‘til he saw the rest of my sexy outfit—in the flesh.

“Everything okay in there?” Lola’s voice rang out.

“You were right; I sent him a pic.”

“You sexted Xavier!” she gasped out. I really wished she could use her inside voice when she was talking about stuff like that. It was embarrassing.

“You told me to do it!”

“But I didn’t think you’d *actually* do it!” Lola retorted. “Good for you, putting yourself out there! Let me see it!”

I rolled my eyes and lifted my phone over the wall so Lola could see.

“How is that sexy?” she demanded. “You can’t even see the lingerie. Come here, I’ll take the pic. I should’ve done it in the first place.”

“Excuse you, my picture is very sexy! So sexy that Xavier wants me to come home right away,” I told her smugly.

“I told you! You’re gonna get some tonight—*again*. But don’t head back right away. You want him to pay for keeping stuff from you? Keep your sexy body away from him and see how he likes it.”

She did have a point.

“Besides,” Lola continued, “we came all this way, we might as well get all the shopping done that we can.”

“Okay, fine, but only if we get lunch!” Right on cue, my stomach started to growl.

“Fine,” she said. “But I have a few more things to try on.”

I rolled my eyes at her, trying to imagine what ridiculous outfit she was trying on as I took off my own lingerie. But something didn’t feel quite right. My body was overcome with a sudden chill, leaving me with goosebumps—even though the temperature in the store was warm. It was weird, like feeling haunted mixed with something almost familiar. Suddenly, it felt like someone was looking at me. On instinct, I checked to make sure that no one was in the dressing room with me.

*You’re just being paranoid,* I told myself. After last night and all the wolf-bear stuff that had been going on, I was probably a little on edge.

But the goosebumps didn’t go down.

I was just about to reach for my clothes when I heard a flurry of stomping feet and a high voice shouting. “Sir, you can’t go in there!”

Suddenly, the door opened wide, and I screamed.

“Well,” said a smooth voice. “I guess we’re even now.”

Greyson was standing in front of the doorway like the world’s biggest perv as I tried to cover my naked body as best as I could. I tripped as I scrambled to grab my clothes, and he tried to steady me, but I slapped his hands away. When our eyes met, a jolt went through me. They were so silver, they had to be contacts or something.

Oh, and I was STILL NAKED. IN FRONT OF GREYSON, MY BOYFRIEND’S MURDEROUS HALF-BROTHER.

“WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU DOING HERE?” I screamed. “GET OUT!”

At my shouting, Lola burst in. “WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON? WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE!”

Even in my shock and humiliation, I couldn’t help but let out a laugh at Lola’s outfit. She was wearing a pastel purple bustier, covered in cream and rhinestone feathers. I mean, what the hell?

My laughter died pretty quickly as I realized that every clerk in the store was looking at me. I cursed inwardly as my cheeks heated with embarrassment.

“EVERYONE, SHUT YOUR EYES!” I shouted.

Seriously, shouldn’t they have been more focused on getting security to throw out the creepy douche canoe than staring at me?

Lola grabbed Greyson’s arm to try to pull him out of the changing room, but he shook her off with ease.

“I’ve come to collect you,” he said, still leering at me.

Quickly, I grabbed a plastic hanger from the hook and waved it at him threateningly. I wasn’t going to let some weirdo, murdering wolf-bear take me anywhere. Especially when I was naked.

Greyson raised one of his eyebrows. “Seriously, a hanger? What is it with you and terrible weapons?”

He had a point. Ugh, I really needed to start carrying a weapon if I was going to face danger every single day. I threw the hanger back onto the floor, still struggling to cover myself. Ugh, this was so embarrassing.

And wait, how did he know about my weapon choices?? He must have been lurking, watching us at the barbecue…

“So, are you here to kill me?” I asked. That was usually every wolf-bear’s agenda wherever I was concerned.

Greyson rolled his eyes, looking very much like his brother. “Yeah, you’ve figured out my master plan. I purposely didn’t let you crack your empty head after you fell three stories. I wanted to murder you at the mall lingerie shop instead.”

“He does have a point,” Lola commented.

“Maybe you just wanted to see me naked before you murdered me,” I snapped.

“While that was a debatable bonus, no,” Greyson said. “We have to get out of here, right now.”

“Actually, *you* have to get out of here, so I can change. Right now,” I ordered, slamming my door shut. I really hoped Lola changed out of the French mistress thing before we left.

We really should’ve just gone to the food court.

As I got dressed, I felt myself getting angrier and angrier about the whole situation. About the utter embarrassment I was feeling. Greyson had exposed me to the whole store when I was already feeling so insecure. Didn’t wolf-bears know how to knock? And he’d insulted me too. A debatable bonus?! How dare he!!

My whole body was shaking so bad, I thought I was either going to cry or punch something. Preferably the latter, and preferably Greyson’s face.

There was also another nagging question in my mind: how the hell had Greyson even found us, anyway? Did we have a tracking device on us or something? Honestly, I wouldn’t have been surprised. Maybe he was one of those creeper dudes who stalked girls. Maybe he was a creeper wolf-bear.

I finished getting dressed and flung open the dressing room door. Lola and Greyson were waiting for me, both of them dressed in actual clothes, thank god.

“Shall we?” he said before taking off toward the exit.

“Oh wait,” I said, realizing I was still holding the lingerie set. I didn’t know the next time I’d see a mall, and the set *was* pretty cute. “I have to buy these.”

Greyson turned and looked at me like I’d just said I needed to go crawl into a dumpster. “Are you really that dense? I told you that we need to go! Right now!”

*Oh, here we go*, I thought. *Another fucking macho wolf-bear telling me what to do and where to go.*

‘Come here, Cali’, ‘stay here, Cali’—like I was a fucking golden retriever. Well, I was sick of it.

“No,” I snapped. “I’m so tired of everyone in your stupid family telling me what to do. Especially when you all like to keep me in the dark. SO IF I WANT TO BUY SOME DUMBASS PANTIES BEFORE YOU TAKE ME GOODNESS KNOWS WHERE, I WILL BUY THE DUMBASS PANTIES!” I shouted. I knew I looked very much like a twelve-year-old having a temper tantrum, but none of these people had the right to judge me. They had just seen me naked, after all.

Greyson just rolled his eyes, his jaw set in an annoyed scowl. He reached into his back pocket, pulled out his wallet and slapped a few bills into the sales clerk's hands. “Keep the change,” he told the astonished clerk before turning to me. “Now let’s *go*.”

Lola and I followed him out to the parking lot.

“Give me your keys,” he told Lola, holding out his hand.

“What?” said Lola, struggling to keep up with his long strides. “Why?”

“Have you not been listening to me? We have to go,” he snapped. “I said, give me your car keys.”

Quietly, Lola handed them over.

“Why can’t we take your car?” I asked. He ignored me and kept walking. I persisted. “Where the hell did you park, anyway?”

When he didn’t speak, I stopped in my tracks. I wasn’t going to get in a car with this creep without a solid reason why.

“Slow down, wolf-bear,” I said. “Who the hell put you in charge of anything? Why are we leaving, anyway?”

“I’ll explain on the way,” he said, walking over to Lola’s car.

I crossed my arms. “Explaining doesn’t really run in your family. You’re gonna tell us what the hell is up, and you’re gonna tell us now.”

Greyson stopped and turned to me, his face twisted with fury, his eyes fierce. His lips pulled back into a snarl.

*Fuck*, I thought. *I just poked the wolf-bear.*

“Don’t you understand?” he spat, through clenched teeth. “If I can find you, so can they.”

**Episode 106**

*They?* Who the hell were *they?* Another vague wolf-bear answer. I was absolutely fuming over everything that had just gone down at the store, and I wasn’t going with him—not without a better reason, at least.

“Who are ‘they’?” I demanded. “I’m not going with you! I—”

Before I could say another word, Greyson let out a low growl of annoyance. It wasn’t like Xavier’s where you knew he was only annoyed. No, Greyson’s sounded downright bloodthirsty. He grabbed me and Lola by the arms and dragged us toward the car. “I do not have the time or the patience for the childish game you’re playing. Get in the fucking car and shut the fuck up.”

He opened the car and pushed me and Lola into the backseat, slamming the door behind us.

“You don’t have to manhandle us!” I hollered as he got into the driver’s seat.

“And you don’t have to act like a loud-mouthed brat, but here we are.”

“Where are we going?” I demanded. “Who’s ‘they’? How did you even find us?” My brain buzzed with questions that needed to be answered and needed to be answered *now*.

“How is it possible that someone I share blood with has any interest in a ratty, rambling, incessantly chattering—”

“OKAY, I GET IT! You can stop with the nursery rhyme insults now,” I told him. I reached over and snatched the car keys from his hand, just as he was about to put them in the ignition. “You’re not starting this car until I get some answers.”

He turned around to face me, his silver eyes dark with fury, looking more wolf-like than ever before. “You won’t be able to hear my answers when your head is torn clean from your body!” he snapped. “Do you think I care that my brother would be angry with me for doing that? Huh? Give me the keys.”

His voice was so dark, so menacing and low… Instinctively, I knew that if I kept my act up, I might actually get my head ripped off. I dropped the keys back into his hand without saying another word.

“Thank you,” he growled out. He put the keys in the ignition and turned to face us again. “It might be in your best interest to buckle your seatbelts,” he warned.

We barely had time to do so before he peeled out of the mall parking lot, gunning it down the street.

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If there was one thing you needed to know about Greyson, it was that he was probably the worst driver in the history of driving. He shot over the speed limit before we even left the parking lot. He ran through not one but *three* red lights. He drove on the sidewalk, almost hitting a group of children crossing the street. I doubted he even knew what a stop sign was, considering the way he breezed past them. Maybe I’d been right about wolf-bears never going to the DMV—it was abundantly clear that Greyson had never taken wolf-bear driver’s ed.

Lola and I clung onto each other for dear life as the mad wolf-bear continued to speed down the highway like he was auditioning for the next Fast and Furiousmovie.

“Are you crazy?” I screeched. “Do you even have a license? You’re the worst driver I’ve even been in a car with, and I’ve been in a car with Colton! Have you actually driven a car before? You’re a fucking menace to society!”

“Lola, please tell your annoying little friend to shut the hell up, or I will stuff her in the trunk.”

“Good luck with that,” Lola said. “Just be thankful she hasn’t taken the wheel yet and run us off the road.”

“Hey!” I cried out.

“That was legit a thing you did, just an hour ago!”

“You didn’t have to tell him that!”

Honestly, me snatching the wheel would have been better than Greyson’s nightmare driving. We almost hit an ice cream truck!

Greyson looked at Lola through the mirror and gave her a pointed glare that made my skin crawl.

Lola turned to me. “Maybe we should listen to him… Unless we want to end up as road pizza.”

I scoffed. I thought Lola had better sense than to trust the crazy wolf-bear. “Listen to him? Uh, *no*. He just kidnapped us.” I wondered if we were too old for an Amber Alert.

“It’s not kidnapping if you come willingly,” Greyson pointed out. “Know the law, love.”

“You pretty much threatened us into getting into the car with you. You also threatened to rip off my head. Call me alarmist, but I’d classify that as kidnapping.”

“I’m not kidnapping you. I’m saving your pathetic little lives. So sit back and enjoy the ride. You can thank me by shutting the hell up,” he said as a truck horn blared.

Greyson swerved to avoid the truck, just barely missing it. “Fucking prick,” he growled out as he continued to drive, flipping off a passing school bus.

*Takes one to know one*, I thought bitterly.

As we continued, I noticed he kept glancing in the rearview mirror, looking almost nervous. What was he afraid of?

“What are you looking for?” I demanded. “Will you finally tell us who’s after us?”

“Rogues,” Greyson hissed, pushing the speed limit even further than I thought it could go. We had to have been doing over a hundred miles, by that point. That couldn’t be good for the car.

*Rogues*. The word sent shivers down my spine.

“Wait. Aren’t you a Rogue?” I asked. “You’re kidnapping us, so you can save us from… you? Rogue wolf-bears like you? That’s a good one.” Did he really think I was dumb enough to fall for that? I might not have known a whole hell of a lot about wolf-bears, but I also wasn’t born yesterday.

“Stop calling us that!” Greyson hissed.

“We can discuss that later,” Lola said. “Right now, I’d like to know what Rogues you’re talking about, exactly. There are a lot of them.”

So there were even more Rogues than I’d thought. I groaned inwardly. Lovely. More stuff to learn and be confused about. I should’ve started taking notes. Or at least writing down my questions. Maybe Mrs. Smith would give me some formal wolf-bear lessons.

“Thanks to my brother’s foolish declaration at the barbecue last night, the word has already spread about the Lupo Finale. Now every pack, lone wolf, and Rogue knows about it.”

“Hey, the only person who can call Xavier foolish is me,” I protested. But that did explain how Mrs. Smith had known about the finale. Did wolf-bears have a secret social network where they got all their information? Like wolf-bear Twitter or something? What would that even be called? Growler? Wolfer?

“Does she ever stop talking?” Greyson growled out.

“Um, I’m sitting right here,” I said.

“And you’re still not shutting up.”

Rude. What happened to the nice Greyson, who broke my fall and bandaged me up? I could handle that Greyson, not *Fast and Furious* Greyson.

“Now, do you want me to explain, or do you want to keep going on about nothing?” he demanded. “Because I cannot focus with your incessant jabbering.”

“Fine,” I huffed out.

“The Redwood pack used to be the most respected in the country,” Greyson said. “And the most feared.”

I nodded, remembering Xavier’s awful father, the things he’d done. I shuddered.

“Every Rogue who thinks he’s better suited to lead will come to the finale. Which means they’ll be challenging Xavier. Some of them will have been training for this their entire lives.”

I didn’t like where this was going. Lola had said that a Lupo Finale could be a fight to the death. Xavier had said actual deaths were rare, but when there were so many fighters, things could easily get ugly.

I swallowed roughly as Greyson continued.

“They’ll look for Xavier’s Achilles Heel—his most vulnerable spot. And that, love, is you. If they kill the Alpha’s mate, he’ll be weak, and they’ll easily defeat him.”

It all clicked together in that moment. The more I was around Xavier, the more vulnerable I was making him. Lola was right—an Alpha in the presence of his mate had his mind clouded. And my being human didn’t help matters, either. The only way I could defend myself was by waving around plastic objects like a dork. But if I was making Xavier vulnerable, what was I supposed to do?

Before I could even start to unravel that question, a roar of motorcycle engines interrupted my thoughts.

Lola and I turned around and saw a whole gang of motorcycles surrounding us, about to close in. There must have been over a dozen of them, the riders all wearing leather jackets, all with wolves painted on the sides of their bikes. Lola and I clung to each other again, abruptly terrified for our lives.

“WHAT’S GOING ON?” I cried out.

Greyson cursed under his breath. “They’ve found us.”

**Episode 107**

This was not good. Like, *really* not good. I mean, getting chased down by a gang of bloodthirsty wolf-bears on motorcycles was never an ideal situation for anyone, but this was especially terrible.

We. Were. *Screwed.*

“WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?” I demanded.

Greyson answered by stomping his foot on the accelerator, causing me and Lola to lurch forward in our seats. “We’ll have to outrun them. If we can get back to the house, we’ll stand a better chance of defending ourselves. We’ll be on our own turf.”

“We can’t just outrun them!” I shouted.

“Watch me,” Greyson said, weaving between cars and trucks. The sound of car horns was almost deafening.

“It’s not a good move for us, politically,” I argued.

“I don’t believe I asked for your opinion on the politics of wolf packs, love,” Greyson growled.

I rolled my eyes. “If we run away, then we’re showing them that we’re weak, that *Xavier* is weak. Then more people will come after us and try to kill me, because they’ll think I’m easy prey. And then more wolf-bears will enter the Lupo whatever if they think Xavier is weak. We have to take our stand, right here and now! I will *not* be viewed as a coward.”

Greyson said nothing. He must have realized that I had a point—even if he was too much of a stubborn prick to admit it out loud. Ugh, boys.

“Plus,” I added, “they’re catching up to us anyway.”

As those words left my lips, the motorcycle gang was close to us, almost touching our bumper. “Pull over into that clearing and let’s show them what we’re made of!”

“Yeah, but, Cali, you’re *human*,” Lola pointed out. “They are not. They can tear you apart like a dog chewing a piece of meat without breaking a sweat. It’s not safe.”

There was a loud, sputtering sound that broke up the conversation. The car jerked as smoke started to pour out of the engine, making it nearly impossible to see.

Greyson cursed loudly, slapping the dashboard. “Fuck! We don’t have a choice now! The stupid piece of crap overheated.”

“Don’t call my baby’s car crap!” Lola yelled.

Somehow, Greyson managed to pull the car over to the clearing, just before it died completely.

He turned around to look at us, his expression completely serious. “You two are staying here. Don’t you dare do anything stupid. Don’t even *think* about doing anything stupid. Because if you *do* do something stupid, I swear I will decapitate you.” He stared right at me when he said that last part.

I opened my mouth to speak, but he was already out of the car. I watched as he shifted into his wolf form, mid-run. The sound of his bones cracking hung in the still air as his flesh transformed into gray fur.

Greyson was a major creeper, but I couldn’t help but be impressed with how strong and sleek his wolf was. How it leapt and ran at the wolf-bear gang, only three of whom had chosen to stop. But those three were tall, muscular, and looked mean as hell.

This was going to get real ugly, real quick.

The sound of a car door opening broke me from my trance. I turned to see Lola jumping out of the car, her fists up and ready for action.

I ran after her. “What the hell are you doing?” The air was punctuated with the sounds of cracking bones. The wolf-bears were almost ready.

“Get back in the car, Cali,” Lola said sternly, looking like she was ready to fight.

“No, *you* get back in the car! I’m not gonna let my best friend get eaten by a motorcycle gang of wolf-bears!”

“Yeah, and I’m not letting my best friend get eaten by a gang of deadly Rogues either. Get in the car, Cali! Greyson may have some Alpha blood, but there are three of them out there. He needs my help.”

“But you can’t shift on demand like Greyson!” I protested. “It’s too risky. You could get seriously hurt!”

“WILL YOU SHUT UP?” Lola snapped. “I’m trying to shift, and I can’t do that with all your talking. Just get back in the car!”

I shook my head. I couldn’t leave her out here in her human form while I hid in the car like a coward. She was either coming back to the car with me, or I was staying out there with her.

But I really wanted to get back in the car.

“If you’re gonna start shifting, you better do it soon,” I said. The growling was getting louder.

Frantically, I looked around for a weapon. Anything I could use to defend myself. I spotted a mid-sized jagged rock next to my right foot. It wasn’t much, but it was also probably the best weapon I’d used in a long time. I mean, it wasn’t plastic, so that was a step up.

There was rumbling of snarls and growls, and the three Rogue wolf-bears approached Greyson. I could see them clearly now. They were all red and huge—about the same size as the bear from last night. One alone would’ve been trouble enough, but three huge wolf-bears against one-and-a-half wolf-bears and a human?

I was gonna need a bigger rock.

I grabbed another rock that was about the same size as the first. With a rock in each hand, I felt slightly better. I waved them around as threateningly as I could until Lola told me to knock it off.

Greyson got ready to pounce while I backed up against the car, Lola at my side. I wished I had wolf-bear powers—I needed to seriously discuss this with Xavier. If I survived that is. The Rogues were getting closer.

“Um, Lola?” I said. “No rush, but if you’re gonna shift, I would suggest doing it now?”

“What do you think I’m trying to do over here?” Lola snapped. “A crossword puzzle?”

“Would it help if you thought about dog stuff?” I suggested. “Or maybe wolf stuff? Like fur. Paws. The moon. Bones? Do wolves like bones the way dogs like bones? Or—”

Lola turned and gave me an angry glance. “SHUT. *UP.*”

I was about to say something when I was distracted by Greyson’s howl. I watched in horror and excitement as he leapt into the air and charged at the closest Rogue wolf, going right for his throat.

I needed to help.

Without many other options, I threw my rock, aiming at one of the Rogue wolf-bears.

I had never been good at sports. Softball, volleyball, soccer, playing catch with my dad in the backyard—all terrible. My aim had always been to blame, always way off target. I wasn’t even allowed to do archery in gym class in high school, not after I shot an arrow into the teacher’s ankle instead of the target.

So, it should’ve been no surprise when the rock sailed right past the wolf-bear I was aiming at and ended up hitting Greyson in the leg.

Shit.

The rock caused Greyson to lose his balance, and he fell off the Rogue he’d been attacking. The other Rogue took this as an opportunity to gang up on him, the second Rogue on his tail.

“Sorry!” I cried out, feeling stupid and embarrassed. Every time I tried to help, I made everything a million times worse. Why was I such a fuck-up all the time?

But I didn’t have time to feel sorry for myself. Because while the two Rogues were ganging up on Greyson, the third had decided to come after me. I looked into his blood-red eyes and started shaking with pure fear. I was too afraid to move, even to throw my second rock at him, afraid that any sudden movement would have him ripping out my throat in five seconds flat.

I was so freaking screwed.

Suddenly, Lola was there, standing between me and the Rogue. He growled viciously, baring his huge fangs.

**Episode 108**

Lola turning into a wolf-bear was truly a sight to behold. Her blonde hair and tanned skin were replaced with soft brown fur. Her bones shifted, and she moved into a killer wolf stance. Her lips pulled back into a snarl, showing her own teeth. She was ready to rumble.

MY BEST FRIEND WAS SO AWESOME.

I gasped as Lola leapt into the air and tackled the third Rogue, biting him deeply in the shoulder.

I watched the two of them fight, fur flying as they bit and scratched at each other. I looked for an opportunity to throw my rock at one of the Rogue wolf-bears, but they were all moving so damn fast. Couldn’t they just stand still for a second so I could get my shot in?

*BANG!*

I jumped as one of the Rogues was thrown onto the car, denting the hood. Even in wolf form, Greyson looked pretty pleased with himself that he’d been able to fling a full-grown wolf-bear into a car with nothing but his teeth. I couldn’t blame him; I would’ve been cocky too.

I needed to do something. I couldn’t just stand here and wait with a rock in my hand while the others were fighting. I looked like such a loser.

I was also worried about Lola. She wasn’t supposed to be in her wolf-bear form for too long, and she was getting attacked by a huge-ass Rogue. Greyson could fend for himself, but Lola needed help.

Maybe there was something in the car I could use as a weapon?

THE CAR! Maybe I could start the car and run them over. I’d played enough *Grand Theft Auto* in middle school that I felt confident enough in my ability to run over some Rogue wolf-bear ass.

I raced for the driver’s side door, barely missing a swipe from the third Rogue as Lola tackled him.

I dove in and slammed the door shut. The keys were still in the ignition—my only lucky break today.

*Please work, please work*, I begged as I turned the key.

The engine groaned loudly, but it didn’t start.

*Come on!* I turned it again. More groaning, then dead silence.

“COME ON, YOU STUPID PIECE OF CRAP!” I shouted, slapping the dashboard as I tried the key again.

That time, it didn’t even groan. Must’ve been pissed at me.

From the front seat, I watched the battle unfolding. Greyson was taking on the same two Rogues at one, red fur mixing in with his silver. Lola was still fighting the third Rogue. He took her roughly by the neck and flung her clean across the field. She landed on the roof of the car.

*CRASH!*

I screamed as the roof buckled.

*CRACK!*

The weight of the collapsing roof was too much for the windshield, and it exploded. I covered my eyes as glass scattered in all directions.

As I tried wiping the glass from my eyes, the car jerked again. I looked up to see the third Rogue, inches away from my face. His blood-red eyes met mine. He let out a low snarl.

Greyson growled, moving closer to the other wolf, but it was too late—the Rogue was too close, I could smell his stinky wolf-bear breath, hot on my face. Disgusting. Brush your teeth, wolfy.

*HOWWWWWWWWWWWWLLLLLL.*

Everyone stopped to listen to the distinctive sound in the distance. As quickly as they’d arrived, the three Rogues scattered, leaving their motorbikes behind.

*What the hell?*

“YEAH, YOU’D BETTER RUN!” I yelled after them. “I WAS ABOUT TO KICK ALL YOUR ASSES!”

Shit, Lola!

I scrambled out of the ruined car to check on Lola, still on the roof. She was still in her wolf-bear form.

“It’s okay, Lola, they’re gone!” I told her. “You can shift back now.”

But Lola didn’t shift back into her human form. Instead, she leapt down from the roof and shook her whole body, like a dog trying to get rid of water.

Oh, that was not good. Why wasn’t she changing back? Maybe it just took her longer to manage…

Greyson was still in his wolf-bear form too, his furry body covered in scratches and blood. For a moment, I was overcome with the urge to pet him. I almost reached out my hand.

Fortunately, he shifted back into his human form before I could do anything stupid.

And of course, he was naked.

I quickly turned away, covering my eyes. “Here we go again,” I muttered. “*Gross.* We should’ve bought extra jeans back at the mall!”

Greyson was not amused. His mouth was set in a tight line, his eyes on the mountains. “We have to go. It isn’t safe here.”

“Why did they leave?” I asked.

“Someone called them back. That was a retreat howl. But that doesn’t mean they’ve given up. Chances are they’ll be back with reinforcements.”

“Yeah, leaving is going to be an issue,” I said, pointing to the banged up, steaming, smoking, glass-filled car. “How are we going to get home? I doubt that car will work. Or even be street legal anymore.”

“Yeah, you might want to take a step back,” Greyson warned, taking a few steps away from the car.

“Why?”

“You’ll see.”

“Why don’t you—”

*BAM!*

The car burst into flames and exploded. Holy shit!

I jumped back to avoid the flames and ended up falling into a naked Greyson.

“How many times do I have to keep catching you, love?” Greyson said, half-annoyed, half-amused as he grabbed me.

“DON’T TOUCH ME! YOU’RE NAKED!” I yelled, scrambling away from him.

My reaction only caused him to chuckle. “You weren’t complaining last night.”

“I WAS, TOO! I HAVE DONE NOTHING BUT COMPLAIN ABOUT YOUR NAKEDNESS,” I yelled, stomping my foot. “And what about Lola? She’s still a wolf-bear! Shouldn’t she have changed back by now?”

Greyson brushed it off. “It’s better that way. We can run back to the house by cutting through the woods. We’ll worry about Lola once we’re safe.” He turned to me. “I’m going to shift back now. When I do, get on my back and hold on tight.”

Was he for real? I wasn’t gonna ride him. I had a mate! He might have saved my life at the party, but that had been a one-time thing. Plus, he was naked!

“No way,” I said flatly.

Greyson snarled. “Do it or I’ll leave your ass here, and you can use your rocks to fight off the Rogue wolves. Your choice, love.”

Before I could answer, he shifted back into his gray wolf. He looked at me and gestured for me to get on.

I sighed. It wasn’t like I had any other options.

“Fine. I’ll do it. But I’m not going to like it,” I said stubbornly as I climbed onto his back.

Before I could grab hold, he took off running. I should have taken my chances with the Rogues.

I didn’t know the first thing about wolf-bear riding etiquette. Like, was I meant to just hold onto his fur, or would it be okay to grab his skin, too? Why hadn’t he told me what to do *before* he turned?

Still, I had to admit, he was pretty solidly built. It was easy to hold onto him. Plus, he felt so soft and warm, it was like hugging a dog. A *giant* dog.

I turned back to make sure Lola was following and was relieved to see that she was. At least if I fell off, she’d be able to pick me back up. Or attack Greyson if he tried to eat me.

Greyson moved quickly through the woods but not gracefully. I ended up getting smacked by a couple of branches, and I was unconvinced that the hits were accidental.

To protect myself from getting knocked off by another branch, I pressed closer to Greyson, wrapping my arms around his furry neck, trying not to breath in his smoky scent but doing it anyway.

I should never have gone shopping. I should have just stayed in bed with Xavier all day, doing nothing. That way, none of this would have happened.

I let go of Greyson’s neck to check on Lola again, just as Greyson jumped over a fallen tree.

“SHIT!” I yelped, losing my grip on his fur and nearly falling off.

Greyson growled. “I told you to hold on tight!”

I tightened my grip around his neck, and then it hit me. “Wait? How did you say that? I thought wolf-bears couldn’t speak when they were shifted.”

Greyson didn’t answer. Maybe I’d just been hearing things. Maybe he hadn’t said anything at all. Ugh, I needed some food and a nap.

I could see the house in the distance, but instead of feeling excited, I felt goosebumps on my skin—the same feeling I’d had in the dressing room at the mall.

*Weird,* I thought, making a mental note to get some food as soon as possible.

By the time we arrived at the house, Xavier was waiting on the porch. My heart skipped a beat when I saw him. My mate.

He burst into a sprint as soon as he saw me.

“CALI!” he cried, pulling me off Greyson and hugging me. For the first time since this whole day began, I finally started to feel safe.

“I was so worried about you,” he said, relief flooding his voice.

“Apparently you and your little girlfriend don’t know how to say ‘thank you’,” Greyson said, shifting back into his human form. Lola was still in wolf-bear mode.

“What the *hell* happened?” Xavier asked, taking a step toward Greyson, fists clenched.

I was about to open my mouth to tell them to stop whena thunderous roar of growls erupted around us.

We all turned to see a ring of snarling Rogues stepping out of the woods.

We were surrounded.

**Episode 109**

The wolf-bears had us surrounded, and they were inching closer. Instinctively, I moved toward Xavier, wondering just how the heck we were going to get out of this one. There were more wolf-bears than we’d fought in the clearing, and they all had big, nasty teeth and angry red eyes.

Yikes!

“Cali,” Xavier said, his voice low, with a forced aura of calm. He wasn’t looking at me but at the wolves heading toward us. “Get in the house. Now.”

“No way, I’m not leaving you.” I was confident that Xavier would be fine in a fight, but I couldn’t bear the thought of staying alone in the house, waiting to see if my mate came back all bruised and broken. If he came back at all. I was his Luna, after all, and he needed my help.

“This isn’t the time to be heroic,” he spat through gritted teeth.

“You need my help,” I said, trying to sound braver than I felt. The Rogue wolves were getting closer, and we weren’t doing anything.

“I need you to not be stupid,” he growled.

“Rude,” I shot back.

“Cali, you need to get out of here,” Greyson said, low and serious.

“Pfffttt,” I scoffed. “I’m not gonna let some naked dude tell me what to do.”

Greyson rolled his eyes and turned to Xavier. “Can you please control your human?”

“No one controls me,” I shot back.

One of the Rogue wolf-bears snarled. They were all moving directly toward *me*, like they hadn’t eaten in days, and I was a tasty Cali snack.

For a moment, I considered running back into the house. I knew I’d be safe there and, let’s be honest, I probably wouldn’t be able to do much good outside. But I couldn’t let them hurt Xavier. I wouldn’t allow it.

Tension crackled in the air—tension between the Rogues and us, tension between Xavier and Greyson, and tension between the boys and me. No one dared to speak, or even move a muscle.

“Where the fuck is my car?” Jay’s voice finally broke the tension as he raced out of the house, failing to notice the pack of Rogue, bloodthirsty wolf-bears that were coming toward us.

Oops…

“Uh, well, about that,” I said, feeling my cheeks flush, remembering the explosive fire that had toasted Jay’s car. “You see, it kinda broke down, and then got smashed, and then it caught on fire, and then… ka-boom!”

“*KA-BOOM?*” Jay roared. “What the fuck do you mean, ka-boom? I leave you and Lola alone with my car for an hour, and you *total it?*”

“It was Greyson’s fault,” I protested. “He’s a horrible driver!”

Greyson shot me a dirty look. “I got you home alive, didn’t I? Something you won’t be for much longer, love, if you don’t get in the damn house.”

“Hey, what’s going on? Can’t a guy take a nap around here?” Colton said, stepping out of the house in nothing but pajama bottoms. He stopped when he saw Maya. “Why are you still here?”

Maya rolled her eyes. “Are you stupid?” She pointed to the Rogue wolves that were now uncomfortably close, either ignoring our constant arguing or just using it to their advantage.

“Oh shit,” Colton said, taking in the situation. “Well, what the hell are we standing around here for?” Within seconds, he shifted into his wolf-bear and lunged at the intruders. Maya, Greyson, and Jay took this as a signal to shift as well.

Great, now everyone had fur and fangs except me. I didn’t exactly *want* to be a wolf-bear but being stuck in my fragile human body wasn’t ideal.

Especially since it looked like I was about to become dinner.

Xavier grabbed my arm and pulled me roughly into the house.

“Get inside, and if you try to jump out a window, I will have them all boarded up!” he growled.

I considered putting up a fight, but Xavier looked pretty annoyed already—not to mention ready to shift into wolf-bear mode. Plus, he’d said to *get* inside, he hadn’t said anything about *staying* inside.

I needed a weapon if I wanted to go toe-to-paw with those nasty Rogues. Something better than a hanger or a rock.

I raced inside the house, heading for the kitchen. Maybe I could get a knife or something. My plan was slightly hindered when I saw just how messy the kitchen was. Dirty dishes all over the place, half-eaten food all around, and piles and piles of trash… Had they ordered food while we were gone and had a freakin’ food fight?!

“THIS PLACE IS DISGUSTING!” I cried out. “WOLF-BEARS LIVE LIKE ANIMALS!”

I searched through each drawer trying to find a knife but kept finding more dirty dishes. I was going to have to have a serious talk with Xavier and Colton about this later.

*GROWWWWWWWLLLLL.*

I spun around to see a giant Rogue wolf-bear staring at me from the living room. Its red eyes looked hungry, and I was the only viable meal in this disaster of a kitchen.

I scrambled backwards until my back hit the wall, leaving me cornered as the Rogue stalked toward me. Trapped.

THIS IS NOT THE DAMN TIME, LOVABLE CLUMSINESS!

This specimen was much bigger than any of the wolf-bears I’d seen before, and it wasn’t all just fur. He looked like he ate other wolf-bears for breakfast. He was barely managing to squeeze his bulk through the doors to get at me.

“HEY! DON’T YOU KNOW STEROIDS CAN SHRINK YOUR DICK?” I yelled at him, purely on impulse.

This, apparently, was the wrong thing to do.

The Rogue gave a powerful snarl and charged toward me. Quickly, I grabbed a pair of kitchen shears that were on the counter and held them in front of me.

“NOT SO FAST, BEASTIE BOY,” I yelled. That made him stop, and I smirked. “NOT SO TOUGH NOW, ARE YOU?”

My smirk was short-lived. The shears fell apart the moment I spoke. One half clanked loudly as it hit the floor.

“Oops.” I was bending down to pick it up when the Rogue leaped high into the air, heading straight toward me.

Oh god.

While my aim had never been good at baseball, softball, or archery, I did have a peculiar knack at darts. I’d once been a middle school darts champion. It was kind of a fluke, but at that middle school carnival it seemed like my moment had finally come. With a flick of my wrist, I threw half of the shears and hit him bang in the chest, sending him to the floor.

“HA!” I laughed. “TAKE THAT, YOU MANGY MUTT!”

The Rogue stumbled back and shook violently. The blade tumbled free from his fur.

“SHIT!” I squeaked. I grabbed a bowl of week-old cereal and splashed it right in his face.

For a moment, the Rogue was taken aback. But then his big wolf-bear tongue started licking the moldy food off his face.

Fact: wolf-bears were gross.

As he licked his disgusting face clean, I searched around for anything that might be able to stop him. I dug through every cupboard until I found a can of air-freshener spray.

Perfect. Not only would it blind him, but it’d also make him smell a hell of a lot better.

I spun around and sprayed the Rogue with a blast of floral whoop-ass. The Rogue gave a yelp of pain as he tried desperately to wipe his eyes.

I raced past him and up the stairs to my bedroom, hoping to at least buy some time. I wondered how Xavier, Lola, and Greyson were doing outside. But to be fair, I had problems of my own.

I ran for my bedroom and locked the door behind me. I searched wildly for something to defend myself with. Xavier seriously needed to give me that weapons closet.

I spied my curling iron by the desk and grabbed it, plugging it in. I was pretty proud of myself for leveling up my weapons game. If a Rogue tried to follow me up here, I’d be able to at least burn the bastard.

I crouched by the side of the door and listened, waiting for something to happen. But I couldn’t hear anything, which only made me more nervous. It was like those horror movies where the girl had a weapon ready and was waiting by the door for the killer, but it turned out he was actually right behind her. Why couldn’t my life be more like a rom com than a slasher flick?

At the thought of horror movies, I quickly turned around to face the window. Just in time for the…

BAM!

The window exploded into a million pieces of glass as a large wolf-bear burst through, heading straight toward me.

**Episode 110**

I screamed at the top of my lungs as the wolf bear came barreling toward me. I thrust the curling iron out in front of me and stabbed at his chest. In between the panic and the adrenaline, I couldn’t help but feel a little proud of myself. Like I’d actually done something legitimately cool. Maybe I wouldn’t be too bad at this Luna thing.

The wolf-bear cried out in pain. “Ow! What the fuck, Cali?”

That was Xavier’s voice.

Now that the glass was cleared away, I saw that the wolf-bear I’d stabbed wasn’t a Rogue at all. Oops.

Damn it! I’d just stabbed my boyfriend with a curling iron. If there was a wolf-bear version of *Jerry Springer*, I’d be on it.

Wait? Had he just talked? Could I talk to wolf-bears now? Was I a wolf-bear whisperer?

In the shock of hearing Xavier’s voice, I dropped the curling iron on my foot, squealing in pain. Smooth move, Cali.

Just as I started screaming, the door burst off its hinges, and the Rogue wolf-bear I should have been stabbing stormed in.

Xavier gave a wild snarl before leaping past me and body-slamming the huge Rogue. I watched in pure panic as the two wolves went at each other, destroying almost everything in the bedroom. I made a mental note to remind Xavier not to destroy my damn bed next time he had to fight a Rogue wolf-bear.

I grabbed the curling iron off the floor and tried to throw myself into the fray, but they were moving so damn fast, fur was flying into my eyes. If only the Rogue could just stand still for a moment, I’d be able to stab the CORRECT wolf-bear this time. But every time I tried to get close, I was knocked backwards and onto the floor.

Xavier and the Rogue battled their way out of the bedroom, tumbling down the stairs with a loud crash.

At that moment, I found myself very grateful that I’d bought the curling iron with the extra-long cord. I hopped onto the banister and glided down the stairs, wielding my curling iron like I’d seen fencers do in movies. Personally, I thought my entrance was pretty badass. I wished the rest of the wolf-bear packs could have seen me.

I leaped off the banister and ran right for the Rogue wolf-bear. And then I stabbed it right in the snout.

I heard flesh sizzle as the Rogue yelped in pain. This gave Xavier just enough time to strike. Xavier pinned the Rogue to the ground and bit down on his neck—hard. With a mighty tug of his teeth, he tossed the Rogue out the door and out of the house.

Yeah, my mate was impressive—and I’d actually helped, this time! YAY.

Both Xavier and I watched as the Rogue scampered off, whining in pain.

High on victory, I jumped up and pumped my fist.

“TAKE THAT, YOU STUPID WOLF WANNABE!” I screamed after him.

Xavier walked over to me, his fur a little burned from where I’d stabbed him.

I knelt in front of him and petted his head. “I’m sorry I stabbed you, baby. But I did also stab the correct wolf-bear this time. And with an actual useful weapon!”

Xavier nuzzled into my neck like a dog.

“Aw, good boy!” I told him, petting him some more.

He leaned up, giving me the wolf-bear equivalent of a glare, and then started to lick my face. Ew!

“HEY!” I cried out, trying to push him off me. “NO, WOLF-BEAR GERMS!”

At least he wasn’t mad about the whole curling-iron-to-the-chest incident.

Xavier seemed to understand what I was saying, because he stopped. He led me out of the house and into the yard. I gasped as I took in the scene. The yard was completely trashed. The trees that had once stood tall were scattered all over the place, and the lawn was torn up and caked with mud. There was a small fire burning—I had no idea how *that* had happened. How could shifted wolf-bears even start fires? They didn’t have thumbs to light matches!

Needless to say, I really hoped Xavier and Colton really did have money from their mysterious jobs, because they were going to need it to pay a landscaper to fix this mess.

Fortunately, most of the Rogues had fled the scene. The last two were currently being chased off by Colton and Maya. I had to admit, I was a little disappointed to see Maya still around. I was kinda hoping she’d get eaten by one of the Rogues. Yes, that sounded mean—she saved me after all—but Maya was also very mean, and if one of us had to be sacrificed…well I wasn’t going to say Lola.

Speaking of Lola, I searched for her and was relieved to find her on the far right-hand corner property, licking at a wound on her leg. She was still in her wolf-bear form, but at least she was alive and not seriously injured. Hopefully she’d be back to her old self soon.

The tell-tale sound of cracking bones broke me out of my thoughts. I turned around to see Colton, Greyson, Maya, Jay, and Xavier starting to turn back into their human forms.

“Wait!” I cried out. “Let me get you some clothes—I’ll be back in a second.”

Of course, no one listened to me. Colton, Greyson, Maya, Jay, and Xavier changed right back into their human forms, each of them bloodied, bruised, battered, and totally naked. But at least they were alive, and I was incredibly grateful for that. I guess including Maya, too.

I turned to look at Xavier, human Xavier, where he was standing next to me. His strong muscles were covered in bites and scratches, his chest was bare, glistening with sweat, and his dark eyes were searching mine. I felt a weird mixture of relief and horniness, but I went with it.

I jumped into Xavier’s arms, holding him tightly. His bare arms wrapped around my body in a warm, protective embrace.

“Are you okay?” he asked.

“Yes,” I said. “I told you I could take care of myself, Mr. Wolf-Bear.”

I could sense Xavier’s eyes rolling without even having to look up. “Oh yeah, I saw your little weapon up there. What were you going to do? Crimp his hair?”

I pulled out of our embrace slightly to give him a smack on the chest. “Excuse you! I burned his snout, and that helped you get the upper hand. Wolf or human, he’s going to be feeling that one for a long time.”

“You’re telling me.” He laughed, rubbing the spot where I’d stabbed him. The chest hair that used to be there had been replaced by an angry red circle.

“I’m sorry, baby,” I cooed, kissing the burn.

“Well, I guess it was an improvement on the spatula,” he said, smirking.

“I thought you promised to never talk about that again!”

“I never made such a promise,” Xavier said. “In fact, I think I’ll keep reminding you about it once a day from now on.”

“Hey!” I smacked him again.

He looked down at me and smiled. “I will admit, you did look pretty badass sliding down the banister with that thing.”

I grinned in triumph. “See, I told you I was good to have around. That I could take care of myself.”

I leaned up on my tiptoes to kiss him. A kiss he eagerly returned and deepened.

“Ahem,” someone coughed pointedly.

I turned to see Greyson staring at us—looking very handsome, very naked, and very annoyed. Why did he have to do that?!

“Uh, hey, love birds? Could you stop playing the happy couple for a few seconds? We need to figure out our next move in case they come back.”

Colton walked over to Greyson and gave him a rough shove, nearly knocking him over. “What the fuck are you speaking for?” he demanded. “This is your fault! You probably led them right to us.”

Greyson rolled his eyes, giving Colton a pissed off look. “Colton. Stop being the same dumb brute you’ve always been. But I guess it’s good to know some things never change.”

Colton and Xavier gave their half-brother a warning growl that he easily shrugged off. “If I were working with them, you’d be dead. You’d all be dead. I could have killed Cali at any time. Trust me, I had plenty of opportunities.”

Greyson turned to Xavier and gave him a smug smirk. “I could easily have picked off your darling girlfriend in the dressing room if I’d felt like it.”

Xavier turned to me. “Dressing room? Why was he in a dressing room with you?”

“Can’t you wolf-bears argue with your pants on? I can’t even look at any of you,” I said, squeezing my eyes shut. I was *so* over seeing dicks all day. “Greyson saved our lives,” I told Xavier. “Without him, Lola and I would’ve been eaten by the Rogues, maybe in the mall food court, but maybe not.”

A small bark echoed around the front yard after I finished speaking. Everyone turned to see Lola, still in her wolf form.

“You can change back now, Lola,” I told her. “I don’t care if you’re naked. You get the only free pass on that.”

Lola moved around in a circle, twisting her wolf body into all sorts of poses, trying and failing to shift back into her human form. She came to Jay and nuzzled him. He knelt to her level, staring intently at her.

“She can’t shift back,” he said suddenly.

“Wait, what do you mean?” I asked.

He looked back at the group. “Lola can’t shift. She’s stuck.”

**Episode 111**

For a moment, I was frozen with fear. What if Lola was stuck like this forever? I was getting used to being friends with humans who were occasionally wolf-bears, but I couldn’t be best friends with a constantly shifted wolf-bear! Who would be my voice of reason? Who would be the person who loved me no matter what? Who was gonna do my hair? Wolf-bears didn’t even have thumbs!

The situation was dire.

I ran over to Lola and knelt in front of her. “Come on, Lola, just change back. I know you can do it. Just think about human stuff. Like smooth skin. Mrs. Smith’s white chocolate mocha. Stylish shoes. Manicures. Television.”

Everyone was looking at me like I’d completely lost my marbles.

“There is something seriously wrong with you,” said Maya. She turned to Colton. “I thought you were the dumbest person I knew. I guess even I can be wrong sometimes.”

*Ugh.* Maybe if Lola never turned back, I could train her to eat Maya. That would be the only silver lining to this mess. Why was she still here if she “hated” us all so much?!

“At least I’m *trying* to do something to help,” I shot back. “Just because you’re a female wolf-bear doesn’t mean you have to be a bitch every second of the day!”

Maya opened her mouth to say something but was cut off by Jay petting Lola’s head.

“I really wouldn’t get too worked up about this,” he told me, but his eyes told another story. “She probably just needs to let the adrenaline settle.”

I wasn’t too convinced about that. This was *Lola* we were talking about—the girl had no chill. She had to be freaking out.

I turned to Xavier. “What do we do?”

Xavier shrugged. “No idea. I’m not familiar with half-breeds.”

I wrinkled my nose when he said that. I wasn’t super familiar with wolf-bear culture, but it wasn’t like Lola was very different from him. While I loved Xavier, he was very much a species-ist.

I looked around to the rest of the group. Not only was everyone still naked as the day they were born, but they were also all bleeding from various open wounds. Gross. That had to violate multiple health codes, in addition to just being plain unsanitary. Someone was bound to get a serious inflection and lose a body part. Maybe it would be Maya and she’d leave.

“Isn’t there some kind of wolf-bear hospital we can take her to?” I demanded.

“Is she for real?” asked Maya.

“Is she really going to keep referring to us as wolf-bears?” Greyson questioned.

“Ugh, that’s a whole other damn thing that keeps getting on my nerves,” groaned Maya. “Seriously, can’t I just kill her now and put her out of my misery?”

Xavier shot Maya a dirty look. “Back off, or I’m going to put you out of *my* misery.”

*Yeah, that’s my man!* He was totally going to get laid tonight.

“Well, we have to do *something*,” said Jay.

“What do you have in mind?” said Greyson. “Personally, I think we should keep her like this. She’ll be more useful.”

“Not to me!” I cried out.

“Or me,” added Jay. “Besides, we don’t know what staying in this form will do to her in the long run. It’s dangerous for her to stay like this.”

The rest of us bickered with each other, the arguments getting more and more heated until, finally, Maya cleared her throat.

“If you all would shut up for a second, I may know someone who can help.”

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About twenty minutes later, everyone was dressed and getting into Xavier’s car. I was relieved—not just because we might be able to help Lola, but because everyone was wearing pants. Don’t get me wrong, I loved seeing Xavier naked, I just preferred to keep the experience a little more private.

I sat in the passenger seat as Xavier sat behind the wheel. Maya and Colton took the back seat. Wolf Lola and Jay were in the last row, Jay stroking Lola’s fur soothingly. He was such a good mate to her

Greyson had decided to not come along because he had, and I quote: “better and cooler shit to do.” Did every wolf-bear have to be so ambiguous and rude?

As we took off down the road, Xavier cleared his throat. “So, what happened in the dressing room, exactly?”

His tone was casual, but I could tell by the darkness in his eyes and the way his hands tightened on the steering wheel that the issue was making him uncomfortable. I mean, that seemed fair enough given that his half-brother he hates saw his girlfriend/mate/soulmate who he loves very much in the nude.

But it was kind of hot seeing him all gruff and tough about it. I smirked at him, twirling a strand of my hair around my finger. “Why do you want to know? Are you jealous?” I remembered the night before I’d left to see my family. How he’d said he never wanted another man to even look at me. He’d been jealous then, and he was jealous now.

Xavier rolled his eyes. “Why on earth would I be jealous of Greyson? He’s a complete and utter twat,” he said, a little too fast and a little too high.

Totally jelly.

I continued to smirk. “Don’t lose your cool, my darling wolf-bear. Nothing happened. Well…” I trailed off, remembering Greyson ripping the door off the dressing room and staring at me. I’d felt his eyes rake down my exposed body, lingering a moment too long on my chest and ass. In the moment, I’d been angry, but now that I thought back on it…

“Well? Well, what?” Xavier demanded.

I poked his arm. “I thought you said you weren’t jealous?”

“I’m not,” he said gruffly. “I just hate it when you start a sentence and trail off. You’re so flighty.”

I rolled my eyes. “*Anyway.* After you called me, I was getting undressed, and then Greyson stormed into the lingerie shop and ripped open my dressing room door and saw me naked.”

“*WHAT?*”

“It’s okay! I threw him out.”

“He saw you undressed?”

“Um, that’s what being naked means?”

Xavier narrowed his eyes, his jaw tight. “I'm going to kill him. I should have ripped his throat out during the battle.”

I looked over at him, worried I’d now—literally—poked the wrong wolf-bear. “I thought you said you didn’t care.”

“I DON’T!” he snapped. Then he took a deep breath and started over. “What I *meant* was that he shouldn’t have done that to you. He shouldn’t be anywhere fucking near you. He betrayed our pack and is a fucking murderer. That’s all, Cali.”

I sank down in my seat. “You guys are constantly walking around with your junk hanging out for the world to see…”

Xavier glared at me but said nothing, his full attention on the road.

No one said much after that.

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“Turn left,” said Maya, about twenty minutes later. “Then just follow the river.”

While Oregon was remote, filled with bears and other wildlife, and probably only had one mall, I had to admit, the scenery was beautiful. As we drove down the road, I looked at the lush forest of beautiful green trees and the sparkling river. It was almost like driving into a fairytale.

“So who are we seeing, anyway?” I asked. “Some kind of wolf-bear doctor?” I tried to picture it in my mind, a wolf-bear in a lab coat, checking people’s blood pressure and giving them clothes when they ran out. Part of me really hoped we were getting an actual wolf in a lab coat.

“Can’t you get it through that incredibly thick but breakable skull of yours? We are not wolf-bears! We are just wolves. There are no such things as wolf-bears!” Maya yelled. “If you call me that name one more time, I’m gonna make you wish you HAD been eaten by that bear last night.”

Ugh, calm down.

Colton rolled his eyes at Maya. “Wow, you’re so weak. You’d really let something so stupid get to you?”

“She keeps saying this dumbass thing to everyone, like it’s fact!” Maya shouted back. "And you don’t know the first thing about me, so don’t act like you do.”

This triggered another argument, one that gradually got more and more heated and loud. A part of me wished they’d just start dating already—no, sleeping together. That would be a lot less annoying for everyone around them. They’d get out all this sexual tension that was exploding all around us.

“Oh, wait, we’re here,” said Maya, breaking out of her argument with Colton to point ahead.

I looked up, expecting to see some kind of hospital or doctor’s office, even a medical center. What I had NOT expected was a tumbledown shack on the side of a hill. Its roof was starting to fall, the paint in the front was all chipped, and most of the windows appeared to be boarded up. It looked like a witch’s house. That one gingerbread house, if it had burned down. It did *not* look clean enough to be anyone’s first choice for healing.

What had I agreed to bring Lola to?

**Episode 112**

“Seriously, this can’t be the place. This is a shack!” I cried out. *Of course* Maya had tricked us just to make us look stupid. She’d rather let Lola die a wolf-bear than help us.

Maya rolled her eyes at me and turned around to talk to Jay. “Wait here with Lola.”

Lola barked, and Jay continued to pet her.

The rest of us unloaded from the car and walked toward the shack. The door opened, and a beautiful woman appeared. She was small, much shorter than I was. Her hair was light, wild, and long, with various shades of grey and purple. But it wasn’t the ‘hasn’t seen a hairbrush in twenty years’ kind of look. More like a ‘I was just in the garden, and I can’t be bothered to do my hair’ sort of thing. She was dressed in a long, black maxi skirt, and a white top with a denim vest. Her hands and neck were covered in jewelry. She sort of looked like a hippie.

The woman watched us carefully, but her dark eyes lit up when she saw Maya.

“Maya!” she called cheerfully, a smile on her face. Her voice was earthy and strong but not loud. “It’s been a while. You should have given me a heads up—I would’ve made cupcakes.”

“What kind? I love cupcakes,” I blurted out. My stomach was growling, I could have really gone for a cupcake—or three. We needed serious food in the wolf-bear cave.

Xavier glared at me and nudged me in the arm.

“What? I’m hungry! I haven’t eaten all day. You guys don't even have granola bars.” My stomach growled again, just to drive the point home.

The woman walked up to me and gave the air a sniff. Ugh, why did every wolf-bear have to do that?

The woman smiled. “A human. How pleasant!” She stuck out her hand. “My name is MacKenzie, but you can call me Big Mac.”

“Like the burger?” I asked, shaking her hand. *Mmm.* A burger and cupcakes would have been perfect right about then.

Maya shot me a dirty look. “Can you not be a rude human for five seconds?”

“I’m hungry!” I said defensively. “But why do you call yourself ‘Big Mac’? You aren’t exactly big? If you don’t mind me asking?” I said, adding the last part quickly.

Big Mac smiled. “Oh, it’s an old nickname that stuck. Personally, I’m more of a Popeyes Chicken Sandwich type of girl.”

“Oh,” I said. “Do you have one lying around?”

“Uh, we have an actual problem here,” Xavier interrupted, turning to Big Mac. “Maya says that you can help?”

Big Mac’s face lit up like a Christmas tree. “Oh, I love problems! Come in! Let me see what I can do for you kids.”

We entered the shack, and for a moment I thought I had been transported into a fairytale. It was gigantic inside. Sort of like a boho-chic penthouse meets hoarder, illuminated by hundreds of white candles. In the living room, some oak shelves were lined with bottles and vials of spices, herbs, dried flowers, and mysterious liquids. I was both enchanted and horrified.

“What is this place?” I breathed, looking at a big Venus flytrap on the table that looked like it could eat me in one bite.

“It’s my home. Do you like it? I was thinking of taking out this wall and expanding the main room,” Big Mac said, touching the wall next to me. “I’d get so much more natural light if I added in a few bay windows.”

Before I could even open my month to answer, Jay entered the house, Colton and wolf-bear Lola following behind.

“Ah,” said Big Mac. “I see what the trouble is. We have a half wolf, half human hybrid stuck in her wolf form.”

I looked at her, surprised. “How did you know that?”

Big Mac gave me a mischievous wink. “Call it intuition.” She turned to Jay. “Take her to that back room to your left, dear.” She turned to Maya and Colton. “I’m gonna need your help with this one. Follow me,” she said, taking them all to the back room.

Xavier and I were the only ones left in the kitchen.

I looked around the room again, taking extra note of her shelves. “I think she’s a witch,” I said knowingly.

Xavier rolled his eyes. “You’ve seen too many movies.”

“There’s no such thing as seeing too many movies,” I argued. “Seriously, look at this place: the candles, the spices, the hanging dried flowers. Looks like a shack outside and could be on *Million Dollar Listing* on the inside? Total witch vibes.”

“You have a runaway imagination. There’s no such thing as witches.”

“Pfftttt, up until a couple months ago, I didn’t think werewolves existed, so I don’t think witches are that much of a stretch,” I said. “There are probably eyeballs floating in a jar somewhere.” Don’t get me wrong, I liked Big Mac so far, and I didn’t think there was anything wrong with being a witch. I just wanted her to own it.

Xavier shut his eyes and squeezed the bridge of his nose. “Caliana, please. You’re going to give me a headache if you keep this up.”

I would have stopped, but then I noticed the rug. The bearskin rug in her living room which, by the way, was just as witchy as the kitchen. “Is this real bear?” I asked, pointing. I thought back to the bear Xavier had fought last night. Maybe it was the same one! Or at least a cousin. “Or do you think it’s a Rogue?” Wow, what if Big Mac had fought and killed a Rogue wolf-bear and used the skin for a rug? That would’ve been badass.

Xavier was not enthused as I was. He shot a glare at me. “Thanks, now I have a headache.” He walked over to the couch and sat down.

I felt a little bad for annoying him, considering he’d just fought a bunch of Rogues not even an hour ago and learned about the whole dressing room sitch. I walked into the living room and caught his reflection in the candlelight. The soft lighting highlighted all his best features. His strong jaw, his dark eyes, his muscular body… Damn. Maybe sometimes I did need to shut my mouth and just admire how good my boyfriend looked.

“I’m sorry,” I said quietly. “It’s been a crazy day.”

“It sure has,” he agreed.

I sat down next to him on the couch, snuggling up to him. I put my head against his chest, and he put a warm arm around me.

“You scared me today,” he admitted quietly, into the darkness.

I was thrown. Xavier was never this open about his feelings. Usually, he just told me how annoying I was, or how stupid I’d acted in any given situation. Like, literally not even minutes ago. This tenderness was unexpected and incredibly sexy.

I cuddled up closer. “Yeah?” I asked, trying to coax out more.

His hand started to stroke my cheek. “I don’t know what I’d do if I lost you,” he said softly.

“Aww, baby! You won’t lose me!” I cried out, tilting my head up to try to kiss him. I missed and kissed his chin instead, but it totally still counted. “You really do care!”

“Of course I care, dummy,” he said.

“Calling me a dummy doesn’t scream *caring*,” I teased, kissing him again. He kissed me back. Inside I was thrilled. Xavier actually expressing a feeling? This was MAJOR. Maybe he’d actually tell me things, now. Maybe he’d finally make me his mate.

We continued kissing for a while. It was a little weird, making out in a witch’s house, but I think it was safe to say that my life was already pretty weird. Plus, I was still high on the adrenaline of the fight, and did I already mention that Xavier looked VERY sexy in the candlelight?

A horrifying howl pierced the air. I jumped out of Xavier’s arms. “Lola!” I cried out. They had to be hurting Lola! Not on my watch!

“Cali, wait!” Xavier called after me, but I was already in the hallway. I grabbed a broom—probably Big Mac’s enchanted broomstick that she flew around on—and burst into the back room. No one was going to hurt Lola. I would protect her with everything I had, which this time was arguably better than a spatula.

“LEAVE HER ALONE! I HAVE A BROOM, AND I’M NOT AFRAID TO USE IT!” I cried out.

Everyone was looking at me, even wolf-bear Lola.

“Give me that,” Maya growled, annoyed. She snatched the broom out of my hands effortlessly. “Now, will you kindly shut the fuck up?”

Rude.

Big Mac took a glass of bubbling black liquid from the counter. “Colton, hold Lola’s feet. Jay, hold her head, please. But be careful, dear, don’t let her bite your fingers off. Had that happen in Glasgow once—it was quite a chore, trying to find all the missing digits.”

*What the hell?* I thought, panicked, as everyone moved into their assigned places.

“It’s going to be okay, baby,” Jay cooed to Lola, taking a hold of her snout even as Lola tried to shake him off.

I looked down at my best friend and felt sharp pangs of fear and helplessness. I couldn’t just stand there watching Lola struggle. I had to do something.

“What can I do?” I asked breathlessly.

“Shut up!” Maya snapped.

Big Mac poured the bubbling liquid into Lola’s mouth. Lola began to howl, writhing in pain. I finally felt Xavier beside me, and I clung to his torso. He put his arms around me as I watched Lola thrash around for a solid minute before suddenly lying motionless. I tried to push forward to get to Lola, but Xavier held me back.

Holy shit, a witch had just killed my best friend.

**Episode 113**

I couldn’t believe what was happening. Lola couldn’t be dead. She *couldn’t*. After all we’d been through, I couldn’t accept that she would die like this—and not even in her human form.

“YOU KILLED HER!” I screamed, tears running down my face.

I shook Xavier off me to take a staggered step toward Lola, but he grabbed my arm and pulled me back again.

“Can you calm down?” Maya sneered at me. “She’s still breathing.”

Xavier released me, and I slowly walked toward my friend. And sure enough, Lola was breathing again, even though it was shallow and barely there.

Relief flooded my entire body. Lola wasn’t dead, thank the wolf-bear gods.

“There’s always a risk of death,” said Big Mac, looking down at Lola. “But I think your friend will be okay. She just needs to rest and allow the medicine to work its magic.”

“Magic?” I questioned. “You’re a witch, aren’t you?”

“Witches?” Maya said. “Geez, I hope all humans aren’t as stupid as you. Do you really think witches exist? What, are we going to Hogwarts now? How the hell have you lived as long as you have?”

“Maybe because you saved me?” I said. “And excuse me, people who can turn into giant wolf-bears and have mates, and Luna marks, and Alphas, and who sometimes fight to the fucking death—*that’s* believable? But witches are a step too far? Give me a break!”

“Wolf-bears?” Big Mac questioned.

Xavier rolled his eyes. “It’s a thing.”

“Oh my god, if you two don’t shut the fuck up right this second, I’m eating both of you. At the same time,” Colton said. “I’m fucking serious.”

“Bite me, Colton,” Maya snarled.

“That’s the idea, princess.”

“EVERYONE, SHUT UP!” Jay snapped, visibly irritated. “Get out! All your bickering could disturb Lola!” He petted her head softly.

“Jay’s right, Lola needs plenty of rest after the day she’s had,” Big Mac said. “Besides, it could be hours before anything happens.”

“Can I stay with her? She’s my best friend,” I said, looking down at her comatose form. I wanted to stay with her, be there for her. She’d have done the same for me.

“That’s very sweet of you, Cali,” Big Mac said. “But it’s best if you let her rest, trust me. Besides, it’s not very entertaining, watching a wolf sleep all night.”

She turned to the rest of us. “You are all more than welcome to spend the night. I have room enough for everyone,” she said with a smile, then she exited the room.

“Come on, baby,” said Xavier, gently pulling on my arm. I gave Lola one last look before slowly leaving the room. At least I’d be under the same roof as her. If the witch ended up being a bitch, I’d be able to protect her. Or I’d give it my best shot, at least.

Colton and Maya exited the room behind us, shutting the door after them.

Knowing that Lola was still alive and—relatively—safe, I could finally focus on a more important issue. FOOD!

My stomach growled loudly as we entered the kitchen. I wished Big Mac had actually made cupcakes. I would have eaten five of them in a heartbeat, even if they were made from eye of newt.

“Okay, I’m going to whip up some dinner,” I said. “I haven’t eaten in over twenty-four hours, and if I don’t get something soon, my stomach is going to eat itself.”

“Good, then you’ll die, and we never have to hear your voice ever again,” Maya said.

“Everyone gets to eat except for Maya,” I said. “New rule.”

“How exactly do you intend to make dinner?” Xavier asked.

I jabbed my thumb toward the fridge. “She has a fridge—let’s see what she’s got.”

I opened the refrigerator door, preparing myself to find eyeballs, brains, and bat wings. I was shocked to discover that Big Mac’s fridge was stocked with food. Actual human food!

Jackpot.

Big Mac walked into the kitchen. “Help yourself to whatever you like. There’s French onion soup in the fridge, and a pan of lasagna in the freezer.”

Big Mac was now my new hero. If I couldn’t be a wolf-bear, I was gonna find out how to be a witch. Seriously, there were tons of different meals in that fridge. It was like Big Mac was the Rachael Ray of the woods. If Rachael Ray were a witch. Hey, maybe she was! I mean, thirty-minute meals? That had ‘witchcraft’ written all over it.

But I was getting distracted again. Probably because I was starving.

I continued to dig through the fridge, curious to see what else was in there. I was still holding out hope for cupcakes.

“Hey, what’s this?” I said, pulling out a large, brown jug with a cork. I pulled the cork and took a sniff of what was inside.

“Yuck!” I cried out. It smelled like burning window cleaner. *Gross.* “What *is* this? Some kind of potion?”

Xavier took the jug out of my hands and sniffed it. A wide grin spread across his handsome features. “That’s no potion, someone’s brewing moonshine.”

Big Mac laughed from the doorway. “Uh oh, looks like you found my special stash. A recipe handed down from my great-great-grandma. I come from a long line of moonshiners.”

A.k.a. witches.

Colton took a swig. “Yee-haw! Wow, that’s some strong moonshine!”

“Yee-haw?” I questioned, raising an eyebrow. “You okay there, Tex?”

Colton nodded, coughing a little. “Just haven’t had moonshine this strong in a while.” He offered the jug to Xavier, who took a big swig.

“Damn!” he said. “This is good stuff.”

“I thought alcohol didn’t affect you guys,” I said.

Big Mac laughed. “Oh, this isn’t any old alcohol, dear. It would get even the most secretive wolf to reveal all her secrets. Have as much as you like, but watch yourselves, kids. And behave,” she said, giving Maya a wink as she took a swig.

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After finally getting something to eat (Big Mac’s French onion soup was officially the best thing ever, next to Mrs. Smith’s white chocolate mocha), she suggested that we take a midnight dip in a nearby hot spring. It sounded like a good way to relax after such a long, stressful day.

As Xavier and I walked hand in hand through the woods, I started to have doubts about this plan. I mean, walking through dark, creepy woods to get to a witch’s hot spring? A hot spring that could totally be a cover for a cauldron? Mad shady.

“Are you sure about this?” I asked Xavier.

“Are *you* stillthinking that Big Mac is a witch?”

“I don’t think—I know. Just like I know that you’re rolling your eyes right now!” I added. I couldn’t see his face in the darkness, but I could see his white teeth as he grinned in the dark.

“Guilty,” he said. “But I’m sure the springs are perfectly safe. And I think it’ll do us good to just relax by ourselves for a while. Especially after the day we’ve had.”

Exactly what I’d thought. We were so in sync. “Day. Week. Solid, like, two months, honestly,” I said.

Xavier just laughed.

I was also pretty happy that Colton and Maya had decided to hang back at the shack. They were either banging or trying to murder each other, but either way, I was just happy not to hear Maya’s insults. I really didn’t get why she saved me in the first place if she “hated” me. She needed to curb the ‘tude.

As we walked, Xavier took another swig from the moonshine jug. “This is great moonshine. I’d love to get the recipe for this.”

“I’d love to get her French onion soup recipe,” I said.

“Here, you should try this, I think you might like it,” he said, holding the jug out to me.

I wrinkled my nose. “Does it taste like beer? Because beer is gross.”

He let out a chuckle. “No, it doesn’t taste like beer. Just try it.”

I took the jug with my free hand and took a sip to see just what all the fuss was about.

*Wow!* It was much smoother than beer. It wasn’t stinky or sour at all. It went down almost like water and had a sweet aftertaste. Not at all how I thought moonshine was supposed to taste.

“I see what you guys mean. That stuff is tasty.”

When we arrived at the hot springs, I was instantly taken aback by the beauty of the place. It didn’t look like a witch’s cauldron at all. Rather, it glowed against the backdrop of the dark woods, illuminated by the moonlight. Fireflies dotted the indigo sky, adding to the mood.

“Wow,” I breathed, very impressed. “It’s beautiful.”

“And we haven’t even gotten in it yet,” said Xavier, putting the moonshine down on the ground.

“Speaking of which,” I said, “you can get in first. Tell me how hot it is.”

In the moonlight, I could see Xavier smirk. “What? Afraid of a little heat?”

I rolled my eyes. “Just get naked.”

Xavier grinned. “Demanding little thing,” he teased but took off his t-shirt anyway.

Honestly, watching Xavier strip, getting naked for me and only me, was really turning me on. Like my own private show. And Xavier’s hotness only added to it. I couldn’t help but let my gaze travel down his chiseled chest. How he remained looking like a Greek god when I never saw him lift weights or anything, I would maybe never know. And did I care? NOPE.

After getting a good look at Xavier’s ass as he turned to put his foot in the springs, I took a quick look around. We were finally alone. *Alone*-alone.

Yup, it was banging time. This was how couples behaved, right? Doing it whenever they felt like it?

I took a deep breath to steady my nerves as I slowly removed my top. I could do this. We’ve already had sex together and public, outdoor sex was merely a rite of passage, right? I only got my top half off before one of the buttons got tangled in my hair.

“OUCH!” I cried out.

Xavier turned to look at me and started laughing. Jerk!

“STOP STARING AND HELP ME, OR I SWEAR I’LL PUSH YOU INTO THE SPRING!”

“I think I’ll take some photos to remember this moment.”

“XAVIER.”

This was NOT how I’d wanted this to go. I’d wanted to slip in beside him—not stand half-naked and flailing in front of the sexiest man I’d ever seen.

Suddenly, I felt the heat of Xavier’s naked body next to mine. A deep, sudden need seared through me, and I had a fleeting hope that the hot spring would somehow be cold instead. My face heated up in a blush as his hands slowly slid up my body before reaching the shirt. Gently, he untangled the button from my hair then removed my shirt altogether.

Oh. Oh boy.

He smiled slyly. “Do you need help with anything else, Miss Hart?”

I opened my mouth to say something, only to be silenced by a long, deep kiss.

**Episode 114**

After a moment of surprise, I kissed Xavier back passionately, getting lost in the feel of it. He tasted like moonshine and something smoky, and I wanted more.

I could feel myself getting wet as the kissing got more heated. Xavier’s bulge rubbed up against my pelvis, searching for friction and release.

I moved my hands down to my jeans and quickly tried to unbutton them, mumbling something about “off” and “now.” I pulled them down, but one of the leg holes got caught on my calf. I tried to pull it off but ended up losing my balance.

“AH!” I yelped. Xavier tried to grab my hair, but the uneven surface made him lose his footing as well. We both went tumbling into the hot spring, entangled in each other.

The moment my body was submerged, I thought someone had lit me on fire. It was like being dropped into a pot of boiling water. Suddenly, I felt great sympathy for all the lobsters I’d eaten in my life.

“SHIT!” I screamed as soon as my head emerged from the water. “This is too fucking hot! I told you, this is Big Mac’s cauldron! She’s probably going to make us into a stew or some shit!”

Xavier's head came out of the water, and he looked at me as if I’d just grown a third eye. “Where the hell do you come up with this stuff? Seriously, what is wrong with you?” Then his face softened a little. “Did you hit your head again?” He swam toward me and touched the top of my head, where I’d injured myself the previous day.

I glared at him. “Oh, ha ha.” I took a deep breath. “I just need a minute to get used to the temperature.”

“Good,” Xavier said with a wolfish grin as he moved closer. “Because it’s about to get a whole lot hotter in here.” He wrapped his arms around my waist and pulled me into another kiss.

I moaned into the kiss, trying to ignore the fact that I was still basically cooking in the hot water. I wrapped my arms around his neck to get close as Xavier pulled me up to his lap. I could feel him getting even harder. How was it even possible for him to get so hard when the water was hot enough to cook pasta?

I stopped thinking about all my questions when his hands moved down to my ass, giving it a squeeze. I gasped in surprise, and Xavier took the opportunity to deepen the kiss even more, making out hot and heavy as we ground against each other.

I couldn’t believe I was about to have sex with a wolf-bear in a witch’s hot spring—it was like I was in some kind of erotic fairy tale.

HOW WAS I MISSING THIS FOR SO LONG?!

I started giggling just thinking about it—three months ago I’d been a virgin, going to college and eating ramen, and now I was starring in sexy fairy tales. College hadn’t prepared me for this one. Wolf-bear 101 wasn’t on the course list.

Xavier pulled away, just a little. “What’s so funny?”

I giggled again. “This. All of it. My life right now.”

I was reaching for the moonshine when Xavier took my hand. “I think you’ve had enough, baby.”

I smirked, feeling the effects of the moonshine as I wrapped my arms around his neck and pulled him closer. “You haven’t given me enough, honey… yet.”

“CANNONBALL!” A naked Colton hit the surface with a huge splash, spraying me and Xavier with scalding water.

Great, Captain Mood Killer was at it again.

I wiped my eyes to get rid of the water. I was more steamed than the springs. How DARE Colton ruin the awesome sex I’d been about to have? AND AFTER HE’D BEEN TRYING SO HARD FOR US TO DO IT IN THE FIRST PLACE?!

Wait, hang on a second. Colton was naked. And Xavier was naked. And *I* was naked.

My face heated with embarrassment as I tried to cover my breasts before Colton resurfaced. Ugh, I should have brought a bathing suit. I didn’t sign up to be in some noodle nudist soup.

I was turning around to reach for my clothes when I came face-to-face with Maya, staring me down with disgust written over her face.

Well, so much for getting a break from Maya.

“Ew, are you naked in there?” she sneered.

“Ew, are you insulting me again for no reason?” I shot back, rolling my eyes. She could be so immature. “You might as well hop in. Apparently, it’s become a double date.”

“There’s no way in *hell* I’m getting in a hot spring with a human. Especially a nasty human like you. Colton, you’re a lying bastard! You said these losers were staying in the shack!”

They were coming here together? And Colton jumped in NAKED. Interesting…definitely an INTERESTING activity for two MATES who wanted to “KILL” each other.

“COLTON!” Maya shouted again.

But neither Colton nor Xavier were listening. They were too busy splashing water at each other. Typical boys. No matter how big, scary, or old they got, they’d always act like five-year-olds given the slightest opportunity.

“Can you two *not* behave like kids at a pool party for two seconds?” I asked.

Colton grabbed the moonshine and took a hit. “We could, but where would be the fun in that?”

He offered the jug to Maya, who begrudgingly took a sip. “Hopefully the alcohol in this will kill the germs from Cali’s lips.”

“Uncalled for!” I shouted.

She took a long swallow of moonshine and grimaced. “This isn’t one of Big Mac’s better batches. It’s far too sweet,” she complained.

Leave it to Maya to find fault in everything.

“Pfffttt, there’s no such thing as too sweet,” I scoffed.

Maya said nothing as she handed the jug to Xavier.

“Aren’t you going to join us?” he asked her.

Colton splashed him before Maya could answer. “Trust me, she’s fine where she is.”

“Then why did you invite her to a sexy hot spring, hm?” I asked.

The moonshine was finally kicking in properly for me, now. Coupled with the heat of the springs, I was starting to feel a little lightheaded, which made me giggle a lot.

“Can we please shut the dumb human up?” Maya asked. “Or leave her in the woods?”

“I KNOW,” I said suddenly. “Let’s play truth or dare!”

That idea was met with an immediate, resounding ‘no’, but I was unfazed. “Come on, it’ll be fun.”

Xavier shrugged. “Why not?”

Colton nodded. “Sounds good to me.”

Maya just gave an annoyed huff. “Whatever.” She snatched the moonshine and scowled as she took a swig.

“Okay, I’ll start because it was my idea,” I said and pointed to Colton. “Truth or dare?”

Colton shrugged. “I ain’t getting my ass out of the water, so truth.”

“When we first met, what did you think of me?”

“Oh, that’s easy,” he said. “I thought you were stupid but hot.”

“WHAT?” I cried out.

“Yeah, I mean you had to be pretty fucking stupid to sell your virginity to a stranger on the internet. But you were also super fucking hot, so I guess it made up for the stupid.”

I turned around. “Is that what everyone else thought?”

“Hot,” Xavier admitted. “And naive. But really, stupidly hot.”

“That’s fair enough,” I said. He winked at me, and a shiver went down my spine.

“Stupid,” Maya said. “From start to finish. Stupid name, stupid decisions, stupid—”

“—OKAY! I get it, you can stop now!” I said. Everyone always underestimated me. I may have done stupid things, but I was no dummy. And at least now I knew that Xavier thought I was hot when we met, which was a major plus.

“Okay, my turn,” said Colton. He turned to Maya. “True or dare?”

“Dare,” Maya said instantly.

“I dare you to get in the water with us,” he said with a smirk.

“Oooh,” Xavier and I cooed in unison as Maya rolled her eyes, huffing in annoyance. With the amount of eye rolling everyone did around here, I was shocked their eyes hadn’t rolled to the back of their heads permanently.

“You think I’d back down from a dare because of a human? With your weak ass dares?” She started to take her top off.

I covered my eyes immediately. Yes, I’d seen Maya naked like a dozen times, but that didn’t mean I was *used* to seeing her naked.

Plus, if it was me, undressing, I’d want everyone to cover their eyes too.

“You can uncover your eyes now, fraidy cat,” Maya teased as she got in. Then she turned to Colton. “Satisfied now, asshole?”

Colton just shrugged. I seriously did not understand their relationship.

“My turn,” said Maya, turning to me. “Truth or dare?”

“Uh, truth,” I blurted out. It was the first thing that popped into my head. And I didn’t really want to get out of the hot springs, either.

Maya scoffed. “Of course you would choose truth. You’re too much of a wuss for a dare.”

Excuse me? Those were fighting words.

I gave Maya the dirtiest look I could come up with. “Fine. Dare. Hit me with your best shot, she-wolf,” I challenged.

What had I just gotten myself into?

**Episode 115**

This was definitely a bad idea. As soon as I saw the sinister smirk on Maya’s face, it was very clear that I was very, *very* screwed.

“I dare you to run through the woods.”

I snorted. That was it? I’d thought Maya was cleverer than that. Maybe she was actually the stupid one. “Pfftt, that’s your big bad dare? Running through the woods? Okay.” I started to reach for my clothes, but then Maya splashed me, shaking her head.

“I wasn’t finished. I dare you to run through the woods… naked.”

Colton ooh-ed and ahh-ed like the man child he was as my smile started to fade. Why did everyone around here want to either get me naked or see me naked? Maybe Maya just wanted to distract Colton from looking at her. It really would explain a lot.

Xavier gently touched my arm. “You don’t have to do this if you don’t want to,” he assured me, knowing how uncomfortable being naked in front of others made me. I was touched.

“Yes, she does!” Maya crowed. “A dare’s a dare! We’ve all done what we picked, and she can’t be some special exception. Unless you really are as chicken shit as I think you are.”

Wolf bitch.

I turned to Xavier and put on my brave face. “I got this.”

Internally, I was freaking the hell out. I mean, I was about to be *naked* in the *woods.* Like, that was absolutely not on my bucket list of fun things to do. But I couldn’t show any weakness to that bitch. This was about dominance. And maybe this was the moonshine talking, but since everyone else had already seen me naked today, what was one more person?

I took a deep breath and climbed out of the pool. As soon as the cool air hit my skin, I started to panic in earnest. The cold air reminded me of my stretch marks. Xavier had seen them, but Colton and Maya?

*Fuck!* I panicked, instinctively reaching to cover my stomach. But then my hands went for my breasts instead. Now everyone was going to see my stupid red lines. Would they think they were cool, like Xavier did? Of course they wouldn’t. Colton was going to laugh, and Maya was going to make fun of me for the rest of my life. FUCK!

I froze in place, a steady stream of curse words and panic flowing through my mind.

Xavier sensed my discomfort. “Seriously, Cali. You don’t have to do this if you don’t want to. It’s just a stupid game.”

Out of the corner of my eye, I could see Maya smirking, obviously thinking that she’d beaten me. This may have seemed like a simple game of truth and dare, but Maya was testing me. Waiting to see if I’d crack. Trying to dig up something she could use against me later. No, I couldn’t turn down the dare. This was my chance to prove my Luna-cred. If I could run naked through the woods to shut Maya up, then there was a chance I could be a good Luna. A Luna didn’t back down. Maybe I needed to prove it to Xavier, too. And myself.

Plus, it was only a quick run, how hard could it be?

I stepped out of the water completely, my hands still covering my breasts. The cool air was starting to make me feel even tipsier, on top of all the moonshine. I stumbled a little, briefly uncovering one breast.

*Get an eyeful, everyone*, I thought, my head swimming.

“Well? Start running, human!”

Oh yeah, right. That thing I was supposed to be doing.

I held my head high and lunged forward. The faster I ran, the faster I’d be able to get this whole thing over with.

That plan came apart very quickly when I instantly tripped on a root and fell face first into a nearby bush. Smooth move, Cali.

I could hear Maya laughing from the spring and tried my best to swallow my shame. I still had some pride. Not much, but some.

I scrambled out of the bush with as much pride as I could manage and headed out into the woods without looking back. Stupid Maya.

As I started running through the dark woods, I allowed myself to remove my hands from my breasts. I partly did it to help me run faster, but it actually felt kind of nice. There was a certain thrill about it all—the cold air was cooling my skin from the scalding water, and the moon was large and bright. I also didn’t mind the wind blowing past all my private parts. That was definitely something I never thought I’d feel.

I couldn’t believe I was actually enjoying being naked—and *outside.* It felt so out of character, and yet so right. Maybe I was starting to become a nudist. Maybe being around so many naked people all the time was making me more chill with the idea of letting it all hang out. Maybe the wolf-bears had finally corrupted me—

A low, dark growl interrupted my thoughts.

What the fuck was that?

I came to a stop, listening for the noise. I remembered what that cop had said, about there being a lot of bears in the area, and I didn’t want a repeat of Cali vs. Bear—especially if it turned out to be the same bear. Did bears hold grudges? I didn’t know, and I wasn’t in a big hurry to find out.

I looked around. I’d definitely been out here long enough to satisfy the stupid wolf-bitch. It was time to head back to the hot springs. Maybe the water would actually feel good, now that I wouldn’t be falling into it. Hopefully.

I turned around, realizing that there were two different paths: left and right. Which one had I taken, again?

Well shit. How far had I run exactly?

Another growl punctuated the air, sending me deeper into my panic. Did bears travel in packs? Herds? Did they eat humans?!

I cursed, probably too loudly. This had probably been Maya’s plan all along. To lure me into the woods so that a clan of bears could eat my naked body. I hoped Xavier would tear her apart if that actually happened.

“Xavier?” I whispered loudly, hoping not to antagonize whatever was following me. Maybe he’d be able to hear me. Didn’t wolf-bears have some kind of super hearing?

Well, whatever this thing was, I wasn’t hanging around to find out. In a rush, I stumbled down the left-hand path, hoping it would get me back to the hot springs faster—or keep me from getting eaten.

Up ahead, I saw a flash of gold eyes reflected in the moonlight.

So this *wasn’t* the right path, after all.

I backed the hell up and took the right-hand path as a chorus of growls echoed behind me. As I continued running, I started to hear voices, and the bubbling of the hot springs.

Thank. *God.*

I raced toward the voices, desperate for safety. I ran so fast that I lost my balance, slipped through the dirt. I screamed as I fell right into the hot springs. Again. Only this time, I fell right on top of Maya.

Maya and I both let out a scream.

“GET THE FUCK OFF OF ME, YOU DAMN DIRTY HUMAN!” Maya shrieked, her rough, wet hands shoving me off and further into the springs.

I swam away from her and toward Xavier, my thoughts still racing and yet frozen with fear. “B-b-b-bears!” I sputtered out. “Bears! They’re following me!”

As soon as the words left my lips, the four of us turned to see a pack of wolves approach the hot springs. They stopped a few feet away, watching us. They didn’t seem quite as threatening as they had a second ago. They lingered between the trees, different sets of eyes glinting from our lights.

I clung to Xavier’s naked body, wrapping around him like a koala. “Okay, so maybe I was a little off on the species. Not bears. Wolf-bears?”

Colton shook his head, his face grave. “Just regular wolves, no bears involved.”

One of the wolves, the white one, snorted loudly, his gaze intense. Did Colton just…insult them? Even “regular” wolves seemed like they could tear me apart happily if they wanted.

Fear churned in my stomach. “Why do I feel like they’re looking at their supper?”

Maya rolled her eyes. “They’d only munch on you if they were really starving. And they hardly look that desperate for your nasty ass.”

Still, I couldn’t shake the uneasy feeling. “Shouldn’t we do something about this, though?”

Colton shrugged. “Why? They’re just standing there.”

“Yeah, but isn’t that weird?! We can’t just wait for them to attack!” I said. “They’re probably just waiting for us to get done cooking in this nudist soup!”

“What did she just say?” Maya questioned.

“YOU’RE ALL LOW-KEY NUDISTS, MAYA! GET A FREAKIN’ CLUE!” I untangled myself from Xavier and swam closer to the pack of wolves. They were still watching us. The white wolf’s eyes met mine.

“Sit,” I told him, my entire body shaking. “*Sit!*”

“You can’t talk to them like they’re dogs, stupid,” Maya said.

However, a few seconds after I said the word ‘sit’, the wolves sat down.

I AM THE FUCKING WOLF WHISPERER.

Oh, *hell* yes.

I looked at the others with a mixture of shock and pride. “That—that WORKED,” I said. “Who’s stupid now, bitch?”

Xavier looked at the wolves, a small frown on his face. “It is a bit odd that they listened to you.”

“Why? I’m very persuasive. And a mate to an Alpha. I’m practically a queen.”

Maya snorted, staying blissfully snark free for the moment. Still beaming, I looked to Xavier for reassurance. Maybe it was odd that they listened to me, but he should be proud! I was really coming into my own Luna-ness. Avoiding my eyes, Xavier exchanged a look with Colton.

I huffed, far too familiar with this song and dance. “What aren’t you two telling me this time?”

**Episode 116**

I was fully prepared to hear some long ass story about wolf mythology and ‘the great tradition of wolf-bears’ or some other nonsense. Or I’d get those same vague muttering responses where I had no real answers.

Yeah, no that wasn’t going to fly.

Colton must have been able to read the annoyance on my face. “Chill, Cali. It’s just that they usually don’t listen to humans. No offense, but you’re kinda looked down on by our furry relatives.”

“Not just our relatives. *We* look down on you too. Some more than others,” Maya chimed in.

“Some offense taken,” I mumbled.

Colton splashed Maya. “No one asked you.”

“I don’t need to be asked,” said Maya, splashing him back.

“They did listen to me, though,” I said, watching the wolves watch me. “In fact, I think they helped guide me back through the woods when I got lost.”

Maya scoffed. “How the hell did you get lost? You were gone for less than a minute. Any idiot could figure out how to find their way back.”

“It was dark!” I protested. “And I mean, they chased me, but I’m back here, aren’t I?”

Colton splashed Maya again.

Maya shot him a death glare. “If you do that one more time, I swear I will rip your head off and play volleyball with it!”

“You wish, princess,” Colton sneered.

I rolled my eyes. “Can you please stop whatever weird little game the two of you are playing and tell me what the hell is going on?”

“We honestly don’t know,” Xavier said. “For real this time,” he added, seeing the skeptical look on my face. “But maybe I can find out.”

Xavier stepped out of the water, causing a new wave of panic to wash over me. “What the hell are you doing?” I cried out. “They still might be dangerous!”

“It’s okay, I just want to talk to their Alpha,” he explained.

“What? You can talk to wolves? And you didn’t bring this up earlier?”

“Yeah, I can talk to wolves. I’m an Alpha after all. And you never asked,” he said, dropping to his knees.

“Wait!” I cried out again. “Could you at least have your little meeting with your pants on? I don’t want some feral wolf to mistake your dick for a sausage!”

Though I had to admit, Xavier’s ass looked amazing in the moonlight. If he wasn’t careful, I was going to take a bite out of it myself. Or I might have if Colton and Maya hadn’t been there.

Xavier smirked at me as he moved to put on his pants. “Fair. I’m saving that for you later tonight,” he added with a wink.

“Oh, you’re a sausage fan, huh? Is that right, Cali? What’s your favorite kind of sausage?” Colton howled with laughter.

Boys were gross. Though I couldn’t help but blush at the thought.

Xavier got back on his hands and knees and slowly moved forward until his nose was nearly touching the large, Alpha-looking wolf. The one with the white fur.

The wolf let out a low, warning growl.

“Xavier,” I breathed, nervous. What if they ripped his face off? Maybe I should tell the wolves to not do that… Would they listen?

“Shhh,” Colton hushed. “Don’t distract him.”

I watched helplessly as the man…wolf-bear…wolf-bear-man I loved came face to face with a wild wolf.

I wrung my hands as Xavier and the wolf locked eyes. They stared at each other for a long, tense moment before Xavier pulled back and turned to face us. “They’re good,” he said simply with a shrug.

I gaped at him. “*They’re good?* That’s all you have to say? THEY’RE GOOD?”

Seriously, that boy was going to be the death of me. Not because he was dangerous, but because he was too damn mysterious.

“Would ‘chill’ work better for you? Relaxed? Cool? They’re chill, Cali,” he assured me. He took off his jeans again and slipped back into the water. “They’re just making sure you’re safe.”

I frowned at him, then turned to look at the wolves. “Me? What? Wait, how do you even know that?” I asked Xavier. “The two of you just stared into each other’s eyes like in a romance movie!” Seriously, that shit had been intense. “And what the hell did they want with me? Why do a bunch of wolves care about my safety? I mean, it was very nice of them to be so considerate, but still!”

“I believe it’s your turn,” Xavier said, trying to draw my attention back to Truth or Dare. As if a pack of wolves *wasn’t* watching our fight with keen interest and what looked like vague amusement. Maybe this was just a fun night out to them. Watching naked couples fighting in a hot spring. Maybe this was their version of reality TV.

I was getting distracted again. I should have been focused on being hella mad at Xavier, who was again changing the subject. Like fucking usual.

“Fine. Truth or care,” I snapped. “And, Xavier, if you know what’s good for you, you’ll choose truth.”

Xavier sighed, clearly annoyed. “Okay, truth.”

“WHAT THE FUCK JUST HAPPENED OVER THERE?” I demanded. “AND DON’T YOU ROLL YOUR EYES AT ME!”

Xavier paused to restrain his eye roll. “Like I said, I’m an Alpha. I have Alpha blood in me, which allows me to communicate with wild wolves non-verbally.” He shrugged. “The Alpha of the pack told me they were protecting you.”

“Why?” I asked. “That’s very nice of them…but why?”

Xavier shrugged again. “Maybe because they saw you prancing through the woods, naked and scared. You must have looked like you needed help.”

“She *always* looks like she needs help,” Maya chimed in.

“But—” I started, but Maya cut me off.

“*Boring*,” she sang out. “You’ve already asked TWO dumb questions.”

“Rude,” said Colton.

Maya glared at him. “Someone had to stop her before she said something stupid. *Stupider*. My IQ can’t take much more.”

“Especially considering it was so low to begin with,” I shot back.

Colton turned to Xavier. “I hate to agree with Maya on anything, but she’s kind of right. This shit is dull. Save the lover’s quarrel for later, and then have some hot makeup sex.”

We were in the woods—I could murder him and get away with it, right?

Xavier splashed water at Colton, shooting him a death glare. That’s my baby. “Okay, it’s my turn,” Xavier said, turning to his brother. “Truth or dare?”

A smug smirk spread across Colton’s face. “Dare away, bro.”

There was a mischievous glint in Xavier’s eyes. “I dare you to…kiss Maya.”

I smacked Xavier. “That’s a terrible idea! They’ll kill each other!”

Personally, I didn’t care if Colton killed Maya, but there was a possibility that I might miss Colton if Maya ate him. Well, maybe. Too soon to say. The forest murder was still on the table.

Xavier ignored my protest. “And it can’t just be a ‘hi, nice to see you again’ kind of kiss. I’m talking full-on Frenching. Lots of tongue action. Some hot mate-on-mate action, not a PG high school kiss.”

“You’re such a dick, Xavier.” Maya scowled at him. If looks could kill, we’d all have been fried by now.

“I have to agree—my brother is a massive dick.” Colton smirked. “Well, kind of. We can all see that isn’t *completely* true.”

I gasped. That was going too far. I happened to know *for a fact* that Xavier had an excellent dick, and I wasn’t going to allow this slander. “I beg your pardon! You two are twins, and as you KNOW he has a—”

“STOP!” both Colton and Maya shouted. Hey, if they were going to hit below the belt, I was going to defend my man.

Xavier smirked at Maya and Colton. “So what are you waiting for? Kiss. Or are you two too scared you’ll enjoy it?”

“Yeah, are you chicken?” I asked. Xavier laughed and started making squawking sounds, flapping his arms like wings. I joined in on the squawking, splashing Colton as I did so.

“Real mature guys,” Colton said.

“Real mature pretending that you and Maya aren’t super into each other,” I said.

“And mates,” added Xavier with his own splash.

“SHUT THE FUCK UP!” Colton yelled, shoving a tide of water at the both of us.

This led to several minutes of fighting. Colton, Xavier and I all ended up splashing each other like we were at a seventh-grade pool party. Honestly, it was so much fun that I kind of forgot about the actual dare until Xavier spoke up.

“I knew you guys wouldn’t kiss,” he said, smirking.

I laughed. “You’re just two chickens, flocking together.”

“Cali streaked through the woods,” Xavier said, a tiny smile on his face. “She did her dare. And you two can’t even do a simple kiss.”

Grinning, I said, “How’s it feel to be the weak one now?”

“Oh, for fuck’s sake,” Maya said. Then she lunged forward, and for a moment I thought she was going for Colton’s throat. I gasped, throwing myself at Xavier in case she was going to attack all of us. We’d just been teasing! Stay out of the hot springs if you can’t take the heat!

But then, instead of strangling Colton, Maya did something I never thought I’d see—not in a million years.

She planted a big, juicy kiss on his unsuspecting lips.

O.M.G.

**Episode 117**

I could not believe what I was witnessing. Colton and Maya, sworn enemies, most likely to kill each other in battle, were now making out like their lives depended on it. It was almost like I was watching a movie—one of those 3D ones, except without the stupid glasses.

Maya had her hands laced in Colton’s hair and he had his big hands on her—excuse me, NAKED—hips, pulling her on top of him as she wrapped her long legs around his waist.

OKAY, THEY *CLEARLY* HAD TO HAVEDONE THIS BEFORE. WHO MAKES OUT LIKE THIS THE FIRST TIME AROUND?

I didn’t *want* to watch Colton and Maya dry humping in a hot spring, but it was like I couldn’t look away. Like I’d been put under some sort of horny spell.

If they kept this up, they were going to start turning this scene into a porno real quick.

I leaned over to Xavier, who was also watching this mess unfold. “What the hell is this?”

Xavier shrugged. “I’ll admit, this wasn’t quite what I was expecting.”

“They seem pretty practiced for two people who swear that they hate each other’s guts,” I commented. “Should we…*do* something about this?”

Xavier gave me a strange look. “Like what, join them? He’s my brother, so hard pass on that.” A devilish grin slid across his face. “*You* could join in with Maya though. That would be pretty hot.”

I smacked him across the chest. “Pig! Don’t objectify women! I mean should we stop them from doing whatever *this* is?”

Xavier shrugged. “Why?”

I gaped at him. “Um, because we are RIGHT HERE IN FRONT OF THEM?! Do you really want to watch your brother bang Maya in a hot spring?”

“I’ve seen him do way worse.”

“You guys are way too close,” I said, turning back to watch the show.

Colton and Maya were still wildly making out, as if Xavier and I weren’t even there. Jealousy and annoyance started to rise in my chest. Xavier and I had been making out like that before THEY showed up and ruined everything. It should have been me—and *only me*—getting fucked in the hot springs. And it would have happened too if Xavier and I had been alone.

So if I wasn’t going to get a super-hot make-out session, then why should they? Plus, if I didn’t intervene, they’d probably keep going all night long.

I cleared my throat loudly, in a not very subtle, grating kind of way. I had to do this twice until Maya—finally—pulled back. She promptly gave me an annoyed look, seemingly pissed that I’d interrupted her make-out session. And I thought she only wanted to kill Colton. Cute how bad of a liar she seemed to be.

“You better not have just spat in that water,” she warned me before turning to Xavier. “Juicy enough for ya?” she asked, climbing off Colton.

“Um, yeah that was…definitely something.” I narrowed my eyes, trying to see if they were blushing from the kiss or from the water. Then what she said hit me. “Wait, why would I spit in the water I’m sitting in?” I questioned. “It’s you wolf-bears who drool all over everything.”

“Hey, for the last time, I don’t drool!” said Xavier.

I rolled my eyes. “Uh, yes you do. I’ve slept in your bed with you. Ya drool, boy.”

“No. I don’t,” he said, splashing me with the water.

“Excuse me!” I gasped, splashing him back.

This splash fight escalated quickly, at least until Colton said, “It’s my turn now!”

Oh right, the game. “Sure,” I said. “Hit us with your best shot.”

He turned to Maya. “Truth or dare?”

Maya rolled her eyes. “Truth, I guess. Anything to get this nonsense over with quicker.”

Colton smirked. “How did you like the kiss?”

I leaned forward, waiting for the drama to unfold. I couldn’t wait to spill the tea with Lola when she was back in her human form. Colton and Maya making out like horny teenagers? That was a huge deal. And Maya must have been into it because she’d gotten *really* involved. Unless Maya was an award-winning actress and had never mentioned it—she *totally* would’ve mentioned it, if that were true—the feelings had to be real. Nobody could fake that much grabby hand action.

Honestly, Colton and Maya had kind of reminded me of how Xavier and I kissed when we really got into it. Only I hoped I was a much better kisser than Maya. I didn’t know if Xavier and I looked like a movie when we kissed…

I made a mental note to somehow figure that out later.

Maya leaned in close to Colton. “How was kissing you?” she whispered in a sexy tone. She traced nails across his cheek, and I totally saw Colton suck in a breath. I needed popcorn for this so badly. “You really want to know?”

Colton’s chest puffed up, and his smile grew wicked. “Uh huh. Tell the truth, princess.”

Maya went even closer, their noses almost touching. “Kissing you was like…kissing a wet, smelly, rangy old dog that should have been put down years ago.”

Wow, that was *not* the reaction I’d expected.

Colton bit his lip and turned away. For a brief moment, I was worried that he was really upset. But then I heard his laughter. It sounded a little too forced to be real, but it was still a laugh. Poor Colton, trying to save face after sucking face.

“Oh, princess, you have such a beautiful way with words,” he said sarcastically. “But I have to agree with you. The only description I’d add is ‘rabid’ and maybe ‘disgusting’. Maybe I should look into a vaccine or something? Or some mints.”

I stared at them, my jaw threatening to drop out of my head.

SERIOUSLY, WERE THEY FUCKING KIDDING ME WITH THIS SHIT? FUCKING WOLF-BEARS AND THEIR INABILITY TO BE HONEST FOR FOUR POINT FIVE SECONDS!

“WHAT?” I demanded. “Oh my god, you two are the biggest liars I have ever met!” I turned to Xavier. “Tell me you didn’t see what I just saw?”

Xavier shrugged. “I saw Maya fulfilling her dare.”

Of fucking course he did. Xavier, king of the liars. “You’re a liar too! The worst one in the bunch!”

“Rude,” said Xavier.

“You can’t say that; I say that!” I said, still pissed off. “They would’ve ripped each other’s clothes off if they had any on! PEOPLE IN SPACE COULD SEE IT!”

Maya’s expression darkened. “And what’s exactly your point? Are you calling me a slut?” she snarled. “I fulfilled my part of this stupid game.”

Yikes, that must have hit a nerve. “You know that’s not what I meant,” I said. “I know you like, ‘hate me’ but I’d never call you that.”

Maya’s eyes narrowed. “Then what did you mean?”

I paused, trying to figure out the correct phrasing—preferably something that wouldn’t make Maya rip my throat out. “I mean…” I started, “Let’s just say that if you’d kept going, this spring would have ended up with an R rating.”

“Which would have been extremely nasty,” added Xavier.

Oh sure, *now* he chimed in*.*

“YOU’RE THE ASSHOLE WHO MADE US KISS!” Maya cried out. She rolled her eyes, clearly annoyed. “Enough of this bullshit, it’s my turn.”

Suddenly, the vibe of the hot spring shifted. Somehow, the kidding around had taken on a dark tone. The spring was still boiling hot, but I could feel an uncomfortable change in the air. Everyone suddenly seemed a little too on edge, like the wrong word or action could send them into a fight.

I wanted to leave. To stop this before things got really ugly. We were guests at a witch’s house, after all. We needed to show some respect and showing respect did *not* entail wolf-bears tearing each other up in said witch’s hot spring and turning it into stew.

I shivered a little at the thought of the barbecue the other night—how the wolf-bears had gone totally crazy over practically nothing. The last thing I wanted was a brawl between all of us. We were all (mostly) on the same team!

“I think the water’s getting too cold,” I said. “Maybe we should head back?”

Maya rolled her eyes. “Don’t be a wuss. It’s a hotspring, it never gets cold. It’s in the title. And besides, it’s my turn to choose someone.”

“I thought you said you didn’t want to play this game, anyway,” I shot back.

“I don’t like playing it when you all pick stupid shit. Now, shut the hell up because it’s MY TURN!”

Geez, what a brat. “You didn’t have a lot of friends growing up, did you?”

Maya ignored me and turned toward Xavier. The dark smile on her face made me gulp with anxiety. “Truth or dare?”

Xavier shrugged. “Dealer’s choice. Bring it on.”

I had to give it to Xavier, he knew how to stay calm under pressure. While I usually flew off the handle with barely any provocation, he was steady. I knew he would make a brilliant Alpha—I could already see it. And when the time came, I’d be by his side.

And it didn’t hurt that he looked so fucking sexy *while* he stayed calm under pressure. Like, if there was a *GQ* magazine for wolf-bear Alphas, he would be on the cover. Shirtless, probably.

As Maya thought over her options, I secretly hoped that she’d dare Xavier to kiss me. Not that I secretly wanted people to watch me make out with Xavier, because gross. But I wanted to shove it in Maya’s face that humans were just as sexy as wolf-bears. I didn’t care what Maya and Colton said—*part* of that kiss had been because they were super into each other and also mates, but *another* part of it had been a power move from Maya. She was always trying to get in people's heads to mess with them.

“Xavier, I dare you…” Maya started, “to give Cali the Luna mark.”

**Episode 118**

“*What?*” I screeched, shock and panic flowing through my system at Maya’s words. Sure, I’d all but begged Xavier to give me a Luna mark from the moment I’d learned they existed. But right now? In a hot spring? At a witch’s house? While I was naked? Plus, Mrs. Smith had said it would seriously hurt or result in death.

I’d had enough painful experiences for one day. Hard pass.

Xavier was also displeased by the dare. He narrowed his eyes at Maya, looking like he was about three seconds away from ripping her throat out with his bare hands. I almost wanted him to do it, too. “Are you out of your fucking mind?”

Maya shrugged. “She’s supposed to be your mate, but I don’t see a Luna mark anywhere on her body.”

“Why are you paying such close attention, Maya?” I tried to stay calm, but on the inside, I was in full panic mode. What if she’d seen my red streaks? What if they became a new thing she made fun of me for? I didn’t think I could bear it—those marks were far too private and personal.

May scoffed. “Oh, don’t flatter yourself. You fell on me, *and* you ran through the woods naked. A Luna mark stands out, and there’s nothing about you that stands out.”

Very rude. But on a positive note, at least according to her, my stretch marks didn’t stand out. I guess I could put that in the win column.

“Don’t be stupid, Maya,” said Colton, losing his joking manner. “A Luna mark could kill her. And who’d want to clean that mess up?”

It was at that point I started to consider that maybe I should get better friends.

Maya shrugged. “It’s a chance I’m willing to take. Though clearly not a risk the supposed Alpha wants to take.”

Xavier walked over to Maya and leaned over, making it abundantly clear that he was much taller, much bigger, and much stronger than she could ever be. His expression was hard, and his jaw was set. He was not a happy wolf-bear.

“Don’t. Push it. Maya,” he growled in a fierce whisper that even gave me chills.

“Uh, excuse me,” I ventured. “But shouldn’t I have some say in this?”

Everyone turned to me at once and gave a resounding ‘no’.

“That’s not fair,” I said. Didn’t these people understand the concept of a woman’s right to choose?

Maya turned back to Xavier, meeting his fierce gaze. “What do you say, Xavier? Are you going to claim your so-called mate or not?”

“I don’t answer to you. I am the Alpha, and I’m pulling rank. You do not speak to me like this—or to my mate,” he growled out.

“You aren’t the true Alpha yet, Xavier,” Maya replied.

“You’re right,” Xavier said. “But when—not if, but *when*—I’m officially declared the true Alpha, I *swear* I will do everything in my power to make life very, *very* uncomfortable for you if you ever dare cross me or my girl again. So keep your mouth shut. Is that understood?”

Maya only nodded.

Xavier turned away and got out of the hot spring. “Party’s over,” he declared and started to walk away.

I quickly got out of the spring, scrambling to keep up with him.

“Xavier, wait!” I called out, grabbing both our clothes before I ran to be by his side. He was walking very fast, almost stalking, anger rolling off his body in waves.

I looked behind me, Maya and Colton were alone in the hot springs. They were either going to fight or fuck, and I didn’t much care to witness either of those options.

“Do you think it’s a good idea to leave Colton and Maya alone?” I asked.

“Who gives a shit,” Xavier spat. “I hope they tear each other to pieces.”

“You don’t mean that,” I said gently, realizing just how much Maya’s dare had affected him. I just didn’t know why. “Colton’s your brother.”

“Thanks for reminding me,” Xavier snarled. “Maybe he should start acting like one.”

“You don’t mean that,” I repeated.   
 “You don’t have the first idea what I mean and what I don’t mean,” he growled.

I stopped walking—partly because his words stung, and partly because I was walking naked through the woods. While talking to my hot, naked wolf-bear was cool (sometimes), getting ticks where the sun didn’t shine was very *not* cool. Maybe that whole nudist idea had been a little premature.

I slipped on my clothes. At that point, Xavier realized I was no longer following him and walked back over to me.

“I’m sorry,” he said.

“Just put on your clothes.” I sighed, handing them over.

He put them on without saying a word. Then he said, “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” I said gruffly.

He winced at my tone and gentled his voice. “I shouldn’t have said that to you.”

“Well, you did,” I said. “I know being the whole gruff and mysterious bad boy is your ‘thing’ but sometimes what you say really hurts.” I was surprised by my own honesty but thankful I said something.

“I'm sorry, Cali.” Xavier pulled me into a hug, and I inhaled the smell of him. “Can you forgive me?”

“Yes.” He was my mate, my love. Neither of us was perfect after all. He squeezed me tightly, and my stomach chose that moment to growl loudly, making us both chuckle.

“Hungry?” He laughed. “Let’s get back to the house. I’m hungry, too, after the swim.”

“I’ve been craving lasagna,” I admitted.

Xavier took my hand, and we continued to walk back to the shack. I was still feeling pretty tipsy, the effects of the moonshine holding strong. I leaned up to kiss Xavier, hoping to recreate the kiss we’d had at the hot spring before the mess started.

He kissed me back, but it wasn’t as passionate and toe-curling as before. It was softer—the kind of kiss you give someone coming home from work, or when the kisser has something on their mind.

I was going to have to do something about that.

“I wish Colton and Maya hadn’t shown up,” I said wistfully as we walked.

“Same,” agreed Xavier.

“They totally ruined our chance at a mini-vacation—is that as much vacation as we’re ever going to get? A micro-vacation?”

Despite his anger toward his brother and Maya, Xavier cracked a smile. “You are so weird.”

I smiled back at him. “Yes, but you love me.”

“That I do.”

We kissed again, with much more passion.

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By the time we made it back to the house, the smell of lasagna was hanging in the air, almost like it was welcoming us. My stomach growled again, demanding food.

“Hey, you two, how was the hot spring?” Big Mac asked cheerfully, greeting us at the door.

“It was hot,” I replied. “Really, really hot.”

Big Mac laughed. “I’m sure it was. In more ways than one, I imagine?” she said with a wink.

*I wish.* Also, why did all magical people seem to constantly have their minds in the gutter? It seemed like all they ever talked about was sex. It had to be a hormone thing or something.

“How’s Lola?” I asked, hoping that she’d be back to her old self again soon.

Big Mac smiled. “She’s resting. She’s still in her wolf form, but I don’t think it should be much longer now before she changes back. Jay fell asleep right by her side. It was very cute. The poor dear must’ve been exhausted, worrying about his mate like that.”

That, or he’d taken a bunch of sleeping pills.

“Are you positive that she’s going to be all right?” I asked, my voice small.

Big Mac put a gentle hand on my shoulder. “You’re a loving friend, Cali. But I’ve been doing this for a long time, and I can assure you that Lola will be her cheery, human self by morning.”

I smiled at that. “Thank you. Can I see her?”

“Of course. She’s still in the back room.”

I walked to the back room, just missing Colton and Maya’s return to the shack. I could hear them bickering at the top of their voices. And apparently, they ‘weren’t in love’. Puh-*lease*.

The back room was dark, lit only by the moonlight that poured in through the open window. I could just make out the outline of Jay, sleeping soundly by Lola’s side, drooling all the while.

I smiled, feeling pretty smug that I’d been right. I wanted to drag Xavier in and show him that wolf-bears did, in fact, snore, but I fought the urge. This was my time with Lola, and it was going to be about her.

I walked over to wolf Lola. She was stretched out on the table, looking a lot like a large puppy. My best friend. I could have lost my best friend in the world today, and she would’ve gone down trying to protect me.

I choked back tears as I reached out to pet her tenderly on the head. “It’s going to be okay, Lolly-Lolls,” I cooed, knowing that if she could hear the old nickname, she’d have bitten off all my fingers in a heartbeat. Worth it if she’d wake up.

“What was the weird shit with the wolves really about?” Colton’s voice filtered in through the window.

I looked out the window and saw that Xavier and Colton were outside talking. Quickly, I dropped to the floor so I could hear them better without being caught snooping. If they were about to talk about super-secret mysterious broody boy things, then I was going to hear. Screw begging them for info anymore—I’d get it however I could.

“Shhh, keep your voice down,” Xavier urged.

Not too down though, for those listening in… I strained my neck up, hoping it would somehow help me hear what Xavier said next.

“Greyson sent the wolves.”

“Shit,” Colton muttered. “To hurt you?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Then what?” Colton asked. Bless his loud voice. “Why is he so interested in us suddenly? This isn’t a fucking family reunion.”

For a few seconds I heard nothing except Jay’s snoring. But then I heard Xavier’s voice again. “He didn’t send them for me,” he said. “Greyson told them Cali’s his mate.”

Wait, I’m sorry, *WHAT?*

**Episode 119**

I did a double take toward the window, trying to make sense of what I was hearing. Greyson thought he was *my mate?* That was impossible. It *had* to be impossible. You were only supposed to have one mate, right? I mean, *technically* Xavier had another mate before I came along, but she was dead. And Greyson and I had only known each other for what? Two days? And sure, we’d both seen each other naked, but that didn’t make us mates!

“What the *fuck* are you guys talking about?” I asked aloud, sticking my head out the window.

The boys turned, clearly displeased to see me. “Language, Ms. Hart,” said Colton.

“Oh, go to hell, Colton!” I yelled back. “What’s going on?”

Xavier glared at me. “Who told you to listen in on a *private* conversation?”

“She’s like an annoying, nosy neighbor,” added Colton.

“First of all, I don’t need anyone’s permission to do anything--especially a pair of dirty rotten liars like you two. And second, you are the worst whisperers in the history of whispering. I could hear everything you said without even trying. Have you even *heard* of an inside voice? Your main speaking volume is shouting.”

Colton rolled his eyes. “I’m out of here. Good luck with that, bro,” he said, jabbing his thumb in my direction before heading back into the house.

Xavier looked over at me, his expression stern. “What exactly do you think you heard?”

“Hang on, I'm coming down.”

The window at Big Mac’s place wasn’t as far from the ground as the one I’d jumped out of last night. So when I climbed through, it was only a few inches from the ground. Yet I still managed to get my foot caught on the sill and tripped, falling into a bush.

At least there was a bush waiting for me this time, not a naked wolf-bear who may or may not be telling people he was my mate.

Xavier laughed. “You are such a klutz. Also, you have a very stupid and dangerous habit of falling out of windows.”

I glared up at him from the bush. “You *could* help me up. My new mate Greyson saved me the last time I fell. Maybe he’s the better match for me,” I said darkly, hoping it stung.

He stopped laughing. “Never say that again,” he growled.

I got up and brushed off the dirt before putting my hands on my hips. “Are you going to tell me why Greyson thinks I’m his mate? Or are you just going to lie to me again like you did at the hot springs? This is why I have trouble trusting you sometimes, Xavier,” I spat, anger running hot within me, rivaling the temperature in the springs.

“You can trust me,” Xavier said.

“I know! But then you won’t tell me what the fuck is going on!”

“How the hell would I know why Greyson is saying that?” Xavier said. “He’s certifiable! Probably just saying it to make me jealous.”

I lifted an eyebrow, my feelings softening. “Did it work?”

Xavier scoffed. “Why would I ever be jealous of that tool? We’re mates. I have nothing to be worried about.”

“You seemed pretty upset that he saw me naked in the dressing room.”

Xavier rolled his eyes. “That’s because he’s dangerous, Cali. He could have hurt you.”

“But he didn’t! Actually, he saved me. Twice!”

“He only saved you because he has an agenda. We need to be careful around him. He’s a hazard—he can’t be trusted.”

Greyson is dangerous.

I’d been hearing that a lot from everyone, but whenever I’d been around him, I’d never felt afraid. Even in the dressing room. He hadn’t even threatened to kill me when I was being a brat. I’d known I *should* have been afraid, but I just hadn’t been.

“Caliana,” said Xavier, zapping me out of my thoughts. He walked over to me and put his hands on my shoulders. “I know I don’t always tell you everything, but it’s because I’m trying to protect you. Will you *please* trust me about this? Greyson being here and playing nice is an act. He’s not a good person, and I don’t want him anywhere near you.”

I looked at him skeptically, but there was a warmth in his eyes. He was being earnest. “Okay. I believe you.”

He sighed in relief. “Good.”

“Good.”

My stomach growled again, cutting through the tension between us.

“I’m going to get some lasagna,” I said simply and headed back inside into the kitchen. Maybe if I had something to eat, I’d be able to think about things more clearly.

“What the *hell?*” I demanded as soon as I entered the kitchen. Colton was standing in front of the refrigerator, eating the last of the lasagna. MY lasagna.

Wolf bastard.

“I WANTED SOME OF THAT!” I yelled, pointing at the now empty lasagna pan.

Colton looked down. “I was hungry.”

Maya was next to him, rolling her eyes. “You’re always hungry. I’m ninety-nine percent sure you have a tapeworm.”

“I’m a growing boy!” Colton shot back.

“Do you guys ever try to figure out whatever is going on between you two?” Xavier asked as he entered the kitchen. “Or do we have to put up with this five-year-old bickering for longer?”

I pointed to Colton. “He ate all the lasagna!” I whined. “What am I supposed to eat?”

Seriously, if I didn’t get something to eat soon, I was going to eat one of them.

“What’s all the fuss about?” said Big Mac, entering the kitchen.

Colton belched loudly, and I jabbed my finger at him. “HE’S THE FUSS.”

“Hey, it’s been a long ass day, and I’m tired of both of you.” Colton turned to Big Mac. “Is there anywhere I can sleep?”

“Upstairs, dear,” Big Mac said, smiling kindly.

“Upstairs? Where is there an upstairs?” I said. The last time I checked, there was not another story on this shack. It *was* a shack, after all!

“Uh, above us,” said Maya snidely.

Big Mac pointed to a corner of the living room where there was, in fact, a staircase. *When did that get there?*

“There’s plenty of room,” Big Mac said. “Make yourself at home.”

“Don’t have to tell me twice. Night, losers. Big Mac,” said Colton, giving Big Mac a small nod before heading upstairs.

Maya yawned. “I’m going to bed. Thanks for putting us up, Big Mac.”

Oh, they were *totally* going to be banging.

Maya turned to me. “Try not to burn the house down,” she said and headed upstairs without another word.

Rude.

I turned to Xavier. “What the hell is her deal? She never stops.”

Xavier shrugged. “Don’t let her get to you.”

“Easy for you to say! *You* have fangs,” I shot back. “Also, I’m starving.”

Big Mac gave a small chuckle as she placed a cheese board on the table in front of us, complete with cheeses, meat, fruit, and a freshly baked baguette. “Your wish is my command.”

Witchcraft!

“You are my hero,” I breathed, my eyes watering at the sight of the still warm baguette.

Big Mac laughed. “Enjoy! I’m going to go check on Lola,” she said, before disappearing into the back room.

Not wasting a second, I chowed down on the food. Big Mac could definitely turn me into a witch if it meant I could keep eating like this.

“Slow down or you’re going to choke,” warned Xavier as he sat down.

“Hey, I just ran around the woods with ACTUAL wolves, naked. I’m ravenous, and I deserve this.” I said, shoving grapes into my mouth. “And it’s rude to comment on a lady’s eating habits.”

“You’re no lady, honey.”

I would have said something scathing in return, but my mouth was full of cheese.

When the growling in my stomach began to subside, I noticed Xavier was only picking at the cheese plate, his face twisted with concern.

I put down my slice of bread and looked at him. “Are you all right? You’re not eating.”

He shrugged. “I’m just tired. It’s been a long, crazy day. Let’s go to bed.”

“But… But *food,*” I said, pointing at the cheese plate. I hadn’t even touched the raspberries. I was *not* going to let the food Big Mac so kindly conjured up for us go to waste. And besides, I was too hungry to stop.

Xavier smiled softly, getting up from his chair. He walked over to me, gently taking the hand that wasn’t holding a hunk of cheese. “I’ll make sure you have a big breakfast in the morning. Now let’s go to bed.”

Torn between my heart and my stomach, I took his hand (and the cheese) and followed Xavier up the stairs. Big Mac’s house continued to be surprisingly roomy and spacious. There were at least five bedrooms for us to choose from. How? I have absolutely no freakin’ clue.

We found a vacant room with a large, soft-looking bed, and I immediately realized just how tired I really was. All the running around, Rogue fighting, and moonshine had sapped my strength. I finished my cheese and collapsed onto the bed, exhausted.

Xavier chuckled. “Tired?”

I couldn’t even answer him, my eyes already drifting shut.

Moments later, I felt Xavier’s weight on the bed. I rolled over to snuggle up with him. He was so warm and soft as his arms wrapped around my body.

“Baby,” I mumbled sleepily, rolling over to face him. But instead of seeing dark brown eyes, I saw brilliant grey.

“Hello, love.”

**Episode 120**

I gasped. It was Greyson in my bed, not Xavier. The look on my face as the realization hit me must have been entertaining, because his lips slipped into an amused smirk.

“Surprised to see me, love?” he asked coyly.

“A little,” I said. “I thought you had better things to do then hang out with us.”

“I do,” he said, playing with my hair. To be honest, it felt nice—until I remembered that I was in bed with an allegedly murderous wolf-bear.

“Where’s Xavier?” I asked, trying to sound stern—which is pretty difficult when a guy has his arms around you and is playing with your hair.

He smirked. “Why do you want to know? Do I scare you, love?”

Surprisingly, no. I knew I *should* have been afraid, being in this bed with him. But I wasn’t. In fact, it almost felt *normal.*

“Just wanted to make sure he’s safe,” I said simply.

“Perfectly safe. Or, safe as he can be in a witch’s house.” He shrugged, still playing with my hair.

“You still haven’t answered my question. Why are you here?”

“Maybe I just want to lie here with you. You’re beautiful when you’re asleep,” he mused.

I fought an eye roll. “What is this? *Twilight?* Serial Killers 101?”

“You’re even more beautiful when you’re awake.”

I couldn’t help but smile, a blush slowly spreading across my face. “Flattery won’t get you anywhere, Greyson.” We were so close now, our chests barely inches from each other, our lips almost touching. This was not a position I should be in.

“Hmm, let’s test that statement,” he said, a mischievous spark in his eyes. He leaned closer, about to close the space between us. I closed my eyes in anticipation…

GASP.

My eyes snapped open as I sat up straight in bed, my breath coming in short gasps. It wasn’t Greyson, but Xavier, sleeping next to me.

*What the hell?*

I looked around to see if Greyson was still in the room but found no sign of him.

*Just a dream,* I thought. *Just a dream.*

WHAT THE HELL?

A fresh wave of panic came over me as I realized what had happened. I couldn’t believe I was having dreams about *Greyson*. Dreams where he was holding me, playing with my hair, about to kiss me…

Had I dream-cheated on Xavier? WITH HIS HALF-BROTHER?! Ugh this whole thing was DEFINITELY turning into a wolf-bear version of *Jerry Springer*. What the hell was wrong with me? I was supposed to keep away from Greyson, not have sexy dreams about him where he was in my bed, and we were about to kiss, and I was going to let him, and OMG XAVIER!

Shit, what if Xavier found out? He’d totally kill me if that happened! What if he read my thoughts somehow?

In my panic haze, I turned and saw him still fast asleep, snoring softly. He was drooling a little and, if I’d been in a better frame of mind, I would have taken a picture of it to prove that wolf-bears did indeed snore. But I was not in the right frame of mind.

*Breathe, Cali*, I told myself sternly, trying to quell the panic attack building inside me. I had to remind myself that NOTHING had happened—less than nothing. It had been a dream. Was dream cheating even a thing? Especially if we hadn’t kissed? And Xavier couldn’t read minds, anyway.

I knew I had nothing to feel guilty about, because nothing had happened, but it still didn’t stop the unease I felt when I thought about it—his fingers in my hair, his scent, how close his lips had been to mine, how we’d both leaned forward and almost…

*NOT REAL!* I mentally shouted at myself, trying to get back to reality. It had been a dream—we hadn’t even slept together.

It was probably all that moonshine I’d had last night. And that funky cheese. I knew I shouldn’t have eaten anything made by a witch. She’d probably put a love potion in it, or some sort of weird sex spell. Well, I wasn’t going to eat any more of her witchy creations. Or maybe it had just been the cheese? Maybe I should go vegan for a week to clear my head. I read once that celebrities did that, and they were probably all fine.

“Morning, baby.” A sleepy Xavier brought me out of my thought spiral.

I turned to look at him again, the rising sunlight creating a glow around him.

How could I have even *thought* about anyone else when I had a sexy Alpha right there? Wow, my subconscious and I needed to have a serious chat.

“Are you okay, Cali?” Xavier asked, his eyebrows knitted together in concern. “You look worried; what’s going on?”

“I’m fine,” I said quickly, my voice squeaking just a little. I felt my cheeks grow warm and turned away.

Xavier sat up in bed, trying to catch my eye again. “You don’t look fine. Is your stomach upset?”

“Ew! No!”

“I mean, you look like you’re upset about something,” he explained. “Or having indigestion from eating cheese so late at night.”

“I had a weird dream,” I confessed, looking down at the bed sheet.

“About what?”

“About Gre— About big pans of lasagna and witches on broomsticks. Crazy dream, what can I say?” I said, furious at myself for chickening out of telling him. Also, lasagna and witches? I needed to get better at lying. I was surprised I hadn’t already gotten better at it, what with constantly being told lies by dumb wolf-bears.

“I swear you are the weirdest person sometimes,” Xavier said with a lazy grin. I turned to look at him again. He looked so damn sexy in the mornings, his expression relaxed, his body warm and soft to curl up to, a tender smile on his face…

I wanted him, and I wanted him now.

“Yeah,” I said with a smile, moving closer. “But you like it.”

I leaned forward and kissed him passionately. I dominated the kiss, deepening it as Xavier opened his mouth. I needed to push the dream of Greyson as far from my mind as possible, and Xavier was the perfect distraction.

I climbed on top of him and straddled his waist, feeling his already hard cock on my pelvis. A girl could keep getting used to that.

I smirked. “What did *you* dream about?” I asked coyly.

Geez, I hoped his had been about me…

Xavier just smirked up at me. “I’ll never tell,” he said and kissed me back just as fiercely.

We made out like this for a while, enjoying the feeling as our tongues tangoed with each other, and I ground my hips into his. I still felt kinda guilty about the whole Greyson thing, but why should I? It had probably been Greyson’s whole scheme, to mess with me and Xavier. Come in and be all good-looking and break us up to get at his brother. Maybe he’d done some wolf-bear magic thing to my mind.

My thoughts were hushed when Xavier flipped me over so that he was on top, grinning down at me like he was a wolf, and I was the prey.

“You look so beautiful when you’re asleep,” he whispered in my ear. “But even more beautiful when you’re awake.”

*Wait, did he just…*

“GOOD MORRRRRRRRRRRRRNING, LOVEBIRDS!” Colton sang-yelled at the top of his lungs as he burst into our room. He had a large, shit-eating grin on his face. “Looks like you two are really enjoying the morning.”

“OH MY GOD, DO YOU EVER KNOCK?” I yelled, annoyed as ever. “A CLOSED DOOR MEANS DON’T ENTER! HOW HARD IS IT FOR YOU TO UNDERSTAND?” I was still pissed about the lasagna thing, but this was a whole new level of annoying. Colton was truly the king of all cock blocks.

My yelling only made Colton grin more. He turned to his brother, who was glaring daggers at him. “Oh, did I come in before you did? So sorry, bro. Better luck next time!” He laughed.

Xavier reached over on the bed, grabbed a pillow, and then threw it at Colton as hard as he could, nailing him straight in the face.

“Okay, I probably deserved that,” Colton said.

“Why are you even here?” I spat. Couldn’t a girl get laid in peace?

Colton pulled the pillow away from his face. “Hmm, let’s see… There was something I was supposed to tell you guys… Hmmm…” He tapped his chin with his middle finger. “I had it in my mind, and now I seem to have forgotten it.”

Xavier and I looked at each other.

“Do you want to kill him, or should I?” I asked.

Xavier turned to his brother. “If you don’t tell me why you barged in here in the next thirty seconds, I will throw you out the window.”

“Oh yeah!” Colton said. “Breakfast is ready. Yum yum.”

I rolled my eyes. “You barged in here just to tell us that?”

“Well, you yelled at me the last time for eating all the food, so I thought I should give you a heads up before I did it again.”

I huffed, annoyed. “Get out of here, Colton.”

“Okay, okay. I know when I’m not wanted,” he said, turning to leave. “Oh yeah, one more thing you might be interested in—Lola’s awake, and she’s human.”

**Episode 121**

Lola was awake? And human? Relief washed over me. For a moment or two, I’d been worried I was going to end up with a wolf for a best friend, which wouldn’t have been ideal.

WAIT, LOLA WAS AWAKE AND NO ONE HAD TOLD ME BEFORE NOW?

“YOU BASTARD!” I screamed, pushing Xavier off me. “You couldn’t have led with that?”  
 Colton grinned, his eyes mischievous. “Where’s the fun in that?”

*Asshole.* I’d gotten mixed up with a whole family of assholes!

“I cannot believe you didn’t tell me right away. You wolf-bears hoard secrets like dragons hoard treasure,” I said, getting out of bed and wrapping the sheet around myself.

Xavier looked up at me in shock and annoyance, his erection clearly visible and bulging out from his boxers. He pointed at his crotch. “Hey, where do you think you’re going? Ever heard of blue balls?”

I rolled my eyes. Men and wolf-bears only ever had one thing on their minds. “Oh, fuck off—literally. I’m going to go see Lola, tissues are over there,” I told him with a cheeky smile to let him know I was kidding. Kind of.

I hurried downstairs, leaving Xavier’s death stare and Colton’s laughter behind. I was absolutely going to get hell from Xavier later, but I needed to see my best friend—even if it kept me from getting laid.

“Lola!” I screamed as I got to the bottom of the stairs. I ran into the kitchen to find her at the table, wrapped in a fluffy plaid blanket. She was sitting on Jay’s lap, cuddling him as Big Mac poured her a cup of tea. For a moment I stopped, taking her in. I almost didn’t recognize her at first, so used to her wolf shape. But she had the same dyed blonde hair, same eyes, same smooth skin not covered in fur. Yup, that was my Lola.

“Good morning, Cali,” Big Mac said cheerfully as she walked over to the cupboard and grabbed another teacup.

“Lola!” I gasped. “You look like you again! You don’t have fur! You’re walking on two legs!”

“Yeah, we can all see, Cali,” said Jay. “Keep your voice down.”

I rolled my eyes. “Shut up, Jay,” I said before running over and hugging Lola.

“It’s good to see you too, bestie,” Lola said. Then she gave a tiny whimper of pain, and I pulled away quickly.

“Gentle now, hon, she’s a little tender,” Big Mac warned, pouring another cup of tea and handing it to me. I gratefully took it, even though it was probably some magical potion or something. “Side effect of being a hybrid and shifting, I suppose.” Big Mac shrugged.

I turned back to Lola. “I’m sorry. How are you feeling?”

“Exhausted,” she said, yawning. “But feeling pretty good, all things considered. I’m happy I’m not stuck in my wolf form anymore, because I think SOMEONE gave me fleas,” she said, shooting a mock dirty look at Jay.

Honestly, I could believe that.

“Hey, don’t look at me,” he said, holding up his hand.

“Do you three want some croissants?” Big Mac asked, pulling a tray of golden croissants out of the oven. The sweet, warm smell filled my nose and made my mouth water. I knew I’d sworn not to eat anything else Big Mac conjured up, but my resistance quickly failed. I grabbed one.

“Thank you, Big Mac,” I told her gratefully as my stomach growled. “When do you do all this cooking?”

“Oh, I like to work my kitchen magic in the wee hours of the morning,” she said with a wink.

*Magic?* Son of a witch.

I sat down at the table next to Lola, thrilled to have my best friend back. I had so much to tell her.

I took a bite of the croissant, and my taste buds hummed in delight. The pastry was warm and flaky, with just the right amount of buttery goodness.

“This is the best thing I’ve ever put in my mouth ever,” I moaned, taking another bite of the miracle croissant.

“Same,” said Lola, halfway finished with her croissant.

“I’m right here,” said Jay.

“Still true,” Lola said, reaching for another.

I turned to Big Mac. “Can I have the recipe?” I asked. I would do some serious dark arts to get these croissants all the time. I only hoped she didn’t guard the recipe as closely as Mrs. Smith guarded her white chocolate mocha.

“It’s nothing fancy,” said Big Mac. “I found the recipe on Google. I just added a few things to make them extra special.”

My ears perked up. “Like eye of newt?” I asked. “I don’t think our supermarket carries that. And also, gross.” How many eyes did newts have if everyone used them in their recipes?

Big Mac just laughed. “Nothing that exotic, Cali. Just some nutmeg and a dash of my special herbs. Speaking of which, I have to go to my garden and collect them.” She stepped out of the kitchen and into the garden.

As soon as she was out of earshot, I turned to Lola. “Okay, so she’s definitely a witch.”

Lola gave me a puzzled look as she ate her croissant. “What are you talking about?”

“Trust me on this one. There’s something odd about her and this house.”

“But Big Mac is so nice,” said Lola.

“She is, but she’s still magical. The outside of her house is a shack, but the inside is a giant penthouse. She’s. A. Witch.” I received eye rolls from both of them. Whatever.

I heard a large thump from behind me. Lola, Jay, and I turned to see a disheveled Maya coming down the stairs. Her hair was a mess, and her mascara was smeared around her eyes, so she looked like a raccoon. She was dressed in only an oversized t-shirt that looked suspiciously like the one Colton had been wearing yesterday.

Lola and I exchanged a look, and I knew we were both thinking the same thing: Colton and Maya totally got it on last night.

“I need coffee,” Maya mumbled, walking over to the coffee pot, not acknowledging any of us. Well, at least she and Colton hadn’t killed each other. I would’ve hated to clean that mess up.

“I need a shower; I smell like a wet dog,” Lola complained, putting her teacup down.

“I mean, you *were* a wet dog for a while,” I teased.

Lola rolled her eyes. “Shut up.”

Still, Lola had the right idea—I could have really used a shower too, especially after that dream last night.

I went upstairs to discover that Xavier had disappeared. I shrugged, figuring he was probably with Colton doing whatever wolf-bears did. I showered and got dressed. Now that Lola was back to her old Lola self, we’d be heading home soon. And while I would miss the food, I was excited to get back to Xavier’s place. Things were just a little too odd around here.

After I was dressed, I headed downstairs and outside, helping Lola into the car. Her body looked normal, but her strength wasn’t. Big Mac said she’d be weak for the next few weeks as her body internally healed.

“Safety first never last, have a future not a past,” I said in a singsong voice as I buckled her in.

Lola shook her head at me. “You are the most ridiculous person I have ever met in my life.”

“But you love me!” I said with a grin.

“I should have eaten you when I had the chance,” she said, but she was still smiling.

The shack door opened, and Jay appeared with Xavier, whose face was expressionless and whose junk was no longer hard—as far as I could tell.

I walked over to him. “For your information, wolf-bears do drool,” I told him, my arms crossed, a little smile on my face.

He just rolled his eyes at me. “Just get in the car, or I’ll leave you here,” he huffed.

“Oh, Cali, wait up!” Big Mac called out from the door of the shack, holding a bag. “I have something for you.”

I turned to Xavier. “If you leave me here, I will make your life a living hell,” I warned before walking back to the shack.

“You already do,” he called after me.

“But you looooove meeeeeee,” I sang.

I walked over to Big Mac, and she handed me a warm paper bag. She smiled. “I thought you might enjoy these.”

It was a bag of croissants. SCORE. “Thank you, Big Mac,” I said, smiling. I was about to turn away so I could devour one, but I hesitated. “Um, can I ask you something?”

“Anything you like.”

“Um, I’m sorry if this is a little tacky but… Are you a witch? Like, can you fly on a broomstick? Make potions? Magic herbs?”

Hey, that was a tactful question in MY book. I didn’t make one single Sabrina joke.

Big Mac just laughed. “What a vivid imagination you have. Do I look like a witch?”

“Well… no. But it’s not like I’m an expert on the subject. I’ve only ever seen witches in movies.”

She laughed for a moment, then her expression went deadly serious. For a moment, I thought I’d crossed a line by asking her about being a witch.

“There’s something I think you should know before you leave,” she said. “There’s something special about you.”

“Special?” I said hesitantly. “Please don’t tell me that I’m ‘the Chosen One’ or some shit, because I don’t want any of that drama.”

“No, nothing like that. You are a *due destini.”*

*A what?* “Gesundheit.”

“Cali, are you coming?” Xavier called from the car. “I’m going to *leaaaave youuuu*!”

“I’M COMING,” I shouted. Then, to Big Mac I said, “Thank you so much for the croissants and for helping Lola.” I turned to go to the car, but Big Mac caught my arm.

“Cali.” Big Mac looked at me sternly, if not a little too intensely. “Be careful which path you choose.”

**Episode 122**

*Wait, what the hell?* Damn, couldn’t I just hang out in a place without someone dropping a major bombshell on me? Just once?

Big Mac leaned up and gave me a peck on the cheek. “Good luck,” she whispered.

I pulled away. “Wait, you can’t just drop this dude panini nonsense on me, tell me I must choose carefully, wish me luck, and send me on my merry way. What the hell is a dude panini?”

Big Mac’s face scrunched up in confusion. “I have no idea what you’re talking about. But to be a *due destini* means that you are destined to have your heart torn and tested.”

Oh, was *that* all? Just freaking peachy.

“Listen,” I said. “Almost every single person I’ve met within the last two months has threatened to rip my heart out of my chest or worse, so death threats have become less scary and more annoying. So I’m gonna have to take a hard pass on the whole ‘heart being ripped out of my chest’ deal.”

“It’s a metaphorical threat.”

“Still a hard pass.”

“You don’t have a choice, Caliana. This is your destiny. This is—” Big Mac was cut off by the honking of the car horn. Stupid wolf-bear that I loved…

“You’d best be off. Good luck, Caliana. It looks like you’re going to need it.”

I stood there stunned as I tried to process what she’d just said. My heart torn and tested? That sounded even worse than being a Chosen One.

The car horn shocked me out of my trance. I said thank you to Big Mac and hurried toward the car, wanting to get as far away from this house and all its magical shit as quickly as possible.

“Oh my god, keep your damn pants on, I’m coming!” I shouted at my boyfriend as I got in the car. For a second, I considered telling Xavier about what Big Mac had told me but decided against it. He’d just get moody and pissed off, and she was just some weird lady. Destiny? I’d make my own, thank you very much. Still, I filed Big Mac’s proclamation under “things I need to discuss with Lola.”

I turned to the backseat. Jay, already asleep, was sitting with Lola. Colton and Maya were sitting as far away from each other as the middle row would allow. Such children.

Xavier started to pull the car out onto the road. I caught him looking at me once or twice, his eyes moving down my body.

Naughty boy.

“Um, keep your eyes on the road, mister. I didn’t survive a bunch of Rogue wolf-bears just to die in a car crash,” I told him.

“For your information, I was looking at the bag Big Mac gave you. What’s in it?”

With all that talk about witches and destiny, I’d completely forgotten that Big Mac had given me something. “More croissants,” I said, my mouth already watering. At least she’d had the decency to give me food to lessen the blow of such terrible news.

Jay woke up as soon as I said the word ‘croissants’. “Hey, toss one back here,” he said.

I rolled my eyes. Classic wolf-bear, only awake for food.

I grabbed a warm croissant and handed it to him, then I turned to Xavier. “Would you like one?” I asked.

“Only if you feed me,” he said, a sexy little grin on his face.

I raised an eyebrow at him. Was he for real? “You want me to feed you? Like… like sexily?!”

Xavier rolled his eyes. “No, Cali. I’m driving, and I’m just hungry. Besides,” he said, his voice dropping to a low mumble, “I thought we could save that for when we get home.”

“How is feeding you romantic?” I asked, trying to wrap my head around it. All I could think about was how owners fed dogs, or parents fed babies. Both very unromantic situations.

Xavier rolled his eyes. “Will you just give me some bread?”

I huffed, grabbing a croissant from the bag and tearing off a piece, holding it up to Xavier’s lips.

He took a slow bite, his teeth grazing my fingertips, his tongue swirling around my fingers as he sucked in the buttery pastry.

I gasped, feeling his lips, tongue, and teeth on my skin. “Hey!” I cried out breathlessly. But I could already feel myself being affected.

Xavier must have known because he was smirking like the cat who sensually ate the canary. “See? Sexy, right?” he asked, licking his lips and making me even more aroused.

I rolled my eyes and turned away, trying and failing to hide the bright red blush that was creeping across my face. “Just keep your eyes on the road, Casanova,” I shot back, taking a large bite out of the croissant.

His dark chuckle did nothing to stop my horniness.

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My arousal disappeared as soon as we entered the house.

We’d all known the lawn was a mess from the Rogue attack, but the interior of the house looked like a mini tornado had blown through it. The carpet on the stairs and in the living room was all torn up from the wolf-bear that had chased me. The door was hanging off its hinges, and half the windows were all smashed up. I was terrified to see what my bedroom looked like.

But all that was child’s play compared to the kitchen.

“Wow, what a dump,” Maya said as we walked in. And she wasn’t too far off. Trash was scattered all around the room, the drawers had all been emptied and tossed to the ground, and there were dirty dishes on every surface. For a moment, I thought I was going to throw up.

“This place is disgusting.” I gasped, holding my nose to try to get away from the horrible stench. I briefly wondered where the air freshening spray had gone.

“What the hell did you guys do in here?” Lola questioned.

“Yeah, this place is seriously trashed to hell,” said Colton. He turned to me. “Cali, you should clean it up. It’s your fault anyway.”

“Me?” I gasped. Oh, there was *no* *way* they were going to pin this one on me!

“I second that,” said Maya.

“Hey, none of this is my fault. As you may recall, I didn’t want to go into the house to begin with. Some giant Rogue followed me in here and chased me around like I was a mouse. If anything, it’s all *your* faults. If you people had been more on the ball, he would never have gotten in here!”

This led to a series of arguments.

“Okay, that’s enough,” Xavier said, using his Alpha voice to shut us up. “I’ll just hire a cleaning service. And I’ll call Phil, or whatever his name is, to fix everything,” he said, pulling out his phone.

“Wait, you have a cleaning service to fix things? This kind of shit happens regularly?” I gasped. The problems of living with messy wolf-bears.

Xavier ignored me. “In the meantime—Colton, Jay, and I guess Maya, we need to come up with some kind of plan…”

I shot him a look, one eyebrow raised. “Uh, excuse me? Why can’t I help with this plan? I am a part of the group, after all.”

Maya scoffed. “Do you really want me to answer that, stupid human?”

I ignored her, my eyes still on Xavier. “I don’t care that I’m human and can’t do much—I should still be a part of it. They’re after *me*, remember?”

Xavier pulled me aside. “I know you want to be a part of this, but I really need you to take care of Lola right now. She’s still very weak, and you’re the only one who can help her.”

I turned to look at Lola. He may have had a point. She was wobbling on her feet, tilting from side to side to keep her balance, and pale as a ghost.

Still, I had to hold my ground. I looked back at Xavier, my arms crossed over my chest and my lips in a tight line.

He sighed. “I’ll fill you in on the details later.”

“Promise?”

“Promise,” he replied.

I gave him one last look, wondering if he would actually keep his promise, before I took hold of Lola’s arm and walked her to her room.

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“Hey, thanks for not destroying my room in the wolf-bear fight,” Lola said. I’d already put her in her soft pajamas, put on some music, and helped her into her bed.

I rolled my eyes. “Any time.”

She yawned. “I’m surprised how tired I am as a human. When I was a wolf, I had tons of energy—it felt like I was invincible.”

“Yeah, but you also didn’t have thumbs,” I reminded her.

“That’s true.” Lola laughed. “I guess being a wolf has its downsides. But enough about me—what happened with you when I was trapped in my wolf body having the best nap of my life?”

I bit my lip, thinking. “Can you keep a secret?”

“Uh, duh, you know that.”

“I don’t mean keeping a secret from *me*. I mean keeping a *real* secret from everyone—including Jay.”

Lola’s eyes widened at that. “You’re scaring me, Cali… Okay. I promise I won’t even tell Jay.”

Relief washed through me. “Good.”

“So,” Lola perked up, “what’s the secret?”