

Chapter 1

"I heard there's going to be two werewolves at school this semester," Carmen says, turning on the blinker to turn into the school parking lot.

I shrug, fixing my hair in the mirror. "They've probably been at school with us since kindergarten. Its only this year that werewolves have to register with the CFSS." The Committee for the Safety of Students. I've never really given it much thought, mostly because I've never known a supernatural being personally. I don't plan on it either.

Carmen turns quickly right in front of another car, which stops on it's breaks and honks. "I was here first, idiot!" she yells through my window, her silver hoop earrings swaying as she shakes her head.

"Can't you be a little more careful when you drive?"

Carmen just looks at me. "Nope."

She pulls the Tempo into an empty parking spot near the front, where kids and teachers are already buzzing around the doors. "Hopefully some freshman didn't steal our table." She grabs her backpack, her dark eyes scanning the area.

"We had it last semester, didn't we? Plus, we stole it when we were freshmen," I laugh, slamming the door.

"That's not the point. Come on, I see Adam and Deon."

We head over to the fountain where Adam and Deon are, sitting with a guy I've never seen before. He has blue highlights in his black hair and he's wearing an ACDC t-shirt over a white long sleeve tee. He looks like he really doesn't want to be here.

"Hey guys," Adam says, shifting his black baseball cap on his head. His brown hair flips out from under it, which I think is kinda cute. "This is Anker. He's new this year," he nods at the blue/black haired guy, "And Anker, this is Carmen and Tess," he looks at me with his crooked smile.

"What grade are you in?" Carmen asks immediately; she made it clear back in June that she wasn't gonna be "frolicking" with any freshmen her senior year.

"Junior," Anker says, not looking at her. Yep, he was angry. Carmen nods just as the first bell rings. Anker gets up and walks away without a word.

"What's his problem?" I ask Adam, waving goodbye to Carmen.

Adam shrugs and holds the door open for me. "I think he's mad because he had to switch schools. What do you have first?" he pulls a crumpled piece of paper out of his jeans pocket.

I look down at my schedule and scowl. "AP Biology."

"I have painting 1. Wanna trade? I can't paint shit."

And I can? "No. I gotta go up to C hall so I'll see you at lunch. We can see if we can guess who the werewolves are," I joke, but I see

something flash across his blue eyes that I can't put my finger on. He looks so tanned. I'm almost jealous.

"Yeah, sure. See you later," he says quickly, distracted. He disappears into the crowd, leaving me staring after him.

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I went through the day like I was in a daze, occasionally seeing Adam or Carmen in the hall and trying to keep up with all the AP classes my step-dad signed me up for. I'm going to punch him the day I graduate. Just four and half months to go.

I stop at my locker, waiting until the last minute to enter McAllister's classroom. My brother Ben caused a lot of trouble in his class so I'm pretty sure he'll hate me. Hope won't change anything but I still hope anyway.

"Hey, Tess."

I jump, nearly dropping my math book on my foot. "Deon, you scared me," I accuse when I see Deon's familiar honey brown hair sticking out of his hood.

"Sorry. Just thought I'd say hi," he pretends to be offended. Me, Deon, Adam and Carmen have been friends since we all got put at the same table in Mrs. Hadley's 3rd grade class. I still haven't figured him out.

I straighten, "Hi."

A group of people walk by and Deon steps out of the way, leaning against the lockers. I've always wondered what people think of him, having never taking his hood off and all.

I slam my locker. "You have history next?"

He frowns. "Yeah. With McAllister. So does Adam and Carmen."

My day just got a whole lot better.

We enter the classroom right when the bell rings and sit at the back table by Adam and Carmen. Adam raises his eyebrows at me but doesn't say anything.

"Tess! You'll never believe what happened..." Carmen babbles on but I space her out without meaning to. Anker just entered the classroom, and the moment his eyes lock on mine I feel cold all over. He looks away after a moment and hands a late pass to the bald man whom I'm sure is McAllister. The cold dissipates as soon as he looks away.

"He's got all the same classes as me," Adam mutters with discontent. He sees me looking at me and tightens his jaw. I think he didn't want anyone to hear him.

Anker sits down at our table. And just by observing I see Deon throw Adam a warning look and Adam nods. I start to wonder if they know something about Anker when McAllister speaks, his voice louder than it should be. Carmen gives me the evil eye for not paying attention to her and looks at McAllister. I forget what I was wondering.

“Welcome to second semester AP World History. I’m Mr. McAllister. First off, I need to do a seating chart-” there was a chorus of boos from everyone in the class, including Carmen, “Now, not an assigned seating chart. I just want you to tell me your names so I can write them on a chart. No need to freak out.” He smiles, and I realize he’s younger than I thought he was. Maybe like 30? I should ask Ben.

He starts going to tables, writing on a sheet of paper.

“Didn’t Ben have him?” Carmen brushes her fingers through her dark curly hair.

I nod. “For world history his sophomore year.”

“Your brother is crazy. He was probably McAllister’s least favorite student, right?” Adam asks, leaning back on two legs of his chair. I’d like to know how he does it.

“By far the least favorite. He-” I was about to tell a story of something Ben did in his class but McAllister appeared at our table.

“Names?” he asks, pen ready to write. He looks at each of us.

“Carmen Velasquez.”

“Adam Foster.”

“Deon Sawyer.”

“Tess...McKay.” I hesitate on my last name. McAllister grimaces but doesn’t say anything. He looks at Anker who looks back at him with a burning stare.

"Anker Creed," he says coolly. McAllister writes his name down and goes to the next table.

"Interesting name," I say to him, just trying to be nice and start a conversation.

He glances at me. "Really? I thought it was too," he sneers.

Adam throws him a look and Anker sighs heavily, "It's Danish," he says, trying to hold back some insult that was probably about to come out of his mouth. "You know, like the doughnut." He starts tapping his pencil against his denim clad knee rapidly.

"So you're named after a doughnut?" Carmen leans across the table to look at him, her charm bracelet clanking against the wooden table top.

He cocks a brow at her and looks away.

Adam and Deon are staring at each other, some unknown words flowing between them. They've done that more in the last couple years.

McAllister starts talking at the front of the class but none of us are really listening, except for maybe Adam who we rely on to tell us what's going on his class.

Carmen catches my eye and sneaks me a little piece of paper. I smile and unfold it.

Is it just me, or is something weird going on between the 3 of them? I'm getting the oddest feeling.

I look up at her but she's busy drawing on the front of her blue binder. I take a pen out the side pocket of my backpack and write back.

It's me too. Text later??

I throw the note at her and she reads it. She nods.

Some kid wearing a Mario tee sets five papers on the table and goes to the next. I think his name is Matt.

McAllister opens the blinds and sunlight streams in through the high arched windows that this part of the school has. It's the older part of Benson High School where all the old windows are and all the old, smelly lockers that squeak when you open them. I blink in the sudden brightness and somebody turns off the lights.

Deon is the first to grab a paper. "Make a mini poster on any major event in history. Must have color, a picture, a summary, and works cited. Due tomorrow. It's a partner assignment," he explains.

"Excellent," Adam takes a paper. "Wanna work together?" he looks up at me, practically pleading with his crystal blue eyes.

I take a paper also. "Sure."

"My place or your place?" he asks, and Anker narrows his eyes at him. I think maybe he's a little different.

"Your place. Both my mom and Dwayne will be home tonight. You won't want to be there. I don't want to be there."

Adam nods, understanding. That's one of the things I love about him. He's so understanding and never really makes me explain anything. He minds my business. And I try to mind his. Not as much though, unfortunately. I'm too curious.

"I'll text you when you can come over. I got some...stuff to take care of after school," he says the last part looking at Anker. He doesn't know I see him.

"Yeah, you do," Anker says, glancing at Deon then back at Adam.

"Ok," I agree reluctantly, wondering what Dwayne, my step-dad, was gonna accuse me of today when I got home.

Anker doesn't speak for the rest of period.

Chapter 2

As soon as Carmen dropped me off, I went around back so I could sneak in without Dwayne seeing me. I glance at Adams' house next door as I cut across the patio; his truck wasn't in the driveway so he's not home yet. Dang it.

Once I'm in my room, I toss my backpack on my bed and tangle the hair tie out of my hair. I throw my leather jacket on my beanbag on top of my pajamas from last night and sit in front of my make-up table. My blue-gray eyes looked misty against my cascading brown hair. Same old Tess.

"Theresa?"

I jump when I see my mom appear at the door in the mirror "Don't call me Theresa anymore. My name is Tess."

"No, your name is Theresa. I'm glad you're home; we need to have a talk about colleges." She folds her slim arms over her chest and looks around my room, her eyes lingering at the few piles of clothes on the floor and the papers strung out all over my bed. "And about cleaning your room."

I mentally roll my eyes. I've already applied to Portland State. She knows that. Or at least I thought she knew that. "I have to do a project with Adam. It's due tomorrow."

And like I summoned it or something, my phone beeps with a text from Adam. I jiggle my phone at her, already taking my cardigan off.

She sighs heavily, looking disappointed. "Be home before dark. Three girls have disappeared in Portland now. Dinner's at five with the family," she smiles at the last part but I'm too busy digging for my red Portland State sweatshirt in my hamper to really take notice to what she's saying. Yes, I'm messy, but really: who cares?

I pull it out of the bottom and shrug it on, sticking my phone in the back pocket of my jeans. I fly past my mom, who just stares at me while she follows me down the stairs.

Family dinner. What is she thinking? Dwayne is *not* my family.

I throw open the back door just as Adam is getting out of his truck. Anker is with them, and I can tell that they're arguing: Adam only slams his door that hard when he's angry.

I decide to but in. "Hey," I say, walking up to his driveway.

He turns, startled, but calms when he sees it's me. "Hey. Is it cool if Anker works with us? His partner bailed."

Anker gives me a cold look. My first instinct is to say no, but he's kinda already here. "I guess."

We get settled in Adams' living room on the floor in front of his makeshift coffee table (made of two crates and an old window. Creative, right?)

He turns his stereo on to break the awkward silence. "Ok, so, what do ya want to do the project on?" he asks, looking at both me and Anker.

Anker grunts. "World War 2."

"Everyone does World War 2. We should do like the assassination of Kennedy or..." I look around the room trying to come up with something else. I snap my fingers, "The Salem Witch Trials."

Adam scrunches his nose. "Shay won't like that."

Oh. I forgot. Shay was one of the 7 witches that went to our school. She was in our history class.

"Well then, we'll do the assassination of Kennedy," Anker says, and his eyes flash a weird color of red but they're back to his normal sea-green eyes a second later. I wonder briefly if he's one of the werewolves. I don't know where that thought came from.

Adam nods and sets in laptop on the floor in front of us.

"I'm gonna use the bathroom first," I get up to head to the bathroom door behind the couch.

"Good to know," Anker sneers.

I roll my eyes even though he can't see. Once in the bathroom, I splash cold water on my face. I don't like being here with Anker. It makes everything feel contaminated. I dry my face on my sleeve.

I was about to leave when I hear them talking, in hushed voices.

“Human? Really Adam? You can do way better than a human.”

That was Anker.

“I’ve known her since 3rd grade, before the shift.” Adam says.

Something clinks on the glass of the coffee table.

“So? You need to get rid of her. Riordan will be pissed when I report to him. This is exactly why he asked me to go to school with you so we can keep an eye on you,” Anker snaps, his voice low and angry.

“I’m not 8 anymore, Crank. I can handle myself.”

The coffee table thing creaks. “Whatever. That’s a conversation you’ll have to have with Riordan later. You better be there tonight.” That was Anker. Sounded like he was leaving.

“I’ll be there. I always am, aren’t I?”

Ankers’ answer was the slamming of the front door. I wait a few minutes then I come out of the bathroom, trying to put on my poker face so he know I didn’t hear them, even though he owes me some answers now. I’d like to know who Riordan is and who Anker really is. And why Adam called him Crank.

Adam sees me and his angry expression softens. “Anker had to leave. Looks like it’s just you and me.” He smiled at me, but it really doesn’t reach his eyes. I decide to play dumb for a little bit until I can come up with a plan to get him to talk. I know I’m being nosy but that’s just my nature. I mean, I tell him everything.

“Oh ok, that's fine,” I sit down on the carpet next to him, my shoulder brushing his shoulder. He's tense; I glance at his hands which are shaking slightly. He gets this way when he's nervous, or if he's hiding something big. I know him.

I sigh. “I heard you guys talking.”

He looks at me with wide blue eyes, which I can see because he's not wearing his hat for once.

“What did you hear?” he demands, turning toward me.

I hesitate, wondering if I should say nothing or if I should really just tell him the truth. “Someone named Riordan, something about me being human is bad, you called Anker Crank, um...the shift, you not being 8 anymore, and Anker going to school to keep an eye on you,” I say truthfully. His face goes from angry to confused to scared in a matter of seconds.

“All that, huh?” he mumbles so quietly I almost don't hear him. He rubs his forehead with his hand, thinking.

“Yeah, all that. Care to explain? I mean, you don't have to tell me everything. I was just wondering what it was all about,” I say, cutting him some slack.

He looks at me with sad eyes and sighs. “You probably should know everything. I don't want anything to happen to you, but I don't want you

to be in the dark. You should be prepared if anything does happen to you.”

I squint. “Um, ok,” I really don’t know what to say.

He looks into my eyes, determined. “I’m a werewolf.”

My jaw drops.

His mouth twitches but he doesn’t smile. “Before you say anything, I need to explain from the beginning,” He stops, obviously waiting for my conformation.

“Ok, well go on,” I say. Werewolf? Really? Somehow that doesn’t surprise me. Jumper, my old Jack Russell Terrier, never liked him.

He takes a deep breath. “Ok, so you know my mom left when I was 8, a couple weeks after I met you, Carmen, and Deon. Well a couple weeks after that, I was in the woods behind my house; I was upset about something I don’t really remember. I was walking and then I saw something, like a shadow of some sort of animal, run past me and a branch snapped in front of me. I got scared and started running toward my house but I didn’t make it. The wolf tackled me from behind and I fell to the ground, it on top of me breathing stale, hot breath into my face. I screamed and it dug its canines into my neck. It was this hot white pain that I’ve never felt before and I passed out. I woke up 3 hours later in that exact same spot. I was still bleeding when I got back to my house to see my dad was gone, never to be seen again. I turned into a werewolf that

next night on the full moon. That is a story we'll save for later. Hunter is the wolf that bit me. Hunter Riordan. He's the leader, or the alpha, of the pack. He calls us The Drifters," He stopped, his eyes flooding with pain and regret. I went to talk but he silenced me. "I'm not done. Let me finish before I can regret this. Anker Creed is Hunters' second in command. He's been a wolf since he was 12. We call him Crank because he's on way too many drugs. Then there's Hunters' girlfriend Mercedes Rayne, who's been a wolf since she was 11. She used to go to school with us but she dropped out sometime in middle school. Then Blaine Woodruff, he was bitten when he was 13. I don't know him very well. Then there's me, and this girl named Victoria Winters. I don't know when she became a werewolf. And then there's Deon. Deon Sawyer."

I gasp. "Deon's a werewolf? How?" There's probably a whole a fleet of people I know that are supernaturals.

"Yeah, Hunter bit him 2 years ago. It's gonna be interesting have him *and* Anker at school this semester." He looks down at the floor.

"So, who are the two registered werewolves at school then?" This is insane. I can't believe I've know about werewolves all my life and I hadn't realized by best friend was one.

He glances back up at me. "Me and Anker. Deon isn't registered. His dad wouldn't allow it."

We're silent for a moment, and Adam starts to tare up paper into little tiny pieces that flutter onto the carpet as he drops them.

"That secret has been clawing at my insides all my life."

I nod, watching him rip the paper. "So, you can only shift at the full moon?"

He drops the remaining paper and brushes it off his lap. "No, but the first shift is always at the full moon. I can shift any time if I get angry enough. I can shift deliberately but it's harder. The others can too."

I'm sort of intrigued. I've always wanted to know more about the werewolves and the other supernaturals but they don't teach it in school because of "racism issues". I heard a story once about this kid who got turned into a vampire came back to his middle school and killed the teacher that failed him. "What's happening tonight?"

He looks at me again, and it makes my heart leap. "Well, it's sort of confidential, but since you're here and I've told you everything else...it's a meeting. Hunter wants to discuss "assignments,"" he finger quotes assignments, "That's all you should know. I'm surprised you believe me."

I shrug. "The Adam Foster I know wouldn't lie to me. He just wouldn't tell me so he didn't have to lie," I tease, smiling. He smiles back, looking a little relieved. "Plus, I've always known werewolves exist. It wasn't that too big of a shock."

“You’re amazing you know that? Just like your eyes,” he says, and I feel heat rush to my cheeks.

I shove him playfully. “Oh, stop it.”

We’re interrupted by phone buzzing. I pull it out of my back pocket to see my moms’ picture blinking on the screen.

“Don’t tell anyone, okay? I mean it. I don’t want anybody else to know,” Adam stands up, a serious look on his face. He helps me up, and I get lost in his eyes; the ring of my phone completely blocked out.

We stand there until my phone beeps, letting me know I have a missed call. “I…better go.”

“Yeah. Tell Dwayne and your mom it’s all my fault, okay?” he holds his front door open for me and places his hat back on his head, backwards this time.

I laugh. “Okay.”

I’m halfway across his lawn, heading to my house, when he stops me. “Tess, wait.”

I turn around and all of the sudden he’s kissing me with such force and warmth I lean into him, kissing him back. His arms wrap around my waist and my hands find his neck, his hair and the tip of his hat brushing against my wrists. Then just like, he pulls away and flashes me his crooked smile.

“See you tomorrow, Tess.”

Today's the day I realized I'm in love with my best friend. And that I love the way he says my name.

Chapter 3

Adam and I are dating. I haven't been able to get that phrase out of my head for the past 3 weeks. And even though Anker gives us dirty looks whenever he has the chance and Carmen is about to burst with prom plans, they've been the best 3 weeks ever.

Adam doesn't share any of his werewolf business with me. He said I shouldn't have to worry about it. It's not my problem. But I'm just so curious about the life of a werewolf I can't help asking him questions every once a while. He answers vaguely, mocking me with his crooked smile. I never told his secret, even Carmen, who I tell everything too.

Adam pulls his truck into the driveway and his face turns grim.

"What's wrong?" I ask, ready to unbuckle the seatbelt.

He glances at me with a worried look. "Hunter and Blaine are here. You better go home."

We get out and he kisses me quickly before I walk across the yard to my front door. I glance back at him but he's already gone. I wonder why they're at his house. They're *never* at his house. Adam told me himself.

I grab a granola bar from the kitchen and head up to my room to do I don't know what. Everyone but me is busy today. Even Dwayne and

my mom have found somewhere to be on a Tuesday afternoon. The house is less cold when he's gone. It's like he casts a dark shadow over everything. The only time I have a little freedom is when he is gone. Of course, most of that time is spent at Adams' house.

I step into some fuzzy socks and see the pile of library books on my desk. They're all books Carmen wants me to read. Maybe I'll start one.

I grab the book on top and fall into my beanbag, turning to the first page. Tess gets to read a fiction book. Imagine that.

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Something jolts me awake and sends the book falling off my lap to the floor. I fell asleep while reading again. Must've been a boring book.

I walk to the foot of the stairs to listen for what woke me up. Yells are drifting up from the kitchen. The kitchen is right below my room so I must've heard it through the heat vent. My mom and Dwayne never fight though. Except on tactics to discipline me. Like I need discipline from a twice divorced 36 year old man who calls himself my step-dad. What my mom sees in him, I don't know.

I pad down the stairs and stop at the kitchen doorway. My mom and Dwayne are standing around the shattered remains of the vase that used to sit on top of the fridge. It was the 2 foot tall red vase with the

intricate designs that my mom bought for \$300 at an antique store 4 years ago. She said it was the one her grandmother kept candy in when she was little. I asked her how she knew and she showed me the bottom which had two little black initials scrawled on it.

My mom's crying and Dwayne is trying to comfort her by awkwardly patting her back. It looks funny because Dwayne looks at least 10 years younger than he's supposed to be. His comfort isn't working. He sees me and points at me. "Look what you've done! You've upset your mom now. This vase was very important to your mother, Theresa," He accuses me with Eyes like slits and a face beat red with anger.

I squint at him in disbelief. "What? You think I did this?"

"You were the only one here! You're always slamming the fridge shut, deliberately trying to get the vase to fall off. How could you, Theresa? How could you hurt me again like this?" my mom says through tears rolling down her cheeks. I stare at her, open mouthed in disbelief. Dwayne would seriously do anything to get my mom to believe I'm some troubled teen who needs to be sent to some military academy in California somewhere. I know it's what he's been planning to do since he married my mom-I found the brochure for a military academy in his desk when I was looking for my motorcycle keys. I'll give the bastard what he wants. Anywhere is better than here. I literally live in fear in this house.

"Hurt you again? When did I ever hurt you?"

My mom is about to say something but Dwayne steps in. "Just go to your room, Theresa. I'll deal with you later."

I stand my ground, "Deal with me? And how do you suppose you're gonna do that? Give me a plane ticket and a lift to the airport?" I feel my face heat up with rage. I should probably stop but I've already gotten myself into this so I should get myself out.

Dwayne stares at me hard, his deep set, black eyes begging me to shut up. "Now, Theresa, don't go to drastic measures. I wouldn't even think of sending you away-" Dwayne's brow is furrowed; he's trying to keep himself calm.

I interrupt. "Oh, yes you would. I found that brochure in your desk. You just have to get my mom to agree." I turn to my mom who's obviously confused and is looking between Dwayne and me. "I don't know how you could ever agree to such a thing. Dad would be disgusted." I didn't mean to mention my dad but it sort of just slipped out. I always got along better with him and my mom knows that. Too bad I never get to see him. Stupid divorce.

"Don't bring your father into this, Tess. And I have no idea what you're talking about. Dwayne and I have only been thinking about counseling," My mom explains, trying to look honest but I'm not buying it. I can't believe she called me Tess. That's a first.

I gasp, bewildered at this news. "Counseling for what?"

“This isn't the time to be talking about this. Your mom and me need to discuss this more,” Dwayne says, trying to keep hold on a conversation he's desperate to guide his way.

“Oh, so you're gonna discuss my life without me? Decide what's best for me without even confiding in me? When you don't even know me? How about you spend the rest of your lives without me instead?” with my final word, I stalk past them and shove my Uggs onto my feet and backing out the door at the same time. I hit the yard at a jog and throw open the gate that blocks the forest from our house, the stars against the pitch black sky being my only light to lead the way.

Chapter 4

I stop when I get well into the trees. The air is cold, fresh with the smell of rain and cedar trees. The cold makes the tiny hairs on my bare arms stand up. I'm only wearing a flimsy camisole. I should go back before I freeze out here but I'm not ready to. I need to be alone, and in the trees is the only peaceful place available.

I tilt my head back and close my eyes, letting the soft breeze whip my hair wherever it pleases. I could stand here all night if I didn't have goosebumps. I go farther in, tripping over fallen branches scattered with leaves, and I smell smoke. Campfire smoke. What, is someone camping in the woods behind my house?

I follow the smell and it's not too long before I hear voices, and I see the smoke wafting up through the trees. I twist through the brush, trying to be as quiet as possible. I think it's working. I can't even hear myself. I was about to walk into a sort of clearing when I see a group of people gathered around a bonfire in the center. I duck behind a tree trunk, hoping no one saw me. I crouch low behind some bushes and look through a gap in its branches to get a better look at the people.

Adam is there. And so are Deon and Anker.

I squint; wondering if this is some sort of gang inauguration when I remember: they're werewolves. Of course. This is a *meeting*.

The light from the flames flicker across their faces and I get a better look at the others. There's a girl with short black hair wearing all black and another girl with short, curly copper hair wearing a red cardigan and knee high lace up boots over leggings. There's a very tall guy with blonde hair wearing a white thermal shirt, and another very tall guy with shoulder length black hair wearing a leather jacket over a fitted white t-shirt. Deon had his hood off, his honey brown hair sticking out at odd angles, and Adam wasn't wearing his hat. He also was wearing a leather jacket, but it was zipped up unlike tall boys' jacket. My heartbeat sped up just by looking at him.

Black haired girl throws something in the fire and it sparks. "It's not the vampires. Of how much I'd like it to be, it's not."

Tall boy shakes his head in frustration. "Then who is it? We've been working on this case for months. That girl was drained of blood; how is that not a vampire's work?"

Copper hair girl steps up to the fire, also throwing something in. "There were no bite marks on her neck, Riordan."

So Tall boy was Hunter. I should really leave but I can't get my legs to obey. I'll leave when they leave. I sit on my knees behind the bushes to

get in a more comfortable position, and one I could jump up quickly if I have to get away for some odd reason. It's better than going home.

"There were no bite marks on the secretary, either," Deon says.

Blonde boy looks at Hunter. "Should we talk to the Fey?"

Hunter shakes his head immediately. "We don't want to get involved with the Fey right now. The Seelie queen is already angry with me for accusing her 'best warrior' of the murder of that little boy last year."

"We don't wanna get involved with *anybody* right now. If you weren't such an idiot, we'd have solved this case by now instead of going around accusing the first supernatural we see," Adam says, irritated. He shoves his hands into his pockets, the flames casting odd shadows across his face.

Hunter throws him a hostile look. "Oh, so I'm an idiot now?"

Black haired girl puts a hand on his chest and gently pushes him back. "Calm down, boys."

Adam looks Hunter straight in the eyes, his face a mask. "You heard her."

Copper hair ignores all of it and continues the conversation. "What if the suspect isn't a supernatural at all?"

"You mean the suspect could be human?" Deon asks, but it sounds more like a thoughtful assumption.

Oh. I think they're talking about the string of murders that broke out across Salem and Portland. I don't watch much TV so this is all news to me.

Copper hair sighs. "Or a half-blood."

"It can't be a half-blood, Winters. No half-blood has that kind of power," black haired girl snaps, her hand still on Hunters chest, who still looks angry.

Copper hair is Victoria Winters.

"How do we know? There's a whole population of half-bloods out there we don't even know about," Anker speaks for the first time. He looks stoned. No doubt he is.

My legs are falling asleep; I shift so I'm just squatting on the ground. I bet this looks hilarious from the back.

"I think we should keep it that way," blonde boy says. Hunter turns to him in disbelief.

"Half-bloods are not supposed to exist, moron."

Blonde boy throws his hands up. "Exactly why we should just forget about them. Most of them don't even know what they are anyway," his eyes flash orange as Adam throws a hunk of wood in the fire, flames shooting up in a hiss of sparks.

Hunter sighs. "Back to the matter at hand here. I acknowledge the suspect could be human, but I highly doubt it. Did you bring the files, Woodruff?"

Blonde boy is Blaine Woodruff. I prefer to think of them with their first names. Sounds less formal.

Blaine pulls a folded manila folder with ripped edges out of his back pocket and hands it to Hunter, but looking at Adam. "Your mom wouldn't give it to me at first. Said it was "too curious" for us to deal with or whatever."

Adam raises his eyebrows. "You talked to my mom? How? She works in the CFSS department."

Adams' *mom* works in the CFSS? I thought she left when he was 8?

Blaine just shrugs.

Hunter pulls some papers from the folder and scans them, his eyes moving quickly over the page, "It is mentioned the suspect could be human, but no one thinks so."

Black haired girl, which could only be Mercedes Rayne, narrows her eyes. I think I recognize her from like, elementary school but I can't be sure. "The girl was found in her own apartment, with all the doors and windows locked, the front door deadlocked. Her keys were in her hand. There were no signs of a struggle and nothing was stolen or damaged. The lock was not picked. Winters and I looked in her records and it said she just moved in like not 3 weeks before, so it's unlikely someone else had a key. There were still unpacked boxes in the living room. How is that a

humans work?" she explains, her voice monotone like she was bored. I get the feeling she doesn't like her job that much.

Hunter shuts the folder. "I don't know. There's no evidence; just bodies of random people drained of blood. Are you sure it's not the vampires? There wasn't a bite anywhere on the bodies?"

Victoria looked uncomfortable. "No. No bite."

Hunter sighed in frustration. "Let's go back to the house. I've had enough of this case for one night. Or possibly a week."

"Good. I left my stash there." Anker says.

Victoria looks at him. "You should really let up on that you know. No one knows what drugs do to a werewolf in the long run."

Anker shakes his head in denial and I think I see him roll his eyes. "Well, I guess I'm the walking experiment then," he splashes a bucket of water on the fire and it sizzles out.

"Do I really have to come?" Deon asks after his bout of silence.

Hunter looks at him funny. "Of course. We're gonna teach Adam here a lesson about loyalty."

Adam squints. "Loyalty?"

"Human girlfriend? Surely, Adam, you know that's against the law. It'd be worse if you told her about us."

"Everyone knows about supernaturals anyways so what does it matter?" Adam asks in defense.

They're talking about me. How could they know? Adam was trying so hard not to be suspicious or to be seen with me when they're around.

"They don't know *who* the supernaturals are though. That's the whole point of the CFSS," Mercedes says as she wraps her arm through Hunters.

Adams' jaw tightens but he doesn't say anything.

I crawl behind the tree trunk and stand up, my legs and feet tingling. I brush the dirt off my jeans and shiver.

"Let's go," Hunter says, his voice fading. Branches snap and leaves rustle as they leave but then they stop.

"Wait a second..." Mercedes says. I can't see her but I know her eyes are searching the woods. I pray silently that she didn't hear me.

I shut my eyes and try to stay as still as a can behind the tree. If they found I out I was eavesdropping I don't even want to know what would happen. It's too dark out for me to see to run and I'm pretty sure werewolves have night vision and can run much faster. I can't even catch Carmens' black cat Jack even though he's so fat his run is more like a lopsided jog.

I lean against the tree as much as I can but it doesn't conceal me. I hear a twig snap and Mercedes is in front of me, her eyes a glittering hazel.

"I thought I smelled a human."

“What is it now, Rayne?” Hunter asks, like she does this all the time.

She grabs by arm and shoves me into the clearing so fast it seemed like it was all one move. It made me lightheaded.

Adams' eyes widen with fear when he sees me. “Tess?”

“Tess, what are you doing here?” Deon gasps.

Mercedes shoves me again to get me to answer. “I was taking a walk. Had to get out of my house.” I answer, my voice a little shaky but otherwise I sounded calm. Can werewolves sense fear?

Hunter looks at me, pity in his eyes, which I can now see are green. He looks at Adam. “Is she your girlfriend?”

Adam looks at him and back at me. He stares at me for a couple seconds then turns to Hunter. “Yes.”

Blaine coughs.

Hunter stares at me, his eyes burning into mine, a muscle in his jaw twitching. He glances at Adam. “Take her home. Make her swear she say's nothing of this to others.” He looks at me again and then starts to turn away.

“That's all you're gonna do? Let her go? She was eavesdropping on our meeting in the bushes!” Mercedes exclaims, starting toward him, dragging me with her.

Victoria backs up and so does Anker. It's obvious that they were a little more than afraid of her when she got angry. Great. I'm the one

practically locked in her death grip. I glance at Adam who looks like he's about ready to grab me and run.

"She knows all our names. Adam told her the day I was at his house," Anker confesses, his face looking fiercer than it did when I first met him. And that was fierce. At least I didn't get cold when he looked at me anymore.

Hunter looks at Adam. "You told her?"

Adam nods, looking a little regretful. Thanks for protecting me Adam, jeez. But he said he was bound to this pack which meant they could tell if he was truthful or lying. That must suck.

"Look, I swear I won't tell anybody. I get why you need to be secret," I say. I was telling the truth. Why would I tell anybody? And who would I tell? Two of my best friends are already werewolves and I doubt Carmen would listen. She's too self-absorbed.

Hunter doesn't say anything so Blaine answers for him. I wonder if they can read each others minds. "Can we trust her?" he asks Adam.

"She's the most honest person I've ever met. I believe you have her word," Adam says, and he throws me a tiny crooked smile that was revealed only by the moonlight that illuminated the little clearing.

"What's your name? I need to know where to find you in case I ever have to kill you," Hunter asks bluntly, obviously a little unsure about believing me *and* Adam.

I go to answer but Mercedes cut's me off. "Who cares what her name is? You can't trust a human. They're natural gossipers," she spats and her hand begins to tingle.

Hunters' eyes widen. "Mercedes don't! Calm down!" He reaches for her but he stumbles back like he hit some sort of force field.

Her hand twitches and she throws me on the ground at an awkward angle. I'll have a huge bruise on my hip tomorrow. I think I know what's happening without having to see it. I turn so I'm on my elbows and try to scoot back.

Her whole body ripples and she explodes into the air and a massive black and red wolf lands on the ground where she was standing, ears pulled back and canines showing. The eyes are a glittering hazel.

She pounds toward me and I scream, and I see Adam out of the corner of my eye scream something but then he's gone and I see a flash of dark brown fur before giant paws knock the wind out of me and the most excruciating pain explodes around my shoulder. My last thought before I black out is I just got bit by a werewolf.

Chapter 5

There was something hot and wet pressed to my forehead and I wanted desperately to take it off but I couldn't move my arm. It was like I was disconnected from my body. I was just floating here in empty space, distantly feeling what my body was feeling. When I found myself here, I wondered if I was dead but I pushed the thought away. I was *not* dead. I think I would know if that were to happen. There was a numb but burning pain in my shoulder that was starting to travel up my neck, making my heart beat faster and faster. That's how I knew I wasn't dead. Dead people don't have beating hearts.

I try to open my eyes but all I get out of them is a little flutter. I want to wake up. I don't want to be stuck in my mind anymore.

The pain starts to slowly go away and my heart slows down, but not by much. I feel something tickle my arm, and then hot breath at my ear. I feel myself flinch even though I didn't intend to. What am I, possessed?

"Tess, you can wake up now."

The voice is far away and sort of metallic but I know it's Adams'.

I try to turn my head but I don't get very far. A cold hand presses against my face and it kinda shocks some feeling back into my muscles. I turn my head again and this time, my eyes obey.

I blink a couple times and Adam blurs into view. He's sitting next to me; the cold hand was his. I look at my surroundings and realize I'm lying on a big leather couch in a room with a very high ceiling. Tall Victorian windows loom on the other side.

"Can you hear me?" Adam asks, his forehead scrunched in concern.

I nod and blink a couple more times to get the spots to disappear. I don't think I can talk quite yet. My throat feels all thick and it hurts to breathe in. I stretch, making my shoulder flare. I wince.

He takes a washrag away from my forehead and places his hands on either side of me so he's practically leaning over me. "Careful. That's a pretty bad bite. It should heal in the next couple hours. I gotta warn you though: it'll scar," he says softly, his blue eyes light and caring.

Bite?

"Wha...ahem, what happened?" I croak, my voice sounding literally like claws dragging on wood. There's a balcony above us and I see a light turn on behind it.

Adam bites his lip, deep in thought. "You remember who I am right? Tell me what you remember."

I stare at him in question. "Of course I do. You're Adam. I've know you since third grade."

He nods quickly. "Okay, what's the last thing you remember?"

I think back, trying to sort all these random memories flying through my head. And just like that, they all piece together to form the memory of what happened in the clearing.

I try to sit up but he won't let me. "Tell me," he demands, almost looking scary. I realize he smells like the woods and he's got dirt smudged on his hands and face.

I look up at him. "I was taking a walk and I found you talking with the others in a clearing and then...Mercedes turned into a wolf and... attacked me," my hand automatically moves to my left shoulder, where I feel rough bandages and tape.

Adam closes his eyes. "I'm sorry I couldn't get to you sooner. Mercedes is much faster than me."

"You...?" I didn't finish the question, only because I didn't really need an answer. He was the flash of brown fur I saw out of my peripherals before I blacked out.

He nods. "I had to check to make sure you didn't have amnesia like some people get after being bitten. I carried you here and cleaned the bite."

I look around the room, now seeing a crystal chandelier and a huge flat screen TV. This is a big room. "Where is here?"

Adam glances up. "This is Hunters' house. Don't worry; he's gone. He took Mercedes out to cool down."

Well, that's a relief. I'm lying on his couch though. I wonder if he knows.

Someone leans their hands on the back of the couch and I look up to see Deon, with Copper hair right behind him.

"Hey. You feelin' all right?" he asks. He's not wearing his hoodie which is a huge shock to me. He's just wearing a gray t-shirt that does wonders for his biceps. He's kinda cute. I'm just now realizing that.

"I've been better," I grumble, and then I turn to Adam. "Am I gonna be a werewolf now?"

Adam and Deon exchange glances, obviously trying to figure out what to say. Copper hair looks at the both of them then sighs.

"Mercedes bit you when she was in wolf form, so yes. You will turn into a werewolf at the next full moon. Now boys, you can go now. I think Tess will want to clean up alone."

She looked nice. She had a child like face framed with curly copper hair, and had deep gray eyes and faint dimples. I forgot her name though.

I did feel dirty. Like I just rolled around in the dirt for a couple hours then took a bath with a muddy dog. "That sounds good."

Adam stood up. "I'll help you up."

I sat up on my own and flung my feet off the edge of the couch. My Uggs were gone but I was still wearing my purple fuzzy socks. How embarrassing.

I must've swayed or something because Adam lightly grabbed my shoulders and steadied me. He helped me stand up and the dizziness that I'd had lying down went away.

"You can use my bathroom. I'll lead the way," Copper hair says, and she takes my arm and leads me to the stairs, which I doubt I'll be able to make on my own.

"Wait," Adam says, and he walks over to me in two strides. "I'm really sorry this happened to you."

I smile half-heartedly, "I'm not freaking out yet. Give me 10 minutes."

He smiles and kisses my forehead, but pulls away quickly after. That was too short to be clarified as a kiss in my opinion. "Hurry back. And don't hurt her, Victoria, or I'll come after you with a chainsaw and a silver knife in your sleep," he threatens, but his tell that he's half joking. He must really trust copper hair.

She rolls her eyes. "You'll be the first to know. Come on."

She leads me up the stairs and halfway down the balcony, then turns into a huge room with sunlight pouring in through the tall windows. (It's daylight already? Crap). The walls are a shocking hot pink and there's

a huge, white four-poster bed sitting in the center. All the furniture is white except for the giant, fuzzy black rug covering the ancient wood floor.

“This is your room? I didn’t realize you lived here,” I say, staring at all of it. There’s a crystal chandelier hanging from the ceiling, exactly like the one downstairs.

She shuts the bedroom door. “Yeah, I live here in this room. Adam and Deon are the only ones who don’t live here.” She comes to my side, her copper curls bouncing. “I’m Victoria by the way. Victoria Winters. And, you’re Tess. Adam told me about you.”

“Oh,” I say, at a loss for words.

She shrugs then goes to her dresser and pulls out some clothes. She tosses them to me, which I surprisingly catch. “Bathrooms through there. There’s soap under the sink you can use. Take as long as you need,” she points to the double black doors I thought was her closet when we came in.

I place my hand on the doorknob, ready to go in, when I turn to her. “Thanks.”

She smiles. “No problem. After all, you’re part of the pack now.”

Part of the pack. That’s gonna take some time getting used to.

I open the door and stop in awe. There’s a shiny claw foot tub in the back, surrounded by pink curtained windows. There’s another chandelier and the sink was set in marble that was at least 5 feet long. The mirror is in

an elaborate white frame and a stand on the right holds pink, black, and white towels. The rugs on the floor were black and fuzzy.

I close the door behind me and set the clothes she gave me on the counter. The girl in the mirror didn't look like me, but she was me. My shoulder was covered in red tinged bandages and my once white camisole was now stained with angry red stains, probably blood. I'm also covered in dirt and my hair was damp and tangled. I sigh and open the cabinets, which hold a variety of bottles holding pink liquid. I take the ones that said shampoo and body wash and head to the claw foot tub. I just gotta figure out how to wash around the bandages. I don't want to see what was under them.

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When I'm done, I throw my towel in the hamper and put on the skinny jeans and gray sweater Victoria gave me. I'm surprised they fit me; she's at least 7 inches shorter and much smaller than me. I'm not sure whether or not to put my fuzzy socks back on but I remembered Victoria being barefoot so I wrap them in my clothes.

I comb my grapefruit smelling wet hair back with my fingers, staring at my reflection. I didn't look that different, I mean maybe a little tanner and my usually gray eyes looked more blue than normal. And I'd

discovered I had muscles now that I didn't have before. Like, toned, rock hard muscles. Now that's an odd feeling.

Somehow, I managed to not get the bandage wet. In some distant part of my mind I'm freaking out about it but I didn't let that affect my appearance. The door creaks when I open it and Victoria comes through her bedroom door at the same time.

"Oh good, you're done," she sees my clothes in my hands, "You can put those in the hamper. I'll wash them and give them back to you later." She takes them and puts them in the hamper herself before I can even do anything. "Hunter and Mercedes are back."

I stop in my tracks. I don't want to face Mercedes.

Victoria seems to sense my feelings. Either that or she can read my mind. "Mercedes is in her room sleeping. She won't be coming out for awhile."

"Oh, okay," I'd still have to face Hunter.

We go downstairs where Hunter and Deon are playing a video game. Adam is sitting in the leather armchair, watching intently, and there was an abandoned control on the coffee table I guessed was Ankers'.

Hunter glances at me and he pauses the game. "Does it hurt?"

"Not anymore," I say, assuming he's talking about the bite.

He nods. "Hungry?"

I consider this and realize my stomach was growling. The last time I ate was at lunch yesterday. "Not really," I lie.

He stands up to his full height, which has to be over 6 foot. He's wearing the same dark jeans and fitted white tee from last night. He was barefoot too. "There's no such thing as not really."

He pads into the kitchen, expecting me to follow. I do rather reluctantly. The kitchen was all rustic cherry wood and top of the line stainless steel appliances. I wonder what he does for a living to be able to afford all this.

He opens the fridge and pulls out an apple and a protein bar. He puts protein bars in the fridge? He also pulls out a can of beer.

He sees me looking at the can of beer and he snaps it open. "The beer is for me. Those are for you," he points to the apple and protein bar and nods at me. He takes a swig and leaves the kitchen. He turns back to me when he realizes I'm not following. "You coming or not? We got things to discuss."

I follow him into the living room as he shuts off the flat screen. I sit next to Adam who almost protectively curls his arm around me. I feel out of place.

"Crank!" Hunter yells up the stairs. I hear a distant and annoyed answer. "Get down here!" Hunter yells again and resumes his place next

to Deon who throws me a half smile. I least I got them here. I don't know what I would do if I was alone.

"Should I get Mercedes?" Victoria sits on the matching loveseat across from me and Adam.

Hunter glances at me again. "No. We can do this without her."

Anker, or Crank, stomps down the stairs, his hair a wild black and blue mess. He's wearing the same clothes too but they're wrinkled and slept on. "This better be good," he grumbles, and mutters something under his breath I can't hear. He collapses next to Victoria.

Hunter looks at me first. "Your first full moon is tonight."

Bluntly put.

"What?" I gasp. I am so not ready for this now. Why am I such an idiot? I should've never gotten myself into this.

Hunter shrugs. "Sorry about the bad timing, but that's not my fault. We'll help you get through it and then you'll be part of the pack. In case Adam didn't tell you, the pack is called The Drifters."

"I know that."

"Okay, well, I gotta explain what we do. We work for a man named Orion, who is, well he was a reaper but he got fired-" Victoria stares down at her lap, looking guilty. "He's a sort of detective now who investigates deaths that weren't supposed to happen, commonly known as murders,

homicides, the like. We're his agents. You'll be one too since you're joining the pack. Understand?"

It's like he's implying I have no choice but to join the pack. But what else can I do? "Yeah, I think so. Do you work with the CFSS?"

"Sometimes. Depends on if they're feeling helpful or not."

"So...you don't have to shift every full moon?" I ask, thinking of the original myth of the werewolf. Well, it's obviously not a myth anymore.

"Not every full moon. The first one you experience as a werewolf you have to, but after that, the most you'll feel is a little wolfy," Adam answers for Hunter, who nods in agreement.

"Wolfy," I smile, internally laughing at the word.

"The first shift is always the scariest but you'll have us there to help you. We'll shift with you so you can get used to the signals and such because we can't talk in wolf form," Victoria says reassuringly.

Anker sits up. "I call it wolf intuition."

I start to feel the beginnings of terror travel up my spine. This is real. I'm gonna turn in to a werewolf. "I'm not sure if I can do this."

Adams arm tightens around me in a sideways hug. "It'll be alright. I'll be with you," he says quietly in my ear.

"Well, it's too late now, honey. Sorry to break it to ya but you're gonna be a werewolf no matter what you do. There's no cure," Hunters' voice was a little too cold for my liking.

"Hunter, don't scare her even more than she is now," Anker says, staring at me. Surprising words, coming from him. Everyone else must've thought so too because they all turned to look at him.

"Is it just me, or did Crank just say something kind?" Deon asks.

"I think Crank just said something kind," Adam looked shocked.

Anker isn't fazed. "I can totally sympathize. When I got bit, I thought it was the most exciting thing that ever happened to me until a few hours before the first shift. Then I flipped and locked myself in my brothers' closet."

Hunter cocks a brow. "Interesting. I didn't think you had feelings."

"Just because I act like an ass all the time doesn't mean I don't have feelings. Try me when I'm out cold. I hear I'm pretty kind then," Anker says sarcastically, a cruel grin on his face.

Hunter ignores him. "Tess, if you have any more questions, just stop me in the hall or ask anyone else here. Ignore Mercedes though. She won't help you. We need to get back to the case," He says seriously, his green eyes narrowed and gleaming.

"Oh, great. More work," Anker complains, back to himself.

I lean back into Adam, suddenly very tired. He tangles his hand through mine. "Let's hear it," he says.

"I think the suspect could be a werewolf hunter."

"There are werewolf hunters?" I ask, actually surprised. I thought since the CFSS existed, we'd all get along in peace.

"Yeah. Lot's of them. They practically have their own race," Deon leans back in the big couch and folds his arms across his chest.

"Yeah, pretty much. They have it out for us, and they're pretty good at owning silver weapons and killing. Say the suspect is one, and he's trying to get to us by murdering random people he knows we'll investigate," Hunter explains with a twinkle in his eye. He could be on to something, even though I have no idea what he's talking about.

"That's a good theory. We'll have to check that out," Victoria says.

"How do we tell if he's a werewolf hunter without asking?" Adam asks, asking the question that was forming in my mind.

"They'll have wolfs bane for sure, and an unusual amount of silver weapons. They'll be strong and smart, not very good looking, and annoyingly but incredibly cunning. They also blame everyone else for everything," Hunter stares at the floor, probably thinking about past werewolf hunters he's faced. Hunter faces the werewolf hunters. Imagine that.

"You practically just described my brother," I say without thinking. Everyone looks at me, and Adam squints at me.

Hunter is the first to speak, "Who is he?"

"Ben McKay."

Adam shakes his head. "He's not a hunter. I would've known cause he used to hang with me and Tess a lot when were younger."

"Yeah, he's not. He has the personality but not the status," Deon agrees.

Hunter nods. "Okay. Meanwhile, we have 2 hours to get you ready for your first full moon."

Adam frowns. I hope he doesn't blame himself for Mercedes biting me. It was my fault I decided to eavesdrop in the bushes.

Hunter sounds excited, but I feel my heart fill with dread.

Chapter 6

I texted Carmen to tell her I wouldn't be at school for a couple days because I'd caught the flu. She was mad at me but she sent me a bunch of smiley faces and a big GET WELL SOON text anyway. Hunter made me swear not to tell her. He also told me that when I shift, my wolf self will be hungry and I'd have to hunt. I imagined myself killing and eating a bunny and I about threw up in my mouth.

And I'm still scared shitless. What if I can't do it? What if I don't make a very good wolf? What if I refuse to hunt? What if I skill *someone* instead of *something*? Hunter tried to reassure me that my wolf senses would kick in and combine with my human senses so I'll only eat animals and no humans. I'm not so sure. Adam is almost as jittery as I am and he's already a werewolf.

Victoria hands me a pink hoodie. "We're going to our regular meeting ground. You should already know where that is."

"Yeah," I say, and head back to the living room with Victoria. Hunter, Adam, Anker, Deon, and a very pissed-off looking Mercedes were already there. She gave me a disapproving look. "Where's Blaine?"

"He's not coming," Adam doesn't elaborate. He takes my hand and squeezes it reassuringly. He's not wearing his hat so I see the worry in

his blue eyes right away. I know he never wanted me to be a werewolf. Neither did I really but I'm an idiot so I got myself turned into one.

Hunter comes to stand in front of me. "I need to take the bandage off the bite," He says, looking at me fiercely but carefully at the same time.

I nod, staring into the mirror behind him. I can see my bandaged shoulder in it. I slide my sweater down over my shoulder and I see Adams' eyes narrow with disapproval. Hunter starts to peel it off at my neck first, and then he rips it off quickly. It stings and I whimper and shut my eyes. Jeez, Tess; don't be a cry baby.

"That healed nicely. Almost too nicely," Mercedes remarks. Deon slaps her arm. I can see a red mark winding down her neck and disappearing under her black shirt.

I open my eyes slowly and gaze into the mirror. The same red line comes down the side of my neck and stops where my arm meets my shoulder. I have the scar of a werewolf bite. Lovely. No more tank tops for me.

Hunter throws the red-tinted bandage in the garbage and brushes his hands on his jeans, "Let's go. I don't want her shifting in my house."

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We're almost to the clearing when I start to feel funny. My muscles ache and everything is louder and a lot clearer. The ache turns to real

physical pain and I grit my teeth to keep myself from wincing and hug myself.

“What’s wrong?” Adam asked, panicked.

“You’re probably starting to feel the shift,” Deon guesses, “Muscle pain? Heightened senses?”

I nod. “Yeah. Is that good or bad?”

“Depends.” Anker says from in front of me.

“On what?”

“Depends on the situation you’re in. Imagine sitting in the middle of a class with 300 other people and you get those feelings,” Hunter answers, glancing at me and throwing a look at Anker at the same time.

“Oh,” I say, hoping this doesn’t happen every time.

“Here we are,” Hunter announces, and we enter the clearing. The remnants of last night’s fire were still in the middle; I can even see the blackened wood with gray ashes spread around it even though it’s almost completely dark out.

The muscle pain gets considerably worse and I realize I *am* hungry. I’m craving steak. I never crave steak. I don’t think I even like steak.

Hunters staring up at the sky and everyone one else is staring at me, obviously preparing for something big. Anker is actually in a really weird poise that makes him look like he’s gonna pounce. Adam still holds my hand, almost too tightly.

"I'm sorry you have to go through with this Tess. I never wanted anything to happen to you. I love you," he whispers in my ear. I'm about to answer him but Hunter locks eye contact with me.

"Moon. Talk to you in wolf intuition, Tess."

I panic and desperately want out but it's too late. My body convulses and I feel my legs give out under me and my knees hit the dirt. I scream and I feel the oddest sensation, like my bones were moving and changing and lifting me off the ground, which is probably what they're doing because my scream changes into a howl. I can't move anything.

My vision focuses and my hearing clears and I feel my feet hit the ground. I look down, the world surprisingly light for it being night, but I don't see feet. I see two gigantic brown paws with sharp claws and tiny golden flecks.

I think I might pass out.

I look up with my new sight, and I see other, massive wolves before me. The one directly in front of me is midnight black with blue eyes. It bows its head and I suddenly feel something like a presence in my mind. It's sort of unpleasant.

So what's it like?

I jump, shocked at hearing Hunter's voice in my mind. I go to answer him but my tongue won't form words. Instead it brushes up against

something hard and sharp. The word canine pops into my head, which is a freaky thought. I have canine teeth!

Hunters' wolf form is practically smiling. *Just think what you want to say. I'll hear it. And by the way, we call each other by our last names while in wolf form and while undercover, McKay.*

Last names? Well okay. He called me McKay. It makes me feel like a troublemaker. I try to do what he says. I feel different. Everything is...What do I look like? That's the first thing I thought of? Don't be shallow, Tess.

I hear something move and I twitch my ears. That's probably the weirdest thought I have ever come up with. I see a hazelnut brown wolf come towards me, his eyes hazel also.

You look amazing. Adams' voice. Then an image forms in my mind of a massive brown and gold wolf with gray-blue eyes and the ears all perked up and cute. That's you.

It's scary really to see yourself as wolf.

Yeah, stunning really. Mercedes retorts. I don't like having her voice in my head, but I gotta admit: her red and black fur is gorgeous. But her eyes and voice are plain scary. I sense she's rolling her eyes. Strange.

None of us like having her voice in our heads. Anker says. His wolf form is dark gray with black spots here and there.

It's not like we get a choice. Victoria says sadly. I realize she's the pure white wolf standing next to Hunter. Deon is the tan wolf that looks a little like a fox.

I don't look like a fox. Deon snaps.

I was about to talk again but I smelled something it caught my attention without me even trying.

That would be a deer. Adam says, answering some mental question I must've asked.

Deer?

Well, let's go then. Deon turns and runs off into the trees, disappearing quickly. Adam nods his wolf head at me and runs off too.

I follow, and I'm surprised to say, running in wolf form is the most exhilarating, adrenaline filled thing I've ever done. I could get used to this. My feet (well, paws, but I don't like calling them that) dig into the dirt and I surge forward, wind rushing through all this fur I apparently have, and this tail that I'm not sure what do with yet.

The forest flies by as we run like its on fast-forward. Then I hear a howl and Anker the gray wolf jumps in the air and pounces on an adult deer. He tares open its neck and stops. There's a bloody deer on the ground and I can't believe I'm about to eat it. I feel so horrible and cannibalistic.

But it tastes really good.

Chapter 7

We get back to Hunters' house at 3 am. He really should've left the porch light on or something because it's so dark out I trip going up the back steps.

"I swear I left the porch light on," Hunter says as he opens the screen door.

"I turned it off," Mercedes confesses. "The lesser the people that know we live here, the better."

Hunter raises his eyebrows at her but doesn't say anything to her. Instead, he turns to me when he turns on the living room light. "You're welcome to stay here tonight."

I give it some thought, but I really want to sleep in my own bed in my own pajamas tonight instead of his couch. "I think I'm gonna go home for the night, but thanks."

Hunter frowns. "You won't be able to stay at home much longer. Mixing family life and werewolf life gets much harder as time goes on. I should know. I've been one since I was 5."

I was taken aback. I didn't know he'd been one *that* long. "At least until I finish high school. Plus, I don't have much of a family life anyway."

Hunter doesn't look convinced.

“Well, I’m going to bed. I hope I don’t see you tomorrow,” Mercedes announces, and she gives me a huge fake grin, showing off perfect white teeth. I’m tempted to attack her. Her stiletto boots click on the metal stairs as she goes up and her short black hair bounces around her head. It only increases my temptation to attack her.

Adam takes my hand and I realize for the first time his hand is rough and warm. Must be side effects of shifting. “Come on. I’m gonna go home too.”

“Come back tomorrow. Orion will be here,” Deon says. He’s obviously spending the night but I know he lives with his dad somewhere downtown Portland.

“See you later. I’ll give you your clothes tomorrow,” Victoria says, and she gives me a hug. I hug her back kind of awkwardly and pull away as Adam leads me toward the door.

Anker pops something into his mouth. “You just survived your first shift,” He grins and crashes on the couch.

Hunter disappears into the kitchen then Adam slams the door behind us and we’re out in the cold night air once again. Or morning air.

We walk along the path back to our houses in silence at first until I come up with something to say. Things are a little different between us now.

“So Hunter’s been a werewolf since he was five?” I ask.

Adam snaps his head up like he'd been sleeping. "Um, yeah. He ran away when he was like 13. His parents made a big deal about it. I think there's still a billboard in Brookings that says "Help find Hunter Riordan."

"Wow," I say because I have no idea what else to say. I would've asked Hunter himself but I'd feel like that would be crossing some forbidden line.

We're silent again until we get to the wooden fence behind our houses. He opens the gate for me and closes it when we're both through.

I turn to him. "What about Blaine?"

He shrugs. "I don't know. No one knows really. He's mysterious. See you tomorrow?"

Talk about lack of information. "Yeah, tomorrow."

"Stay safe," He says, then makes his way to the front door of his house. I stand here, taken aback. Did I do something wrong? He acts like he's mad at me. I swear I'll never figure him out.

I wander into my dark, empty house; nobody's home. I disappear for a couple of days and they still go to work and come home like any other normal day. I wonder what would've happened if I had *never* come home. If I would've just stayed at Hunters'.

I jog up the stairs, suddenly very tired, and I start when I throw open my door.

Dwayne is sitting on my windowsill, holding a long, slender, silver knife.

He looks at me calmly with a slight grin. "Hello, Tess."

"What are you doing in here?" I demand. He is *not* allowed in my room. And I just decided no one is.

He stands up, running two fingers along the blade of the knife. "I think we both know the answer, don't we?"

The moonlight shining in from my window makes his combed back blonde hair look even blonder and his face look pale and porcelain.

Pale and porcelain.

Shit. He's a vampire. How is it I never noticed before? He walks, talks, and looks perfect. Not to mention he *does not* look thirty-six. He looks like he's twenty.

He walks toward me slowly and I back away along the wall, feeling for something that I can use to defend myself. It's not like I keep weapons in my room so I'm gonna have to improvise. Really improvise. Like shove an eyeliner pencil in his eye or hit him in the head with a book.

"I tried to protect you," he starts, lightly hitting the knife in the palm of his hand. I still can't believe how good my night vision is. "Sending you away was the only choice but I had to get your mother to agree. So I made you seem troubled by using compulsion and simple scenarios, like breaking the vase. I was only trying to keep you safe from the wolves."

“Oh, so this is about the war between vampires and werewolves? Nice of you to stick me in the middle,” I retort, and my hand brushes the edge of a book. Looks like that’s my weapon. I better keep him talking.

He shakes his head. “The only way I could get to the wolves is to bring them to me or get you out of the way. So I tried both. But those werewolves are too stupid to figure out the murderer was a vampire. They kept thinking it was a human. They should know by now that the bite marks heal within minutes,” he explains through gritted teeth.

I stop and stare. “You were the one who killed all those girls in Salem and Portland?”

“Of course, my dear. They were all half-werewolves too. Turns out those werewolves don’t know how to identify their own kind!” He chuckles in a teasing tone.

“I’ve been living with a murderer. How could you do this?” the set of realization sets in. He is gone a lot, and he never seems to eat anything. And everyone knows vampires and dogs do not get along so that’s probably why he got rid of my dog. Hate starts to rise in me and burn toward him and my heartbeat speeds and my muscles began to ache. I try to calm myself down. But...if I’m in wolf form I can tell the others. But they’re not in wolf form right now so that idea’s off.

He stops laughing and steps directly in front of me. So close I can feel his cold breath on my face, his black eyes almost glowing. “I did what

I had to do to protect you from the wolves. But then you go get yourself turned into one! Filthy dogs. It's my job to kill you now," He hisses. I see his fangs and a flash of silver. I grab the book and I slam it into the side of his head. He's caught by surprise and stumbles to the side, throwing his hand out to catch himself.

I scramble to the door as fast as I can but he grabs my ankle and I fall forward, slamming into the wood floor. I see stars before my eyes but not for long. He drags me backward into the room and I try to kick him but as embarrassing as it is, I can't reach.

He yanks me upright but he shoves me into my make-up table at full force and it breaks in half. Pain jars up my spine and I hit the floor along with all my make-up, a pile of books, and bottles of body spray.

He holds the knife in a position ready to do some stabbing. I break off one of the make-up table legs with surprising strength and hold it out as a shield. Wood kills vampires.

"You shouldn't even bother fighting back, Tess. I always win," Dwayne mocks with a twisted grin.

"Not this time," I say. I can already feel myself shifting.

The shift isn't as painful this time and I see a flicker of fear in Dwayne's face but it doesn't last long. The wood floor cracks and bows when my paws make contact with it and I bare my teeth at him. I'm

probably three times his size now but he's got a lot more experience at this than me. I wish he'd turn the light on. It'd be easier.

I slash my claws across his chest with all my strength and he stumbles back and actually trips over the corner of my bed and lands on my side table. It breaks too. The lamp shatters on the floor and I'm pretty sure my iPad won't work anymore. He jumps up and crosses the room in one quick move. He blocks the door.

"Gonna have to try harder than that. You're just a rookie; I'll still win."

I launch myself at him and he sprints downstairs at an inhuman pace. I follow, breaking the doorjamb as I enter the living room. I stop behind the couch; I don't see him anywhere.

"Told you so," he says from my right and he kicks me in the ribs so hard I whimper in pain and slide across the floor into the corner of where the wall meets the door to the kitchen. My nose hits the edge of the entertainment center and the flat screen TV topples forward and hits the floor with a sparking thud. Blood fills my mouth and I spit it out. This guy is strong.

"Hurts don't it? You'll be easier to kill when you're already too distracted with the pain," he sneers as he comes to stand above me. I stare up at him hard, desperately wishing I could speak.

I jump up and lunge at him with both claws out aiming for his chest. My claws sink in and we both hit and destroy the coffee table. Glass and wood flies everywhere. I bark in his face and I hesitate too long to make another move. He pushes me off and I fly backward and hit the couch. It topples over backward and my claw rips a hole in the cushion. He comes at me and I lunge at him again and we slide into the kitchen. We're gonna destroy the whole house. That's not good. But I can't let him kill me too. He'll go after Adam and Deon, and Hunter and Anker, and even Blaine and little Victoria. I wouldn't care about Mercedes. I can't let him do that.

I sink my claws into him again and hurl him into the kitchen cabinets. Doors fall off and dishes fall out and shatter on the floor. He leaves a dent in the framework. He jumps over the table at me and at the last second, I dive out of the way. He crashes into the wall behind me and the clock falls down on his head. At least mom's not home. She'd be pissed.

Dwayne's starting to look a little doubtful. He looks downright determined to win now and he lost the twisted grin and replaced it with a twisted frown.

"Theresa?" mom's worried voice sounds from outside the door and I turn around quickly and alarmed, but no ones there.

Dwayne jumps on me and sinks the silver knife into my ribs.

Pain flares along every inch of my body, so much pain that it blinds me. I howl and it turns into a scream as I shift back into human form. I fall to the floor, unable to hold my self up. The pain is unbearable. Tears sting my eyes and my hands find the hilt of the knife sticking out just above my hip bone. It's sticky.

I see a blurred Dwayne standing over me with that twisted grin again, saying something but the pain blocks it out. I can't think. I can't see. I can't hear. All I can do is feel this burning hot pain that's radiating from the knife and shooting all over my body. I hear myself screaming from a distance.

Dwayne walks away.

Absent mindedly, my shaking hands grip the knife and pull it out. It creates even more pain but it ends as soon as the knife is out. I throw it away from me and sit up, my vision coming back into focus. I look at my hands which are wet with blood. The front of my sweater is sticky with blood and it still hurts, but not as bad. Blood blossoms over the floor and my jeans. The sight of it sickens me. I sway when I get up and I limp into the living room; I can't put weight on my left ankle for some reason. I grab one of the wooden coffee table legs out of the mess. Dwayne is on the phone by the door. He's not a very good vampire. He should be able to sense me.

"Hey," I say hoarsely.

Dwayne whips around in shock and I shove the wood into his heart. He falls down but I don't stick around to see what happens to him. I rush out the door, leaving it open behind me, and run to Adam's house where I throw open the door.

"Adam!" I yell, and the wound flares up and I double over.

Adam is next to me in a second, looking freaked out. I would be too if someone covered in blood just burst through my door.

"What happened?" he takes my hands away from the wound and gasps. "Silver knife...who did this?"

I meet his eyes and the room sways. "Dwayne. It was my step-dad, Adam. He killed all those girls. He's a vampire. He tried to kill me and he was gonna come after you guys next," my voice sounded small and weak. I must be losing a lot of blood.

He picks me up carefully and runs into the living room where he sets me on the couch. He's back not a second later with a first aid kit and a little bottle of brown liquid. He's wearing nothing but a pair of flannel pajama pants that hung low on his waist. He looked like a really ripped sun-tanned god. If the pain wouldn't make me pass out, he would for sure.

He works quickly. He rolls up my sweater to reveal the wound and I look away and squeeze my eyes tightly shut.

“Open your eyes,” he says softly. I do, but slowly. He dumps the brown liquid stuff on me and the wound stings, but it dulls the pain. He opens the first aid kit and dumps some hydrogen peroxide on a Kleenex. He wipes all the blood away from the wound and it stings more. He dumps some more brown stuff on it and the sting dies down, and the pain is reduced to just an annoying throb. I realize I’d been holding my breath.

He tapes gauze to it and rolls my sweater back down, “What’s that brown stuff?” I ask, finding my voice.

“It’s just some medicine that heals wounds caused by silver, only available to werewolves. Hunter gave it to me,” he meets my eyes, “Where is Dwayne now?”

I stare at him for a while and then I look away. “On the floor of my living room with a wooden stake in his chest.”

He squints and almost smiles. “A wooden stake?”

“Well, one of the legs from the coffee table.”

“And you did this after you got this?” he gestures to the wound.

I nod. “Yeah. It was hard.”

He looks at me, almost in admiration, but the look fades into something like realization. “We need to get out of here. Out of town. We can’t be here when someone discovers him. We’ll go to Hunters’ first and tell him though.”

“Leave town?” I’m not sure I like the sound of that.

Adam gets up and sets the first aid kit on his make-shift coffee table, "You still have your motorcycle right?"

Okay, maybe I do like the sound of this. But I have to call my mom and Carmen when we get to Hunters'.

"It's in the garage. I'll have to get the keys from Dwayne's' desk."

He nods. "Pack a bag with some of your stuff. Grab the keys and the bike. Meet me outside in twenty."

He helps me up and I pop my ankle, which makes it feel a lot better. Must've been twisted. I go back to my house almost reluctantly.

Dwaynes' body lies where I left it, except now he was all skeletal and gray. When vampires die, they decay to what they should've been if they hadn't come back as a vampire when they died as a human.

In my room, I grab my big blue Adidas duffel bag and start throwing clothes into it. I pick all my make-up out of the wreckage and dump it in there along with my Converse and some flip flops. I peel off the sweater and replace it with a white tee and my Portland State sweatshirt. I pull on my black boots and throw my Jack Russell Terrier stuffed animal that's Jumpers' replacement and a couple of books. I put my phone in my pocket and take one last look around. This is probably the last time I'll see my room. It's a wreck now. I saved what I could. If only I could save my Taylor Lautner poster but I wouldn't fit in the duffel.

I run down the hall and into Dwayne's office. I reach my hand all the way to the back of the middle drawer and grab my motorcycle keys. There's a bag of wolfsbane next to it. Can't believe I never noticed that either. There's a label on it.

I run back downstairs, jumping over random pieces of broken furniture, and throw open the garage door. I tare the cover off my motorcycle and jump on, shoving the key into the ignition. It starts right away and I turn it around. The garage door opens (it opens when it senses movement). I zoom down the darkened driveway, wind whipping my hair, just as Adams comes down his. He carries a backpack that no doubt carries one of his X-Boxes. I stop at the edge of the driveway and scoot back against my strapped in duffel. He's driving tonight.

He straps his backpack on top of my duffel and hops on in front. I wrap my arms around his waist and we zoom off down the street, the sunrise beckoning us.

Epilogue

Orion and his team retrieved Dwaynes' body from my old house and cleaned up all the wreckage. They burned him at the stake and the Portland-Salem murders case was solved and closed. Hunter sold his house and moved to Los Angeles. I moved with them rather reluctantly, but I had no choice. But the cops were already looking toward me as a suspect of Dwayne Price's murder so I moved with them. Mercedes still doesn't like me and Victoria has become like a sister. We're like crime solvers, investigating supernatural crimes that take place just out of the humans' reach. All is well.

The only thing I regret is never saying goodbye to Carmen and my mom. But I had to disappear. I had no choice.