



# WOLF

Best Selling Author  
ALASKA ANGELINI

# WOLF

Best Selling Author  
Alaska Angelini

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

# WOLF Wolf River

Best Selling Author

Alaska Angelini

Copyright © 2015 by Alaska Angelini

ISBN:

All Rights Reserved

All characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any resemblance to persons living or dead is strictly coincidental. The scanning, uploading and distribution of this book via the Internet or any other means without the permission of the publisher is illegal, and is punishable by law. Please purchase only authorized electronic editions, and do not participate in or encourage the electronic piracy of copyrighted materials. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

# Prologue

## Wolf

*It was once said that love was the strongest emotion man could feel. The depth at which the sensation coursed through one's heart and mind could make anything possible. It was what dreams were made of. Of what hope was based on.*

*Where it mended the broken souls and brightened the darkest thoughts, it also had the ability to cause death to the purest heart. For no emotion was one-sided.*

*I was forced to learn the truth the hard way. Emotions didn't create miracles, and beliefs could only get you so far.*

*When the outcome of what I was became clear, hate took up residence in my mind. Like a disease, it merged with my ailment, worming through the crevices of my brain. It didn't take long to begin to feel myself alter. The fiery heated rage that seethed within became my motivation—my obsession.*

*My humanity was gone. The glimpses of the everyday life I still received were vague. If I wasn't taken over by my wolf, the fog I drifted in left me stumbling through a routine I was quickly forgetting. I was doomed—infected with the one thing our kind feared the most—bad blood.*

# Chapter 1

## Erin

Most people saw the transitions of life as change—the change in seasons, the change in relationships ... in people. Not me. I saw death. Leaves fell, relationships fizzled out ... loved ones died. Everything had an ending. Maybe it was a morbid way of viewing the chapters of time, but my thirty-two years on this planet hadn't been kind. Loss was something I knew all too well and it molded my current path, taking me deeper into the heart of nothingness.

Green, orange, and yellow festooned the tall trees that lined the road and I couldn't help but take in the foliage. Fall was in full swing and the colors of the leaves were peaking. Red mixed in with the scenery and I took the curved road, slowing to view the forest and stream as I crossed a bridge. The current rushed through the rocks below, shallow but fierce, and my car switched gears as I headed up a steep hill.

Wisconsin was beautiful in fall. Although I'd been here before, it had been further north, along the coast of Lake Superior. Then, I had been a tourist—someone's fiancée—basking in the local festivities with the man I loved. This time I was here for work. And again, this state harbored death. But I wouldn't focus on that. My priority was a young woman who had lost her life way too early. It didn't revolve around the memories of Martin, but something more gruesome.

I pressed the red button on the tape recorder, maneuvering it to hold steady along the steering wheel as I drove. The sun was starting to set and clouds darkened the sky even more. I took a deep breath, remembering the

details of the case before my voice filled the interior of the gold sedan I drove.

“Victim, Kelly Morrison, twenty years of age, five feet, six inches tall, blond hair, brown eyes—found not far from the bank of Wolf River. Deep lacerations along her throat and chest. Her stomach contents, missing, as was her right leg, which was found approximately a mile from the location of her remains. Aside from the spoor of animals, no evidence of a perpetrator was ever recovered. The victim’s cause of death appears to be a mystery, despite that it was ultimately ruled a bear attack.”

My throat cleared and I tried to focus on the road as the photos I’d seen of her mutilated body flashed before me.

“A bear attack coincides with the gashes across the victim’s neck and chest. Except for the fact that the markings from the thick claws don’t match up with those of a bear. Where bear claws are usually dull from climbing trees, the incisions in the victim were clean cut. Almost, razor sharp ... as if someone took a scalpel ... or made the claws out of ... something.

“From the angle of the blows, my expert assures me the bear would have been standing when it attacked. Which baffled him since he placed the bear close to seven feet tall. The average height for a black bear is five feet when standing on its hind legs. A little over six feet would be pushing a world record. Perhaps Kelly Morrison was kneeling or...” My eyes squinted as I tried to decipher the mystery. Nothing would come. Although I had some information on the case, details were missing and the handwriting almost indecipherable. The detective wasn’t of much help, but I had found most weren’t when it came to private investigators being hired by the family. Either the department wasn’t doing its job, or didn’t care to.

“Regardless, black bears aren’t common for the area. From my research, they mainly reside more in Northern Wisconsin, but have been migrating more toward the central part of the state as their population grows. Perhaps it was a bear,” I mumbled under my breath. “A really, big bear. But if it’s not, the width and precision of the claws raise the biggest question of all. What sort of animal could have created such gruesome wounds on Kelly Morrison, at such a height? And why didn’t it bite her in its attack? Her stomach was gutted from the claws with a single blow. Did it stop when it found its meal? And if so, why tear off her leg? *Something did*. Something ripped the limb free from her body as if it were nothing. Did the creature carry it almost a mile away, just to discard it? Or did another animal do that?”

I bit my lip, turning off the recorder as I let my questions consume me. Since I had gotten the call over a week ago, I couldn’t get this case out of my mind. Maybe it was the desperation in Mr. Morrison’s voice. He was panicked and distressed, yet fearful. He swore his daughter hadn’t been killed by a bear. He hunted them up north every season since he was a kid and he was convincing and knowledgeable from what I could tell. So what was it? Or *who* was it?

The former detective in me was dying to get out. If only I could have been there on scene when they found her, it would have made all the difference. Photos, reports ... those weren’t enough for me. I used to live for investigations. My work was my life. Well, until it died right along with my partner and fiancé. It was from a robbery in a town we weren’t even from—a bullet right through his head. Life didn’t make sense. How many times had we been in the face of danger and come out unscathed? So many that I couldn’t even come up with a number. Yet, our first weekend away together—the weekend of his proposal—dead.

Numbly, I reached forward, pushing the button on the radio to drown out the voices in my head. The sun wasn't even visible anymore and complete darkness was creeping in. I shouldn't have left so late in the day. How long had it been since I'd gone through a decent town? Rochester? Yes, that had to be it. The drive from Des Moines hadn't taken too long. Just a day's trip, but there wasn't much in the form of scenery beside all the trees.

I yawned, picking up my coffee from the holder and taking a sip. Although I would be getting in somewhat late, work didn't technically start until tomorrow. The cabin I rented along the river would put me in the perfect location, not far from the scene. I could pass it on my morning run before I met with Mr. Morrison and Detective Perkins.

A half hour drifted by while I kept letting everything repeat through my head. Street lights appeared and I slowed as I cruised down the main stretch of Wolf River. My eyes darted around, widening as I came upon a single gas station with a built-in diner. *Nothing*. This place was practically deserted. I glanced down at my gauges. I still had a quarter of a tank, but I liked to be prepared. Plus, my training always told me to make an appearance—to leave a trail to my whereabouts. I didn't expect anything to happen to me, but I couldn't erase what was ingrained.

Lights flickered from the cover above the gas pumps and I looked up as I climbed out and closed the door behind me. The outside was completely silent. No cars drove by. There were no bugs or animals chirping or making sounds in the distance. I held the keys tightly against my wallet as I walked around to the passenger side. A note was posted along the pump—*Pay inside*. The words were almost illegible and I nearly groaned, remembering the police report.



The tapping of my heels broke the silence and I couldn't help but scan my surroundings as I headed for the door. This place was desolate. Still, no cars drove by. I scanned the woods in the distance, narrowing my eyes at the darkness they held. I couldn't shake that something was there, watching me from where it hid amongst the trees. I doubted something was actually present, but the sensation was real. It drove me forward, almost faster than I liked. I wasn't afraid of much, but there was already something about this town I couldn't quite put my finger on.

Dinging met me as I stepped through the threshold of the door. The weight of my gun behind my blazer calmed me a little, but there was a charge in the air I couldn't explain. An electric feeling combined with a heaviness of dread. Almost as if there was a stain in the atmosphere that tried to warn of something sinister.

An older man stepped from the back, walking forward as I paused at the register. His hair was balding at the top and the rest was nearly white. He was short and heavy in the middle. The smile he cast was friendly enough. But ... not right. His aging features were set tight.

"Gas stop, I suppose?"

I smiled back at him, opening my wallet and reaching for my card. "Yeah, but I don't have much further. Maybe five minutes."

His hand paused mid-way to the register and his eyes cut up to mine. He reached for the card quickly after that. I let his unease sink in as I glanced toward the diner. It was just as empty as everything else.

"You're staying in Wolf River? You don't look like the rafting type."

I paused, calculating the concern I picked up in his tone. I knew this place brought in the occasional tourist, but I wanted him to continue.

"Rafting?"

A quick nod left him as I piped in for him to run the card for twenty dollars.

“That’s right. Sometimes people come here to do white water rafting. I take it that’s not why you’re here.”

“No,” I said, lowly. “Do a lot of people come through? Is the rafting seasonal?”

The man ran the card, handing it back to me. “We don’t get too many visitors lately. Especially after the snow falls.” He opened his mouth to say more but quickly shut it.

“I see.” I slipped the card back in my wallet, scanning the store before turning my attention back to him.

“Where are you staying, if you don’t mind me asking?”

It was my turn to pause while I battled as to whether I should give out such personal information. “Up by the river. There’s a cabin a few miles out that gives me good access to the trails.”

His eyebrows drew in. “I don’t see a bike on the back of your car, and there isn’t a rental place around this area. I’m guessing you’re not talking about riding an ATV through there either. Are you saying you’re going to run those trails?”

“Is there reason I shouldn’t?”

A nervous expression flashed over his weary features and he glanced out of the large glass window that aligned the store. “They don’t call this Wolf River for nothing. Best be careful up there. People have been known to get attacked by ... things. I’d hate to hear something happened to you too.”

“How many people have been attacked?”

The man clearly became uncomfortable and turned to mess with something along the counter, giving me a wide span of his back. “Just a

few. Not too many, lately. Just be careful if you go venturing out into the woods. Especially around dark. Better to be safe than sorry.”

The detective in me wanted to push for more questions on the attacks, but instead I nodded and stepped toward the door. I could always come back if the need arose. Besides, I was getting tired. For as simple as the thought of sleep was, it was almost an impossible task.

“Thank you, I’ll be safe.” I mumbled the words, pushing through the door and heading back to the tanks. As I began to pump the gas, my attention returned to the forest not far away. This whole time I had been so focused on bears that I never gave wolves thought. *Wolf River*. A shiver raced down my spine.

The pump slowed, coming to a stop. It didn’t take me long to get back in the car. The temperature may have been in the low forties, but I had never felt colder. Stories and a conversation from my grandfather came barreling through. Even as his voice flooded in from the past, I pulled onto the road.

*“Can’t I go hunting with you, grandpa, please? I’m eight, now. I can do it.”*

*His laugh was followed by a groan as he pulled me into his lap.*

*“The woods aren’t safe, Erin, or else I would take you. Just last week I lost Ranger. You know how much I loved that hound.”*

*“But you said wolves got him. I won’t be running off by myself. I’ll be with you.”*

*“It sounds simple and safe enough, but it’s not. There’s complications that come with hunting. I have to always be ready. When the dogs get on the trail of a wolf, you have to break them as fast you can. It’s a split-second decision. One you have to make in the moment. If I can’t break them, I’ll have to chase them down. I can’t do that, watching over you.”*

*Wolves are tricky. The smartest predator you can come against, in my opinion. And they're vicious. I don't want you out there with them."*

*My confusion built as I tried to find an excuse good enough to get him to take me.*

*"What do wolves do that are so bad? How are they the smartest?"*

*The chair began to rock and he sighed. "You can't see the significance unless you've been there. Unless you've seen how they can manipulate." He paused, dragging out the seconds and making me even more afraid with the fear I knew he wasn't meaning to display. There was concern on his face. Worry I'd never seen before.*

*"They know when a dog is on their trail. The wolf will start off by running in big circles, staying well ahead of the hound as it rushes through the trees at lightning speed. Wolves are very fast, Erin, and they love to play games. But this isn't a fun game. There's only one thing they want—food. They'll play with anything they can get in their trap, but it goes beyond just one wolf. They work in packs. Waiting. Watching every move of their prey. Just as their meal begins to tire, they'll all move in...and they'll attack."*

*He had looked down and even now I could see him and the forest-lined road in front of me. I swallowed hard.*

*"It's something you never want to see or have to go through, sweetie. Best stay here until you're older."*

*Older. No, I never went. Never even asked again after that night. I didn't scare easily as a child, but what I saw in my grandpa's eyes brought out a fear I had hardly experienced at that age. And it was still there within me. I could stare down the coldest killer, but an old story that had given me nightmares for months had the ability to crumble my defensive walls. So easily, I could see those wolves pouncing and shredding into one my grandpa's dogs. In my childhood imagination, it had been all too vivid. As*

if I had been there. The phantom cries of the hounds I'd been raised with were still there, still sounding in my head.

"Come on, Erin," I said, "Don't think about it. They're just wolves. If you should fear anything, fear the damn bears. Those are what is apparently killing people here. Not the wolves. Wolves are like ... dogs, but meaner. You can deal with dogs with attitude. You have a gun for crying out loud. One warning shot would definitely having them running away."

Right. One gun versus a pack of wolves. Something told me they might jump at the sound, but their bravery increased with larger numbers. Just like anyone's. How big were the packs here?

Music drifted through the car, quietly, and I leaned forward, turning it up as I fought not to think about the memory anymore. Darkness blurred in my peripheral vision and before I could turn to see what it was, I felt my head jerk to the right. Heat flamed in my neck from the force of the collision and my car slid through the oncoming lane as I tried to gain control. Time slowed and even as I tried to see what had hit me, I couldn't. Whatever it was, it had been big.

The car smashed into trees and the impact had my whole body jolting in the opposite direction. The side of my head hit the window and warmth gushed down the side of my face. The seatbelt locked against my weight and pain flared over chest and waist as I was wrenched yet another way. My car was sliding down some sort of hill or embankment. Somehow through the blur of motion I knew that. I was falling.

The sound of more glass shattering registered, as did the popping of metal. I'd heard this before. This wasn't my first wreck. Even as I knew what was happening, I was aware that my body wasn't reacting as it should. My mind told me that wasn't a good sign. I blinked heavily, seeing the glow in front of my car waver as I lurched to a stop.

Just as fast, a figure that appeared to be inhumanly tall and wide blurred in front of the lights. I jerked in reaction. My breath shuddered and my eyes rolled back as I fought not to pass out. Pain was increasing in my head. My fingers twitched and I tried raising my hand to feel for my purse. I needed to call for help. I needed my gun.

Air was all my hand came into contact with as pitch black began taking me over. Somewhere in the distance more metal creaked. It didn't sound natural to my dazed self. Had the engine made that groaning sound? My imagination could almost believe that sharp nails were raking along the exterior of the car, just like the sounds they'd make on a chalk board. They were getting closer. Louder.

I tried to lift my eyelids but felt them lower almost as soon as they gave me a view of the lit up trees before me. Yes ... *head wound*. I wasn't thinking straight and I was fading by the second. Even the piercing howl that chilled my blood couldn't stop unconsciousness from taking me under.

# Chapter 2

## Alex

Blood. Hers—mine. It perfumed the air, mixing with earth and pine to make the most mouthwatering fragrance I had ever smelled. My pulse thumped hard, in waves of impatience. Blistering heat poured from my skin and the call was so clear. My wolf wanted to come. To finish the meal that was so conveniently set out before me. The temptation caused me to pant before I could reign in the heavy breaths and slight whimper that left me.

I couldn't get closer. I couldn't provide assistance, not even to save her life. If I did that right now, she'd die for sure. And I didn't want that. No, *I did*, I just couldn't afford any more attention. Suspicions and fear were already high and if I did what I wanted, people would know. And then they'd die, too, because I didn't have plans on going anywhere.

Uncontrollably, I took a step closer.

The drumming of her pulse was like gravity, tempting the killer in me even more. She was waking. She was *afraid*. The fear left my bones vibrating in excitement. I could so easily shift into a wolf, regardless that the moon wasn't forcing my change. And I wanted to. The fact that I was able to keep my human form after smelling her blood was sheer willpower. I could restrain myself. I had to.

The wind picked up, the cold chill cutting into my nude frame. It had to be dropping to the mid-thirties by now, but I felt nothing but the appeal to move in. *To hunt*. I glanced toward the sky, seeing the glow of the moon cut through the tops of the trees. Nausea clutched my stomach and I

side-stepped along the length of the mangled sedan. I couldn't let her see me like this, or anyone else if they happened along the scene.

“Go.” The word came out in a rush from my lips and I tore myself away. It was almost impossible to turn my back to the vehicle, but my legs were already carrying me further away, back to my home less than a quarter mile away. Trees blurred as I broke into a sprint and each push of my bare feet into the ground intensified how in tune I was tonight. It didn't take me but a minute to burst through my door. I raced into my bedroom, pulling on a pair of jeans and shoving my arms through the sleeves of a flannel shirt. I didn't bother to button it as I slipped into my boots.

With as close as I lived, no one would question me hearing the crash. I'd call the sheriff and make sure the woman was okay, then slip back into my home as if this night didn't hold such temptation or rage. The two emotions were polar opposites and yet best friends. They were always together. Always paired up beautifully in my chaotic, unstable mind. But that was all I had known for so long and there was no changing it. My life would forever be this way—beautifully chaotic. My wolf loved the hunt and the freedom. The man I once was hated it, even if I had accepted my path more now than I did when me and my friends were attacked a few years out of high school. With being the only one who survived, no one was here to know what I had become. Or what had truly killed Jack, Kevin, and Toby.

My life and dreams plummeted that summer. From well-known and popular in our small community, I became an outcast. A hermit, of sorts. I avoided everyone, even my family. They had tried to get me back for years, but they'd given up. They knew what happened had destroyed me. Who wouldn't grieve and blame themselves at being the only survivor of such a horrific tragedy? I *loved* my friends. We'd grown up together. And it was



me who'd planned the hunting trip. Now I was exactly what had killed them and there was no changing it.

Over the years, I had accepted who I was—what I was. It didn't mean I always embraced what I felt I had to do. For the most part I had my wolf under control. Except times like this... Times when my wolf locked on a scent. This time was different though. Dangerously so. As much as I knew I needed to stay restrained in the house and call the cops, my wolf was already leading me out of the door. Running back to the injured woman in the light colored car. My heart was racing and my senses were positively peaked. Every little sound pinged in my ears. The small animals in the trees, the random leaves crunching beneath my boots. And it all drove me faster. Right back through the thick branches that tore into my skin. *Blood*. It blossomed again in a mouthwatering scent.

A small cry had me slowing as I approached. I swallowed hard, heading toward the jammed door. Thoughts of how I wanted to breathe in her blood—her scent—again, bombarded me. Somehow I managed to block them out as I forced my pace to increase. My wolf growled at me in annoyance, instead turning his focus on every sound she made as I got closer. The pitch of her groan perked my ears and hunger tightened my stomach.

I approached the pinned door, leaning into her broken window. I held my breath knowing I daren't smell her this close. Not if she was going to survive.

"Please." The whisper was said just at my ear. I clenched my jaw at the hot air tickling my skin. My finger punched in the clasp holding the seat belt fastened and I pulled her out as fast as I could. Her face settled against my chest and I could feel her begin to shake as I carried her a few feet

away. Cool air from the breeze rushed past and I rested her against the earth as I stood and sucked in a breath.

“Don’t move. You’ve been in an accident.” My eyes scanned over her face, quickly, and I tried not to look at her. “My name is Alex and I’m going to get you some help.” I spun, cursing myself as I realized I had left my cell at home. “Do you have a phone I can use? I don’t live far away, but I don’t want to leave you out here by yourself.”

“Console. It’s in my purse.” Another groan left her and I felt myself jerk down to crouch as she tried to sit.

“No, no,” I said, lowly. “Lay back and try to relax. You’ve been in a really bad car accident.”

Her eyes jerked up to mine, full of fear. I felt myself—my wolf—become rooted at the beauty the emotion carried for her. My lips separated and for the first time I took in every feature of her beautiful face. *Wide, light colored eyes. Full lips. Small, straight nose.* I couldn’t move as she struggled to her feet to loom over me. The quickness she displayed as she pulled a gun from under the black blazer she wore tore me from the spell.

“There was something in the woods. Something ... big. I saw it.” She spun, swaying a bit as she leveled it to the surrounding forest. Cautiously, I eased to stand, trying to ignore the way her pulse was pounding. With it came her increased scent. The sweetness hooked into me, reeling me closer.

“Your head is bleeding. Are you sure you saw something?”

The ponytail swung as she glanced over at me. “I...”

Confusion flashed and I bit my lip, eying the gun. “Are you a cop?”

“Detective. No, investigator, now. Who are you? I’m sorry... Did you say you lived around here?” Her hand went to her head and the gun lowered the smallest amount.

“I do,” I said, calmly. “But I need to get you help. I’m going to grab your phone real quick and call the police. Are you going to be okay?”

Full lips pursed, but she nodded. I didn’t waste time as I headed back to the driver’s side and peered through the window. It was dark, but my enhanced vision could see her purse on the passenger floorboard. I walked to the other side, closing my eyes at the huge dent that was embedded in the entire door. *Son of bitch*. I punched out the window, reaching down to collect the phone that was partly sticking out of the top.

“Jesus. Be careful. Did you cut yourself doing that?” The woman was walking over and I shook my head, not wanting her to get closer. I could smell her blood as if I were bathed in it. The scent was so fucking strong. “Then did all of that come from me?”

At the point of her finger, I looked down. The headlights had me lit up. Bright red was smeared across my chest. Some of it was from her, a tiny bit my own, from the dense and unforgiving foliage.

“Your head is bleeding pretty good.”

“Shit,” she breathed out, blinking as she stared down at the red soaked along the drooping collar of her shirt. Her fingers rose, tapping over the wound. “It’s not bad. Not really that deep at all. Okay ... good.” She was talking to herself and I couldn’t turn away. After a few seconds she seemed to notice. “Are you going to make the call?”

“Right. Yeah.” I nodded, clicking the button on the phone. *No Service* was displayed at the top of the screen. “You’ve got to be kidding me.”

“What?”

“You don’t have service. Fuck, I need to get you help so you can go to the hospital.” I glanced toward the direction of my house, not liking the energy I sensed in the woods behind me. It made the hair on my nape

prickle and left my wolf desperate to come out. It also had me walking back to her. “Listen, we need to get to a phone. Let’s go to my place. There, I can take a look at your head wound.”

“Cut,” she corrected, placing her gun back in the holster. “And I’m fine. It’s not that bad, I promise you. I’ve seen a lot of wounds. Had a few more myself, and I guarantee that I will be just fine with a few butterfly Band-Aids.” She paused as if to make herself clear. “That’s all its getting. No hospital, no doctors.” The finalization was deep in her tone and I wasn’t about to argue with the wounded woman. I went to lift her when she reared her head back and extended her arm. “I can walk just fine, thank you. And I mean that sincerely. Thank you for offering, but I’m okay. Really.”

Damn stubborn woman. I was already regretting this. What was I doing? To have her in my house? To have her scent in my home! Could I be any stupider? She’d never leave. She’d be dead before she made it to the middle of the living room.

“This way. If you start to feel—”

One step and she was falling, already passing out. The sheer strength and determination she displayed had fooled me completely. I knew the wound was deep, but with how composed she was, I had believed her. And her body hadn’t been able to keep up with her mind. Jesus, who was this woman?

Weight dropped into my arms as I managed to catch her collapsing frame. I didn’t have to pretend or disguise who I was after that. She was out. I took off in a run, holding her tucked into me as I wove through the trees. I tried my best not to take in her scent, but it was too late as the wind pushed her deeper into my lungs. I found myself leaning in closer, breathing her into me to stay. I knew in that moment—no matter where she was in this town, or how many layers of clothing she used to cover her curvy body

from the cold, I'd have her forever memorized. Categorized by her essence and what made her, her. Smell was enough for my wolf to target her within miles. Taste... I looked down at her unconscious body in my arms. I *could* taste her. I could sample the best part of her right now if I just ran my tongue over her cheek to take in her blood. I wanted to. I wanted more.

*Temptation.* It raged a war within me. I could tear her throat out right now if I wanted. There was nothing I couldn't do to her helpless form. The fact that I wasn't harming her as of yet was the only thing leading me forward. *I could do this.* I could get her help and win this never-ending battle that plagued me.

Light haloed and within seconds I slowed, approaching my door. The woman was unresponsive and I shifted her in my arms as I threw the barrier open, lying her on my sofa as I spun for the house phone. I couldn't risk the cell coverage, regardless that my supplier had decent service for the area. I had to hurry before these urges grew again. Before I acted on them.

My hand clutched to the cordless and I stole one last glance of her before I ran outside, closing the door behind me. The crisp air had me breathing in deep to try to clear my head. Frantically, my fingers pushed in the number to the Sheriff's Department as I began to pace. The greeting seemed to take forever as the words pushed against the back of my throat, ready to spill out. They had to get here fast. I wasn't sure how much longer I could hold off my wolf. I could still smell her all over me. And I liked it. No ... I fucking loved it.

"This is Alex Villani. I live at 408 West Creek Drive. I have a woman here who was in a car accident. She was conscious when I began helping her to my home, but she passed out on our walk. I need an ambulance."

A pause had me running my fingers through my hair.

“Was there anyone else involved?”

I bit the insides of my cheeks, shaking my head. Flashes of the dent blinded me and there was no way I was sharing my suspicions. “No. It was just the woman. Her car is in the ravine, off the highway. I doubt officers will be able to see it from the road. Luckily I was awake and heard the crash from my home.”

“Assistance is on its way, Mr. Villani.”

The woman began to speak again, but I hung up, not wanting to answer any more questions. The less I was involved with the cops, the better. I already knew they were apprehensive of me. Especially since Detective Perkins questioned me multiple times about the last girl that ended up dead not far from my place. They ruled it an animal attack, but they weren’t stupid. No one in this town was.

“Dammit.” I continuously squeezed the phone as I walked back and forth in the front yard. Minutes stretched out and with each one, my wolf locked to the woman’s heartbeat even more. *Thump-thump*. The rhythm wrapped itself around my beast like a collar and leash, pulling me in. Bringing me closer. I couldn’t stop prowling feet from the entrance of my door. My head was down but my stare was cut up. There was nothing I could do to stop the predatory response. I was gone, lost in the beautiful melody of life. *Her* life.

My ribs shifted and I stiffened as my body tried to betray my command. I knew I couldn’t do anything, especially now that the police were on their way. That only drove my need even more. It was the forbidden. The thrill drove me a step closer. A groan from inside of the house had my hand shooting out to the knob, and more, my bones shifted.

Her weakness was my strength. It left my true self raging to finish her off.

I stumbled, spinning and putting even more distance between me and the house. Faster, I paced. At some point I had dropped the phone. My fingers pulled at my hair through my need and my canines thickened in my mouth causing my teeth to ache. How long had it been since I'd tasted a human? Fuck, I couldn't remember. *I couldn't think of anything but her.*

Howling in the distance had my head jerking up. My steps slowed and I listened to the call. They weren't wolves like me. They wouldn't turn into humans, nor had they ever been one, but we were the same in a sense that no one would understand. We thought alike. Our methods of hunting were somewhat the same. But their form allowed them freedom. I would never have that. I didn't resemble them when I changed. No, I was worse than any monster depicted in folklore. More frightening than any illustrated picture drawn up by some artist's gruesome imagination. To see me would be coming face to face with a traumatic nightmare one couldn't escape. Not only because of my speed and strength, but my appearance was enough to have anyone lock up in horror. The mindfuck that shocked their bodies into statues was my advantage. They rarely were able to process what was happening before they were already being eaten alive.

*"Hello?"*

The weak voice was followed by footsteps. Staggering ones. I could hear the way her feet slid against my wooden floor. She was unsteady and the man in me wanted to go back and help her. To lay her down and tell her that everything was going to be okay, that the ambulance was on its way. The same man knew the price of closing the distance. It had my boots pushing even more into the dirt with my determined steps to stay back.

*"Hello?"* The thud of her knocking into something was followed by a curse as she tried to right herself. I could hear it so well it was as if I could see what was happening.

Fabric rustled and I barely cared how I must appear to her as I saw the curtain pull back. Sirens in the distance broke through my haze. It had me jerking to a stop, mid-stride, as I realized what I was doing. My lids blinked, repeatedly, and my eyes locked with a pair of narrowed ones. They held curiosity and confusion for only a moment before I saw what I longed to. *Fear*. I didn't think as I spun and pushed my legs to sprint. If I didn't leave now, she was just as doomed as I. There was only one problem. One I couldn't escape no matter how much I wanted... My wolf wouldn't forget this missed opportunity. Ever.

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)



# Chapter 3

## Erin

Dizzy, nauseous—the side effects of my condition couldn't overshadow the way I felt as I stared through the window at my savior. He had looked possessed as he stalked toward me. As if he was ready to harm me, just as much as he wanted to help me. Rarely did I ever get frightened by another person, but the look in that man's stare brought me to a place I hadn't felt since I was a child. *No, I'd felt it again just before the accident.* I feared him and that was enough to have me focused on him even more.

When he ran off, relief was immediate. But now I was questioning why he left at all? I could hear the sirens getting closer. Why leave now?

Hesitantly, I turned, scanning the small living room and open kitchen of the cabin. Everything was impeccably clean, minus the blood I left behind on his dark brown leather sofa. A few deer heads were mounted along the wall and it looked like any cabin I'd ever seen. Pictures drew me closer to the mantle of the fireplace and I studied the man's smile as he posed with a few other guys. They were all in hunting clothes and he looked younger than the mid-thirties man I'd seen tonight. Maybe by ten years, maybe a little more. He was surprisingly good looking. In the pictures, he didn't have a good week's worth of growth on his face like he had now.

Sirens grew louder and I turned, heading back to the door. I paused, squinting as I tried to peer down the dark hall that sat in the back. Knocking drowned out my curiosity and I went forward opening the door as a police officer scanned my face.

“We got a call about an accident. I take it from the blood that you were the victim?”

I nodded as I stepped back, allowing him in. “That’s right. Erin Billings. I...”

My mouth closed as I tried to figure out what to say. The accident was a blur. What followed shortly after I was hit was even more so.

“Something rammed into the side of my car.”

The officer looked around the living room. “I see. Where’s Alex? Dispatch said he’s the one who called it in.” *Alex*. He talked as if he knew him. With as small as this town was, I didn’t doubt that was the case. They looked around the same age. Except where Alex had dark hair, this man held blond.

“I’m not sure. He took off back into the woods just before you arrived.”

“Probably checking on the car or something. Sheriff’s over there now looking at the scene.”

More sirens sounded and I knew it was an ambulance. I’d been around the sounds long enough to know the difference.

“Can you tell me more about the accident, Ms. Billings? You say you hit something.”

“No,” I said, in a deeper tone. “I didn’t hit something, something hit me. It broadsided me. I thought it was a car at first, but there was no intersecting road. It was an animal. I’m just not sure what kind could do something like that. The force...” My words died off toward the end. I really didn’t know what it could have been and I wasn’t about to start making speculating.

“An animal?”

EMS had us looking toward the opened door. I nodded as a man and woman came forward.

“It was big,” I continued. “Maybe they’ll find it on the road. Surely it couldn’t have survived with as hard as it hit. It must have been running from something when it plowed into me.”

“You’re probably right. I’m sure they’ll find it.”

“Ma’am, can you look right here?”

I squinted past the bright light that flashed in my eyes. “I’m okay, it’s just a concussion. Probably a mild one.” I lifted my arm as they brought out a blood pressure cuff, but turned back to the officer. Before I could speak, another man came into the cabin. He wore a suit and was maybe a few years older than me. His dirty blond hair was cut short and his green eyes scanned the room, much like I had.

“Detective Perkins. Surprised to see you here.” The officer gave him a nod and the tall detective glanced over at him before putting his focus on me. I couldn’t help but sit taller under his watchful gaze. The paramedic started bandaging up my head, but I didn’t break my stare.

“Just happened to be in the area when I heard the call over the radio. Figured I’d come check everything out.”

“Looks like an animal collided with her car. Probably a spooked deer.”

My fist clenched and I subconsciously shook my head. “There was no way that was a deer. It was bigger. And ... darker in coloring. Bear, perhaps, but not a deer.”

The detective pushed his hand in his pocket and cocked his head. “Did you get a good look at it, Ms...?”

“Billings. Private Investigator, Erin Billings. And no, Detective, I did not. Only a glimpse from my peripheral just before it hit. But I’m telling

you, it was no deer.”

Something flashed over his face that I couldn’t read. Seconds went by before he seemed to let whatever he was thinking pass. “Well, I didn’t expect to see you until the morning. I think I would have rather met you under those circumstances. I’m sorry your welcome into this town had to turn out this way. At least you’re okay.”

“I’m fine. It’s just a mild concussion,” I repeated. “I’ve had worse.”

“I know your background, but we can talk more about that when you get released from the hospital.” He took a step to turn around when I shrugged out of the paramedic’s grasp and stood.

“I’m not going to the hospital, I’m fine. I’m only staying a mile or so down the road. All I really need is sleep and some pain relievers. I intend to still meet you in the morning.”

“That was a decent sized laceration,” the male paramedic said. “I’d advise you to go get checked out.”

My head was already shaking when the detective nodded, agreeing.

“Thank you for your concern, but I’m declining the right to go.” I walked closer to the door. “If I could just go down and get my things from my car, I’d appreciate a ride to my place. If you don’t mind taking me.”

“I’ve seen your car. I don’t think you’re in any condition to wave your rights.” Detective Perkins stepped in my way, cutting me off. “Let me ask you a question. What’s the date?”

Shit. I had no idea. Everything kept looping in my mind, yet I could barely recall what I was thinking. My head felt like it was going to explode. Still, I wasn’t going. I knew these symptoms.

“She said she doesn’t want to go.”

A voice outside had me and the detective turning to see my rescuer standing a few feet away.

“I’m aware of what she said, Alex. Whether it’s for her best interest or not has yet to be determined.”

Intense eyes scanned over me and I could see his wide, blood-smeared chest rising heavily. A thin layer of chest hair beneath the crimson stains caught my attention and I followed it down to take in the sweat beading over his defined stomach. I couldn’t help but step through the threshold, closer to him. There was a mystery surrounding his rugged appearance. The danger he threw off intrigued me just as much as his good looks.

“You ran off. Where did you go?”

His arm lifted a little and my purse dangled by his knee, but he didn’t look very willing to hand it over. He stood rooted to the ground, clutching to the strap in his fisted grip.

“I thought you might need this.”

I swallowed hard, walking toward him. He seemed to stiffen, but held still until I stopped only a foot away.

“Thank you. For everything.”

I took my purse, but kept my eyes on his. The light from the house cast a soft glow across his face and I couldn’t deny how handsome he was. From his square jaw, to what I could now see were light brown eyes, mixed with a lighter gold coloring, his good looks gave me butterflies. I almost couldn’t turn away with how surprised I was by his effect on me. I didn’t usually react this way to anyone. Not since Martin.

Footsteps approached from behind and I turned to see Detective Perkins stop only a few inches away. Guilt swamped me and I got uncomfortable as I was suddenly sandwiched between the two. The realization had me moving off to the side. But I didn’t miss the tension

between them. They were glaring and my instincts flared. There was definitely something there.

Detective Perkins' jaw tightened just before he turned to me. The mask that slid into place was nothing but a stoic expression. So different than the amount of anger that had been present only moments before. "I guess you seem lucid and steady enough on your feet. Why don't we head out?"

He was already walking away. It hadn't been a question, but a demand for me to follow.

I turned, jolting to a stop at the hand that latched to my bicep. Alex's face leaned in toward mine and he breathed in deep before weight pushed against my chest. "Better keep this close."

My fingers grasped around the extra gun I carried under the seat. I felt my pulse explode even more.

"Don't go into the woods alone. Especially at night. Out of the darkest nights can crawl the deadliest creatures. Best to remember that if you're going to be staying here."

His fingers let go and my mouth opened to speak. The detective calling out to me cut off anything that might have come. I shoved the gun in my purse and turned, taking in Alex's serious expression for only a moment before I began to take careful steps to the unmarked car. What had he meant, *out of the darkest night could crawl the deadliest creatures*? Did he know something about these attacks, or was he speaking in general? Regardless, the statement was odd. It went right along with what the store clerk had said.

The engine came to life and I noticed Alex kept his focus on me as I got in the car. His plaid shirt blew back with the gust of wind, drawing my attention back to his hard stomach. I traveled the length down, following

the thin trail of hair leading to the low waistband of his jeans. Before I could break myself from the sight, we began to turn. Trees illuminated the surrounding forest and we headed down a dirt road. My mind raced and I couldn't shake what I'd been through tonight. I was exhausted and hurting in places I hadn't realized before. My head throbbed and I still felt sick. Not to mention my shoulder and hip were starting to feel the effects from the safety belt. I was surely going to be covered in bruises. *And Alex...* I didn't even know where to begin concerning him.

"You're lucky, Billings. Not many people travel down that road. There's no telling how long it would have taken someone to find you down there."

I glanced over to the detective and winced as he hit a bump. "I would have recovered before then. I am glad it didn't come to that, though. I really wouldn't have wanted to walk back to town." I turned more to face him. "Did they find what hit me?"

The car rocked through the pot holes while he shook his head. "I don't think so. They hadn't when I stopped by on my way in. What do you remember from the accident? You say you saw it out of your peripheral. Are you sure it wasn't a deer? They have more force than you think."

My head was already shaking. My brain just wouldn't believe that's what hit me.

"It wasn't a deer. I'm certain of it. It was ... big. It looked like a flash or blur, but it was—" I stopped before I sounded absolutely ridiculous and destroyed any credibility he thought I had. I couldn't say that although I thought it was hunched forward as it ran, that it was still slightly taller than my vehicle. That would make it how tall?

"It was what?"

I licked my lips, glancing out of the window. “It appeared bigger, but maybe you’re right. I guess it could have been a deer.”

Silence drew out between us until he was pulling into a driveway. I didn’t think to ask how he knew where I was staying. I hadn’t supplied the information, or even thought to. Jesus, was I so far gone? I knew I was. My head was as wrecked as my car.

Light flooded the interior and I stood from the door. Pitch black surrounded me, making my pulse accelerate. Even the trees were masked in the darkness. They had to have been thick if the moon wasn’t even making it though.

“Charlie said you were staying at his rental. Key’s under the mat, but I’m sure he already told you that.”

I shakily followed Detective Perkins up the stairs to the small deck. In all of my life, I had never been as spooked as I was in this small town. Sounds came from the woods all around and I couldn’t shake that damn feeling that I was being watched.

“Here we go.” He stood, unlocking the door within seconds. He took a step, but stopped to peer behind us. It had me turning around and cursing the damn uneasiness I kept getting. Was something there? Someone? I never reacted this way unless I had reason.

The porch light lit up and I let the weight of my holstered gun remind me who was in control. I stepped through the entrance to follow, surprised by what I saw.

“Nice.” I dropped my purse on a small table, taking in the pale blue decorated living room. I knew the place was a seasonal rental, but from the stale air I could tell no one had been here for a while.

A white sofa sat against the far wall and a picture of a light blue flowered field hung above. The lamp shades were white, but the base was



the same color blue. My brow furrowed for only a moment before I forced a grin. I wasn't much of a decorator, but whoever had put time into the place had done it with care.

"Thank you for the ride. I really appreciate it."

Detective Perkins, shrugged, glancing toward the door. "Not a problem. Do you need anything else? Town isn't too far away. I can pick you up something."

"No. Thank you, you've done enough. I have Tylenol in my bag. That's all I need. I may be late meeting you in the morning. I'm not sure of a rental place around here, or when they can deliver a car. I ... need to call my insurance company." My hand rose to my head to try to stop the pounding.

"I'll come to you. Don't worry about it. You take your time getting everything situated. The case is already solved anyway."

"Perhaps. But Mr. Morrison has reason to believe otherwise. I have to admit," I said, sitting on the arm of the couch. "The evidence I've collected..." My ease vanished as I pushed back to my feet, jerking my head to the door. "Shit. My files are in the car."

"They're fine. What were you saying about the evidence?"

A response was almost impossible when all I wanted to do was make it back to my car and retrieve those files. And my tape recorder—I had to get that back as soon as possible. If anyone heard everything I had on there ... my thoughts, insight into who I was ... the stuff that happened. Fuck, I didn't want to think about that.

"I have to go." I rushed toward the door, only for him to step in my path.

"Where exactly do you think you're going?"

"To my car. I have to get my stuff."

He shook his head. “You’re lucky as hell that I even let you come back here. You should be in the hospital. I said don’t worry about your things. I’ll have the sheriff collect them for you.”

I didn’t trust him not to go through it first. “Sorry, detective. I can’t do that. You can give me a ride or I’m walking. The choice is simple.”

A hardness came to his face as he began to stare me down. “How about this? I’ll go give him a call and have him drop it off tonight when he leaves the scene. That’s your only option. If you want to argue with me, the only place you’ll be going is to the hospital. Fight me if you want, but I think waiting here is a hell of a lot better than being secured in the back of my cruiser for the next half hour. What do you think?”

Damn that bastard animal that hit me. “Fine,” I ground out. “But you better hope nothing of mine is missing. I want my files. Oh, and my recorder. It’s in the compartment between the seats.”

“I doubt there’s anything in those files we don’t already know. Give me a minute. I’ll go call it in.”

The door shut quietly behind him and I pressed my fingertips into my temple. It brushed against the bandage on my head and I groaned in frustration. Nothing ever went my way. If something was bound to go wrong, it did.

# Chapter 4

## Alex

To see Caleb Perkins so close to Erin left me more territorial than I could ever remember feeling. I still couldn't believe I didn't push for her to go to the hospital. What in the hell had I been thinking?

Oh ... *I knew*. If she was at home, she'd be away from the bastard detective. And, she'd be an easier target. It was wrong, but seeing her talk to Caleb at my front door was enough to have me reacting rashly. I wasn't thinking past the need to have her isolated. I wanted them away from each other, and her in a place I had access to. Not only physically, if I wanted, but visually. It was uncontrollable on my part and I knew I was making things worse. Not only for her, but me. Damn my wolf.

"Yeah. It's in the middle console."

Caleb's voice drifted to the edge of the woods, just outside of her property. I had to stop my fingertips from pushing into the bark of the tree I was crouched next to. Pieces were falling at my feet. If I continued to do these stupid things, it might just get me busted by the one person who I butted heads with the most.

Since Kevin's death, Caleb had never been the same. With him being the older brother, we never got along when my best friend was alive. We sure as hell didn't now. The tragedy had pushed us further apart and neither of us had wanted to try to work on forming any sort of bond over Kevin's loss. I wanted to be left alone and Caleb couldn't stand to see me alive when his brother wasn't.

“10-4. I’ll be here for a bit longer so just drop everything off when you can.”

A few seconds went by before Caleb stood from the front seat and shut the car door. He scanned the perimeter, but continued forward. The moment I watched it shut, I stayed low and rushed closer. The shadows were something I was used to. I used them to my advantage as I made it to the edge of the house and then around to the back. When I came upon the opposite side, I slowed, listening as Erin’s low voice hit my sensitive ears.

“My bag would be great. Thank you, I didn’t even think to ask you to have my suitcase brought over, too.”

“You’re not thinking much about anything right now. Why don’t you lie down on the couch? You can rest while I wait for the sheriff to arrive.”

“I’m fine. Thank you.”

A loud sigh left Caleb and I could almost see him standing there with his arms across his chest.

“You have got to be the most stubborn woman I have ever met. You were just in a serious car accident. Lie down, dammit.”

The tone was bordering threatening and I closed my eyes to calm myself. It wouldn’t be long now. I had to let him do his thing until he left. Once he was gone, I was home free. The cops had already got my two-sentence statement and left. Unless the sheriff wanted to talk to me personally, I didn’t have anything to worry about. And I knew he wouldn’t care to. No one liked talking to me for long. It was my energy. I made everyone nervous.

“Pardon me if I don’t want to be vulnerable around a complete stranger, Detective. I don’t know you, just as you don’t know me. If it

makes you feel better, I'll sit, but I'm not going to take a cat nap while some man watches over me."

"I'm law enforcement. What do you think I'm going to do? The sheriff knows I'm here." He got quiet and I couldn't hide my smile. It pleased me that they weren't getting along. I couldn't bear a threat, especially from him.

Footsteps were followed by a creaking of what I assumed was the sofa.

"I don't believe you'll do anything, but you miss the point. I'm just looking out for myself. I've had a hell of a night and I just want my things. I *want* to go to sleep. Waiting isn't something I'm good at. I'm sorry if I'm being complicated right now. I..." she trailed off and I moved in closer.

"Don't apologize. You're right. You have been through a lot. And I don't just mean the wreck. The last two years must have been very trying for you."

*"Excuse me?"*

More footsteps. Was he getting closer? My bare feet pushed into the earth. The feeling of wanting to stop him was all I knew in the moment.

"Don't get defensive that I know your history. The loss of your fiancé couldn't have been easy on top of everything you've gone through."

"Get out."

"Erin, I wasn't saying that to upset you. I'm clearly stating—"

"Out! And don't call me by my first name again. We're working together. We're not friends."

Pounding against the floor was followed by a crash in the front. Her voice grew louder and I knew she'd opened the door.

"If you're going to wait, you can do it outside. I'll see you tomorrow."

Slowly, I could hear Caleb move. The material of his slacks rubbed together as his steps grew further away. “Fine. If it makes you feel better, I’ll just wait in the car.” He paused in walking. “I really didn’t mean to upset you. I lost someone close to me, too. I just wanted you to know that I’ve been there and I’m sorry for your loss.”

After a moment of silence, the bottom of his shoes hit the wooden deck. I slowed my breathing to listen as the barrier shut and his footsteps led him further away. When the car door shut, I put my attention to listening inside. A snuffle had my eyebrows drawing in. Involuntarily, my hand reached to my pocket, gripping the tape recorder through the jeans.

“Fu-uck.” The broken up word was followed by the bang of something. The familiar creak told me she was back on the sofa. “Nosey fucking detective. I should have known. I should have prepared myself.”

Another snuffle, and the sounds grew quiet. Several long minutes went by as I focused on her pulse. It was strong. Not too fast, but not in a normal rhythm. My beast held to it while I positioned myself to sit alongside the cabin so my back was supported. Time dragged out and I kept my eyes closed to focus only on the beating. It wasn’t until I began to drift off that I realized an odd transition had taken place. *Thump-thump. Thump-thump.* The sound was soothing me when before, I would have been wired to continue the hunt. Fast, slow, it wouldn’t have mattered. I would have counted the beats as I waited. Yet, now I wasn’t.

Leaves cracked as a car neared. I blinked heavily, listening as it came to a stop and the sheriff and Caleb began to talk.

“Got the files and suitcase, but I didn’t come across no tape recorder.”

“Shit.” Caleb let out a deep breath. “She won’t be happy to hear that. Here, let me have these. I’ll break the news to her.”

“The girl’s looking for trouble if you ask me.”

The sheriff’s voice was low, but I still managed to hear every word.

“What do you mean?”

A twig snapped and the sheriff continued. “She’s got all kinds of experts in on this. The bear expert bothers me the most. Says it’s not a bear. Not a bear, can you believe that?”

“Every expert will give a different opinion. Don’t worry about it. I’ll have a talk with her tomorrow during our meeting.”

The sheriff made a sound, much like a grunt, before the car’s engine changed gears and the vehicle disappeared. Knocking sounded briefly and the knob clicking open brought my head to the side.

“Great, you got everything.” Erin’s voice was scratchy, but something about it had lust hitting from nowhere. I shook my head, trying to dismiss the way my cock was hardening. This wasn’t right or natural for my wolf.

“Sheriff said he couldn’t find the recorder. I can take you to search the car tomorrow if you’d like. Maybe we’ll have better luck locating it. It is pretty dark out.”

“What?” Panic was edged into her tone. “He couldn’t find it? But ... it was in the console.”

Hesitation. “Maybe it got thrown out during the crash. We’ll find it. It has to still be in the car.”

“Yes. Okay, thank you, I’d appreciate the ride.”

Her breathlessness made *me* breathless. I pushed to stand, trying everything to relieve the pressure of my jeans on my cock. Again, my hand came up to the recorder to hold, but it wasn’t the only thing I wanted to grip. The throbbing down my length was new. I couldn’t remember the last time I felt aroused from a woman ... or anyone. The closest thing to release I got was from my occasional kills.

“No problem. Are you sure you don’t need anything? You look a little off-balance. Here, let me help you back to the couch or bed. I don’t feel comfortable leaving you this unsteady.”

There was no argument as the footsteps retreated deeper into the cabin. My jaw clenched and I pushed my palm against the wood that separated us. Fuck, there was my wolf, again. He surged protectively to the front.

“I think the room is right back here,” Caleb said, closer.

Light flooded the window next to me and I moved over to the side even more.

“Thank you. This should be fine. You can just put the bag on the bed.”

A thud told me he complied, but I didn’t like the awkward silence.

“Right. I’ll lock the door behind me. There’s a phone in the kitchen if you need anything. You have my number, right?”

“Yes. It’s in my purse.”

“Good. Call me if something happens. I don’t live too far away. I can be here pretty fast.”

The bed squeaked and I stepped closer to the glass. Her outline through the thin curtain had me gripping to the frame of the window.

“I will. Thank you.” She tucked a piece of her long brown hair that escaped the ponytail behind her ear, as Caleb’s form stepped back. It looked as though he gave her a small wave before I heard him making his way back through the house. When the door shut, the top half of Erin’s body fell back to the mattress. I barely recalled the detective’s car driving away. I was too fascinated by watching her lay there, sideways on the bed. There was nothing special about it. From the split of the curtain I could see her eyes



were closed, but I knew she wasn't sleeping. She looked beautiful. It didn't compare to the next moment.

She sat, reaching up to pull her hair free from the rubber band. The waves fell down to the middle of her back. She appeared softer ... more feminine than the hard-ass female who pushed herself to the point of passing out.

I bit my bottom lip as the aching in my cock broke my concentration. The need to take care of myself only grew as she pulled off her shirt and began searching through the bag. Surprise over her half-sleeve tattoo registered, but her generous cleavage stole every ounce of attention I harbored. Dammit, I had to leave. I shouldn't be invading her privacy like this. The man I used to be knew it wasn't right. For the life of me, my feet wouldn't move, nor would my eyes redirect.

A white and lavender nightgown was pulled from the bag and Erin walked from the room, disappearing through a door in the back. Water sounded and I shook my head. I couldn't imagine her undressed anymore. I would become the lowest scum on earth if I did. Shit, I already was. There was no way I could go through this much longer. If I was smart I'd leave while the connection was broken.

The shower started and I stepped back, beginning to retreat, only to find myself doubling back. Four more times it happened until the shower finally ended. Dammit, why was this so hard? Just when I went to head home for sure, she reentered the room. I managed to walk, but not in the right direction.

In a fast pace, I broke around the side of the house and headed right to the deck. I had no idea what I was doing. Not when my bare feet connected with the deck, and sure as hell not when my fist pounded against the heavy wooden door. Within seconds, she opened it. Her wet hair was

pulled back, exposing her neck, and the soft colors she was covered in nearly undid me.

“Alex. What are you doing here?”

I didn’t miss the gun she held down at her side. It wouldn’t hurt me, but her pulling the trigger would. If for some reason she shot me, she’d see what she shouldn’t. My beast wouldn’t be contained after that. The truth would seal the deal. She’d have to die for knowing the truth. That was, if my wolf didn’t kill her out of pure greed first.

“I wanted to check how you were doing.”

Erin’s features drew in and I knew she didn’t believe me. Skepticism flashed, making me shift even more.

“I’m fine. I’m going to bed. Is there anything else I can help you with?”

The recorder had me reaching in my pocket, regardless that I didn’t want to give it back. I hadn’t even had the chance to listen to it yet. Erin tensed at my fumbling. I knew she was debating lifting the gun. Her fear was still there, but she wasn’t showing it as badly as before. Or I wasn’t reacting to it the same way. I wasn’t sure.

“I found this. I forgot to give it back before.”

A gasp sounded. “Oh, thank God!” Erin surged forward, pulling it from my hand before I could lift it completely. “You didn’t listen to it, did you?”

My head shook. “No. Why, what’s on there?”

The relief faded, melting into a mix of emotions.

“Just work stuff.”

I lowered my eyes to the recorder at her chest, but couldn’t stop myself from taking in the gentle rise of her breasts again. Even though the nightgown was actually pajamas, the material was on the thin side. And

with the majority being white, it wasn't see-through, entirely, but it left little to imagination. Her nipples were pushing through and I nearly moaned at the urge to suck against the hard nubs. I licked my lips and I couldn't look away. Heat swirled my insides, racing through my arms and legs, only to burn into the middle of my stomach.

“Alex?”

Erin stepped back and I had to force myself to avoid stepping forward. My eyes rose to hers and her fear returned, but something entirely different was there, too. *Arousal? Attraction?* God, I was almost positive. *Show me a sign. Give me an excuse to hold onto. Anything.*

My mind raced as I searched for an excuse. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have come. I just needed to make sure you were okay, and I thought you’d like to have the recorder back.”

“Thank you. This is going to save me so much time. I appreciate it.”

I nodded, standing there like an idiot. What the fuck was the matter with me? Leave! My mind was screaming it, but my wolf kept my body from reacting to the orders. I’d never had this problem in the last few years. I’d gotten better and done so well.

“Is that it?”

Again my head bobbed up and down. Erin’s eyebrows drew in and with the slightest movement, her head tilted to the side. Then, she gave me a confused smile. It left me even more captivated.

“What are you doing here in Wolf River? You mentioned you were an investigator. What exactly are you investigating?”

The curve of her lips fell and seriousness replaced it.

“Animal attacks—dead residents and tourists. You know anything about that?”

The switch of her personality snapped my wolf from possessive predator to defensive destroyer. A twinge in my ribs had me rotating the top half of my body to the side.

“Not anything more than I already told the cops. I never saw a thing.”

Erin’s stare rose to glance behind me.

“There was a woman attacked not far from here. Probably somewhere between your house and this one. You never heard anything? You never saw any suspicious tracks or an animal that might have stood out from the rest?”

“Stood out from the rest?”

“Yeah,” she said, pinning me again with her hazel eyes. “Kelly Morrison didn’t die from a bear attack. I have experts that blow that theory out of the water. Whatever killed her was bigger than a black bear. At least a foot taller if it were standing.” Her hand rose to come inches from my face. “And its claws weren’t as dull or even the right width of a bear. Tell me, Alex. What sort of animal could filet a woman alive with the ease that this one did? You said, out of the darkest nights can crawl the deadliest creatures. Tell me what you mean by that. Have you seen something you’re afraid to speak about? ”

I took one step back. Then another. Lust was gone. Her eyes were accusatory, though I knew she wasn’t necessarily blaming me. She was genuinely curious if I knew anything. My guilt wouldn’t let me see it that way.

“No. I have no idea if there’s something like that out here. But the fact remains. Something is hurting people. If you were smart, you’d be very careful. Maybe even leave.”

“I’m not going anywhere until I get to this bottom of this. If something or *someone* is out there killing innocent people, I’m going to find out exactly what it is.”

“Someone?” Silence stretched out between us as she searched my face. Regardless of the cold, I was beginning to sweat. “*Something.*” I stressed. “Not someone. Drop the crazy talk and don’t take this so lightly. You may end up dead too if you go about this recklessly. Did that ever cross your mind?” There it was. Anger. To hell with wanting her. If she was going to stay alive, I had to prepare her—and myself. The saying, *keep your friends close and your enemies closer* had never been so clear. With the way my wolf was responding, I wasn’t so sure exactly where she stood. Enemy?

The edge of Erin’s lips pulled back into what I could only assume was a smirk. “I’m not sure if I should perceive that as a threat, but I assure you, I’m not taking anything lightly. Whatever it is can sure as hell try, but I assure you one thing—I won’t go down without giving it the fight of its life. I may win, or I may lose. Regardless, I’ll make my mark, and when I do, the world will know the truth. Evidence is in everything, Alex. I’ll be sure to uncover enough to expose the secrets of Wolf River. You can bet on that.”

# Chapter 5

## Erin

*Wolves blurred through the trees, their sprint graceful and fluid as they raced forward in slow motion. I could feel them all around me, moving together as a pack. The internal call of prey pulled at them. Food. Death. Yes, something was dead. Or would be soon.*

*The light from the moon didn't give view to much of the forest's surroundings, but I didn't have to see when I was so in tune to the killers around me. We were flying, regardless that I felt like I wasn't moving at all. Everything swirled—my mind, my energy. For once I wasn't afraid of them. They were beautiful in their togetherness. This was the way it was supposed to be in the circle of life. They had to eat. Did it really matter how they got their food?*

*The question registered, but I felt no need to answer it or even question why the thought was there. I was more along for the ride, floating, just like the snowflakes that were beginning to fall around me. Yes, snow. It was cold outside. So cold.*

*A sound left my lips and I hugged to my chest, trying not to feel sick from the instability of my hovering form. We were going so fast now. And in circles? Yes, I'd been here before. Why were we going in the same loop?*

*My grandfather's story broke through, along with a tinge of fear, but it didn't last. There was a certain numbness associated with my mindset.*

*Once again I brought my attention to the wolves that were slightly ahead and underneath me. I could feel their communication, even if I*

couldn't quite hear it. We were getting closer. To our hunted, or to the location, I wasn't sure.

Leaves and earth crunched in my ears from the push of their paws and I had to clench my jaw at the volume increasing by the second. My hands shot up for cover, but nothing I could do managed to buffer the loud crunching. The constant crinkling of broken pieces of leaves and snapping twigs nearly had me screaming. Or, was I screaming? Someone was.

The high pitched murderous tone had my chin snapping up from my chest. My eyes widened as I took in the wolves circling a kneeling woman on the edge of a river bank. White from her gown blew back from a gust of wind, as did her medium length hair. But I couldn't see her face. She was looking into the water.

Suddenly I was walking up from behind the wolves. A threatening aura was pushing against me and my fear rushed through in a burst of my pulse. Growling sounded at my sides as I walked between two wolves at the very front. I had to jerk away at the last moment to avoid one snapping at me.

“Hello?”

The word fell from my lips, stolen by the frigid breeze that chilled me to the bone. My legs didn't want to move and walking was like trudging through quicksand as I pushed forward. The woman didn't look up or reposition from where she was.

My breath held and I turned to the right, trying to look around her. She was just kneeling there, staring into the dark water. What was she looking at ... or for?

I opened my mouth, but I wasn't able to speak. The compulsive need to swallow past my fear was constant. Everything in me was beginning to

*feel the need to run. The growling was getting louder and something told me it wouldn't be long now. I had to help the woman.*

*Shakily, my hand moved forward to touch her shoulder. The moment my fingers connected, wind whipped her hair against my palm and the light strands began to come free from her scalp. A scream locked in my throat, stuck there as the woman's face snapped to me. Claw marks were torn into her forehead and across her cheek. One of her brown eyes were missing. The sight had me stumbling back into the water until I felt myself falling.*

I flew to a sitting position in bed, gasping. My head was throbbing and my throat was so dry that I could barely swallow. Pieces of my dream began filtering as I reached for the glass of water on the bedside table. I took deep gulps, trying to stop the shaking.

Fuck, I needed more pain relievers ... and coffee.

I swallowed the last drink, pushing the dream away as I stood and reached into my purse. My eyes would barely open due to the pounding. As I fumbled through the contents, flashes of the woman's face registered. My fingers grasped around the medicine bottle and I popped two pills, barely paying attention as I took in the claw marks carved into her face. *Kelly Morrison*. It had to be. I'd seen pictures of her months prior to her death. It was a close match. My mind had invented what I couldn't remember, but it was clear who I had seen.

A chill had me shaking worse. I grabbed a sweater from my bag, pulling it over my pajama top. Due to my exhaustion, I hadn't even thought to find a heating source. The house had taken on quite the temperature drop and even asleep I had felt it. I had been cold in my dream, too.

The floor creaked as I walked through the living room. A pile of firewood sat near the wood-burning stove and I quickly got it going, taking a few minutes to bask in the warmth as it began to heat the small cabin.



Before I could head into the kitchen to search for coffee, a knock sounded from the front door. My eyes immediately went to the window. From the small crack between the curtains, I could tell it wasn't even quite daylight yet. Surely Detective Perkins wouldn't be here already?

I glanced toward the room, debating if I should get my gun. I wasn't as jumpy as I had been last night, but the caution was still there.

Instead, I walked to the door, peering through the peep hole. A frown had my brow drawing in. I twisted the lock, pulling the door open.

"You're here early."

Detective Perkins threw me a grin, holding up two convenience store style coffee cups. He was wearing a jacket, jogging pants, and running shoes. It was far from the stylish suit he wore not hours before.

"I knew you'd be an early riser. Besides, I didn't feel comfortable leaving you last night so I went home, changed, and have been sleeping off and on in my car. You weren't well. You should have gone in to get checked out."

"You slept outside?" Surprise laced my tone as I took the cup.

"That's right. Not a big deal." He nodded toward the kitchen, changing the subject. "I didn't add cream or sugar. There might be some in there. I know Charlie keeps the place stocked pretty good for guests so feel free to fix it up how you like while I go get my files from the car."

"Thank you." I pulled my sweater down a little as he headed back out of the door. I couldn't believe he actually slept outside. Would I have done that for him if the roles had been reversed and I thought he wasn't okay? He didn't know me. And I had been arguing with him a lot. Yet ... he'd still stayed close. I couldn't wrap my mind around it. My views on his character shifted more in his favor. Maybe he wasn't as bad I as I had thought?

I walked to the kitchen and flipped on the light. The sugar was easy enough to find in the blue and white canisters. While the coffee cooled, I headed back to the room to get dressed. He may have brought the files, but I had more things on my agenda than looking over paperwork. I wanted to check out the scene. To do that, I'd have to hit the trails. I had already plotted the route on the map before I headed up here. One led right to the location where the body was discovered.

I took out my black running pants and paired them with a long sleeve matching top, heading to the bathroom. Running was my thing, or had been the last few months. It helped me think and I would have plenty of time to do that when I explored the miles of trails that wrapped through the forest.

As I was slipping on my running shoes, the door sounded from the front. I pulled my hair back into a ponytail, trying to hurry as I headed back to the living area. Detective Perkins was laying out files on a small round table in the far corner. He glanced up, only to do a double take as he looked over my clothes. He kept silent while I headed into the kitchen to grab my coffee. When I returned, he was still looking at me oddly.

"What is it, Detective?"

"Nothing. I mean... Where are you going?"

I glanced over his own apparel. The way he was dressed, he could easily accompany me.

"After this I plan to go for a run around the back trail to where Kelly Morrison's body was found. You can come with me if you want."

Detective Perkin's face lit up in surprise.

"It's not as simple to get to as you think. The trail you're talking about taking winds around a good three miles before it gets to the river. It'd be easier to walk the quarter of a mile straight to the location."

“But I want to see the woods and get a feel where this animal lives. Besides, three miles isn’t bad. The exercise will do us good.” His build told me he had to work out somehow. He was in good shape. At least six feet with broad shoulders. Much like Alex’s build, but the detective was a bit shorter.

He turned toward the table while the side of his mouth pulled back in annoyance. “It’s a bad idea after what you went through last night. But I’m sure you don’t care about what I think so let’s move on. You can start here.”

My eyes shot over to him and I flipped through the folders. “I’ve already seen these, Detective. I’ve gone over everything here countless times, including the crime scene photos. There’s nothing new here.”

“This is all I have to give you, Ms. Billings. You can look over everything and ask me questions, or I’m afraid I can’t help you.”

My temper sparked, triggering my headache, but I pushed it away. There had to be more than this. There had to be.

“Fine. I have a few questions for you. Tell me, who was the first person to speculate this may have been a bear attack?”

“Easy. Me.”

His lips hardened into a thin line, but his posture never wavered or increased in stiffness.

“Why a bear?”

“Again, easy. Because it was one. Given the trajectory of the claw marks and the fashion in which Kelly Morrison was killed, what else could it have been?”

I took a step forward, picking up a photo of the crime scene. It was a close up of the body, revealing the tears in the woman’s skin.

“I can tell you what it wasn’t,” I said, showing him the photo. “It wasn’t a bear.”

“Says who? Your *experts*?” Detective Perkin’s glare cut right into me. “Your experts are full of shit, Ms. Billings. Kelly Morrison was killed by a black bear. A *really* large one. And here you are, dressed in your workout gear, ready to go running through the woods to go look at a scene that’s been unattended to for over two years. What exactly do you plan to find?”

The horrific injuries had me shaking my head. I placed the photo back on the stack and met his eyes. “Does it matter? She wasn’t the only one who had a run-in with this *killer*. Do not for one second think I’m stupid. I’ve done my homework and I know there have been more deaths like this one. How many cases of attacks and missing persons has Wolf River had, Detective?”

The anger faded as he turned and walked to look out the window. “Since I’ve been a detective? Or in the history of this town?”

# Chapter 6

## Alex

I knew Erin was headed in my direction long before her scent overpowered the Jack I'd been drinking. It cut through the toxic fumes like a breath of fresh air. It didn't take long after that for me to hear her communicating with Caleb Perkins. The anger was immediate. His constant hovering made what I wanted even harder. Not because I couldn't overpower him easily and take them both out, but because him being *around* her set me off. So many emotions had become warped since I had caught that woman's scent. It was driving me damn near crazy as I tried to understand it.

I brought the end of the ax down on another chunk of firewood, splitting it down the middle. The pieces fell to the sides and I tossed them over into the pile, grabbing another to cut. Footsteps a good hundred feet away grew closer. I didn't acknowledge that they were near. Instead, I kept at my chores, slamming the axe down even harder. The volume decreased and there was a hesitation in their voices as they came to a complete stop. Still I continued my own thing. Sweat was beginning to run down my back and face and I wiped the trickle from my brow. My temperature was up more than normal. Soon my skin would be on fire, craving not only the kill my beast needed, but her. Even celibate and alone, the sexual urges peaked around the time of a full moon. With it only being days away and her near, they were unbelievably strong.

"Mr. Villani."

Erin's call had my wolf rearing into me. I couldn't tell if he was happy for the greeting or delighted at the proximity in which she stood. She wasn't too far away. Fifteen feet now, give or take a few inches. I didn't have to see her to know. My instincts told me everything.

"Ms. Billings," I answered, slowly coming to face her. The hair that I thought was darker last night appeared light today—chestnut brown. It was tied back into a ponytail again and the tight, black running pants and long sleeve shirt clung to her body in all the right places. I tried not to stare. Instead, I moved my eyes up to look at the small cut surrounded by bruising on her temple. "You look as though you're feeling better."

"I am, thank you." She took a few more steps closer. *Eleven feet. Now, ten.* "Mr. Villani, I hope you don't mind, I'd like to ask you a few questions about Kelly Morrison."

My gaze cut over to Caleb long enough to see he was staring at me.

"I told you everything last night."

"You really didn't tell me anything, if I recall correctly. Since I was a bit under the weather, perhaps you wouldn't mind going over my questions again. After you put the ax down, of course."

The thud from the weight hitting the ground could have been a full sized truck dropping for all the silence that was between us. The request wasn't sitting well with me. *No ...* her expression wasn't. The caution she held while she studied my every move had me ready to pin her down. Ready to ... what? Fuck her? Feed my urges by scaring her? I wasn't sure. Jesus, I needed more to drink.

"Thank you. If we could just start from the beginning. When was the first time you met Kelly Morrison?"

Caleb crossed his arms, just as interested as her, regardless that he knew everything.

“A long time ago. She was the little sister of one of my close friends. He’s been dead for a few years.”

“Dead? How?”

Heat blistered my skin as I began to clench my jaw.

“Mr. Villani?”

She turned to look at Caleb and I couldn’t help but place my hands on my hips, squeezing through the anger. Fuck, I didn’t want to talk about this. Especially with *him* around.

“Bear attack,” Caleb said, his tone now deep and forbidding. “Toby wasn’t alone though, when he died, was he Alex?”

My pulse roared in my ears as I met his stare. “No. He was not.”

“So tell her, then. Tell her what happened.”

He was goading me and instead of turning my attention to her, I stepped closer to Caleb. “That fucking thing nearly killed us all. Me, Toby, Kevin, and Jack. You love pointing out how I was the only one to survive. You act like I had a choice!” The roar that left me had Erin’s hand coming up. I knew she had a gun holstered under her shirt. The woman never seemed to be without it.

“I’m sorry. Listen,” I said, calming my intoxicated mind. “If I could have traded places with any of them, I would have. I’m sorry about Kevin, but I’ve said that to you before. Does the fact that I almost died myself mean nothing? Fuck, Caleb, I loved him. You know that.”

Silence was all I got from either of them. Caleb looked too pissed to talk and Erin was forever watchful, which brought back the reality of the situation. I was being questioned once again and I’d lost control of myself. This time, I refused to play their game. This wasn’t a real investigation and I wasn’t being forced to tell them shit.

I grabbed my shirt from the ground, spinning back to my house. I didn't miss the intake of breath from Erin, or the fact that leaves were cracking under her feet as she began to follow. Four steps in, she stopped.

"Mr. Villani. Mr. Villani, please!"

"No." I kept going, not bothering to turn back as I spoke. The tension was so thick within me, I could feel the deep scars that covered my back pull at the tightening of my skin. My bones were aching...begging to shift. Begging to kill them both so they could never remember the weakness I'd just displayed. Human emotion wasn't weak, but my wolf felt it was, and the conflict from my two personalities was raging a battle that could come back to haunt me. I had to keep going. I had to put distance between us so I could cool off.

The door slammed at my pull and I threw the shirt, letting a growl pour from my lips as I headed to the kitchen counter where the bottle of liquor still rested. The burn felt good against my throat. I didn't stop drinking until it was almost unbearable. Unfortunately, the knock sounded at the same time.

"Mr. Villani, I need to speak with you."

Erin's voice broke through not only the walls of my cabin, but through the barrier I used to guard the humanity I had left. A frown pulled at my features and I cursed under my breath.

"Go away."

More knocking.

"Please. Just a few questions."

"Go. Away!"

A sigh left her lips and I closed my eyes, lowering my head. She wouldn't entirely go away until she interrogated me to the fullest. I knew that. She was stubborn. I'd seen it last night. This wasn't over.



A few seconds passed before footsteps faded into the distance. I took another swig, slamming the alcohol down. How long would it be before she returned? Or the real question ... before my wolf drove me right to her door ... again. Even as I thought it, I hated that she was getting further away. I could sense the distance between us. It had me running my hands down my face in impatience.

“Damn Caleb, this is your fault.”

And it was. If he hadn't set me off, maybe they would have just continued on their merry way. Erin would have never of seen my scars. She wouldn't know that my past linked me to the very type of creature she was investigating.

Or would she? She seemed thorough. She might have uncovered it on her own and then we'd be right here anyway. She wanted answers. Wasn't it better that I was getting this out of the way now? I'd tell her it was a bear like I'd said before. I never divulged the truth anyway. Who would have believed me if I would have told them about the terrifying creature who had attacked me in the woods? Who murdered my best friends and left me alive for reasons I still didn't understand?

Further, our link stretched. Her scent was fading, her footsteps, almost gone from my hearing. I glanced at my shirt crumpled on the floor and walked over, picking it up. It took a few seconds before I could force my arms through the sleeves. The large tattoos on my biceps disappeared under the fabric and I was glad for it. I'd gotten the ink just months before the attack. Kevin had been with me during the hours it took for the artist to finish. I couldn't look at the designs without thinking of him. Everything reminded me of that day.

My head subconsciously shook and I knew what putting on my shirt meant—I was giving in. Doing the one thing I didn't want to ... going back

outside. I couldn't help it. If I couldn't follow Erin's trail, I had to at least be outside within the same elements. The urge within was undeniable. A nuisance, more than anything. I didn't want to be this taken over. She constantly stayed on my mind and I couldn't exactly figure out why. Sure, she had initially been potential food for my wolf, but why this overly obsessive behavior? This attraction? She was beautiful, there was no denying that, but I'd seen my share of good looking women. Nothing besides the tattoo and her attitude put her apart from them. So, why?

The door slammed behind me as I tried to stop the repeating question. A single bird chirped in the background, but other than that there was silence. I walked over, picking the ax back up. But I didn't start swinging. I held to the wooden handle, closing my eyes as I tuned into the surroundings. The connection I held with the wolves was faint, telling me they weren't searching for food. I cocked my head, pushing my abilities to the max. The hum a voices were barely existent, but still audible.

*"I'll just talk to him about it later. I have to meet with Mr. Morrison in a few hours so I won't have time today. Maybe tomorrow. Mr. Villani knows something. He has to."*

*"I've already told you. Let it go, Ms. Billings. You're wasting your time with Alex. He knows nothing and even if he did, he wouldn't help you. I doubted he even tried to help my brother when that bear tore him to pieces. You're wasting your time even being here."*

*"How would he have been able to help?" she cut in quickly. "I thought you told me he was attacked first."*

*"Do you believe he went unconscious from his injuries?"*

*Erin didn't respond for a few seconds. "The claw marks were deep and went down the length of his back. He said he almost died and you didn't*

deny it. Sure, I believe he could have gone unconscious from loss of blood or shock. I would be surprised if he didn't."

"Bullshit," Caleb ground out.

"Really?" There was hesitation and almost astonishment in Erin's tone as she continued. "Detective, let's be rational. We both saw his wounds. Alexander Villani wouldn't have been able to save anyone, let alone himself if that thing had returned to finish him off. Do you want to know what I question concerning their attack?"

"What's that?"

"How the other three men couldn't take out a single bear after it hurt **Alex**. Did anyone get off a shot? Stab it during their own attack? Run to try to save themselves? We're talking seasoned hunters. You told me yourself that they'd been hunting together since their youth. With your father, no less. How does something like that happen to four men in their early twenties, yet only one lived to tell about it?"

Caleb let out what sounded like a huff of air. "You tell me, Investigator. It's the question I've spent the last decade trying to uncover. None of this shit makes sense."

"No...it doesn't. What baffles me the most is your anger toward Mr. Villani. You blame him for your brother's death when he was the one attacked first. As if he could have actually done something to save any of them. I don't understand."

"Understand this," Caleb snapped. "Alex isn't providing the entire truth about the story. Omission of any kind wreaks of guilt. That tells me he's hiding something. Like you said, how does something like that happen to four men? Four damn excellent hunters? It doesn't. It all comes back to Alex and his lies. Maybe we could have found the bear that did this and put a stop to all the disappearances and deaths that followed. To make things

worse, he's connected one way or another to every case that's followed his. Whether that be vicinity, association .... I'm telling you, he's linked. He's responsible for all of it.

A growl tore from my throat as my eyes shot open. I was swinging the ax before I realized it. The impact had me tensing a little too late as I sliced through the trunk of a smaller tree not two feet away. The crack exploded in my ears, but my mind hadn't quite caught up to sound. The second it took me to process what I'd done gave me enough time to curse in my mind. But it was too late. The ax fell from my hands and I reached out just as the fifty foot tall tree leaned and began to fall, right toward my house.

"Shit. Shit!" My voice grew louder as I raced forward. I wasn't sure what I was going to do, or could do. I was stronger than an average human, but I wasn't superman. I couldn't fly the tree away moments before it hit my house. And it would from the looks of it. What I was doing was pointless and I knew that as I dove forward, feeling my fingertips push at the wood. The tree moved over the slightest amount, but I hadn't been able to put enough strength behind the connection before I hit the ground.

Bark shot out in all directions and the loud bang had my eyes closing through the rage that festered. *Caleb. He was making her more suspicious of me.* The realization made the blistering anger worse. My stare connected with the edge of my damaged porch and my head lowered to the ground just before my fist connected with the earth.

Erin would surely come after me with everything she had. From curiosity to solve the case, or suspicion that I was guilty, it didn't matter. She'd pry and try to claw her way into my world. Little did she know, if she broke through my walls, she might never escape from the hell within them. The draw she held wouldn't save her then.

# Chapter 7

## Erin

Chills raced up my spine and it had nothing to do with the lack of sun under the canopy of thick trees. Something wasn't right with Detective Perkins, or with the scene before me. Everything felt off kilter and I couldn't quite put my finger on what it was.

I crouched, taking in the different angles of the twigs that were positioned where I was told Kelly's body was located. The sun shone over the area, peeking from the clouds for only seconds before everything dimmed again. The amount of darkness I stood in was unsettling for it being so early in the day. I didn't like it. I constantly checked behind me due to the invisible pressure of eyes on my back. The impression that someone was watching just wouldn't leave me. I tried to ignore it as I focused on the overgrown foliage around the perimeter. There were plenty of places for someone or something to hide if they wanted to stalk their victim. But where exactly did they come out from?

"See. Nothing here."

My stare rose to the detective for only a moment, but I ignored him. I tried to imagine her body mirroring the crime scene photos I had memorized. She'd been on her back, her head closest to the water.

I took a few steps, placing me feet from the river bank. The current was slow. Almost nonexistent as I stared in a daze. For half an hour I had went over the possibilities and I had yet to come up with anything helpful. There had to be something...

“Can we go now? I have stuff to do and I still have to drive you into town.”

Detective Perkins appeared uneasy as he began to shift his weight.

“Soon,” I said, lowly.

Again, I focused at the ground seeing Kelly’s mutilated body before me. My mind filtered through the photos and I frowned as I went back and forth between reality and the mental images.

“There was more....” I blinked a few times, letting the scene register. “It’s more open now than it was when she was attacked. Was this area cleared out afterward?”

“What?”

Detective Perkins took a few steps toward me as he scanned over the trees before us. Multiple expressions crossed his face and I studied each one.

“The area is bigger than in the photos,” I tried to explain. “The brush and trees were denser back then. We’re looking at a good fifteen to twenty feet of extra opened space. As if someone came in and took out a few trees.”

He nodded, but stayed quiet.

“Who would do that?”

The repeated tensing in the detective’s jawline had me turning back to glance at the connecting trail. It was a good length away. Which meant someone returned to the scene of the crime, probably quite frequently given how clean the space was.

“I’m guessing it was the person who owns this land.”

“Mr. Villani?”

“None other.”

My head shook as I tried to understand, but a deep voice drowned out any thoughts that began to register.

“Trying to make me into the bad guy once again, I see.” Alex’s eyes were narrowed as he broke into the dim clearing. “Kelly’s father, Gregory, comes here on occasion. He asked if it would be alright if he set up a bench out here. He talks to her sometimes. Anyway, I gave my permission and helped him make space. He still hasn’t brought the bench.”

His hand rose toward the detective and he pointed his finger.

“You knew that. I asked the department’s permission before I touched a damn thing.”

“It completely escaped my mind.”

“Did it, Caleb? It might have been months ago that I called, but I think you remembered just fine.” Alex circled around, throwing off waves of aggression. Yet, I wasn’t fearful of him. He was clearly defending himself. It was Detective Perkins. He was having a hard time disassociating himself personally from what happened to his brother.

The tension was thick as I put myself between their locked glares. “Now I know,” I said calmly. “Mr. Villani, thank you for providing that information. Did you change your mind and decide you wanted to speak with me about your accident?”

“No.” He said, glancing toward me. “Sheriff’s at the house. He wants a word with *Detective Perkins*.”

“Oh. Thank you.” The look I gave the detective had him pausing for only a moment before he headed for the trail at a fast, but heavy pace. His tall figure seemed wider, suddenly. As if he were eating up the space. My

brow furrowed and I ignored the odd sensations of uneasiness as I turned back to Alex. He wasn't as angry now. His arms were crossed over his chest and he held to his biceps as he stared at the ground. I took a deep breath, stepping closer. "May I please ask you a few questions?"

Light brown eyes appeared almost gold as his stare rose to me.

"Ask, but I can't guarantee I'll give you the answer you're hoping for."

"I just want the truth."

A smile tugged at the corner of his lips. "You can't handle the truth, Ms. Billings. Erin," he said quieter, almost purring through my name. The change in tone sent my mind and body spiraling through the strangest tug-of-war responses it had ever received. Arousal hit with a force I couldn't understand. The emotion was one I hadn't felt in so long that it had me taking a step back. The action was mirrored with Alex taking three steps forward. Regardless of my conflicting responses, the fear suddenly overpowered everything. The look on his face...it was as if he knew my body was betraying my instincts. I'd felt it last night at the cabin but put it down to the shock after the accident.

"The truth," I repeated, breathlessly.

Alex tugged at his bottom lip with his teeth and nodded. "Alright. If you're going to be digging into the secrets of this town, you might as well hear them from me. After all, who better to hear the legend from than the one man people seem to think it currently links to?"

"Legend?"

Alex let out a small laugh at my incredulous tone.

"That's right, Erin. Legend. It is pretty farfetched, I must admit. I mean, come on, who believes in werewolves anyway? It's not like they really exist. But to the residents here, they do invoke a fear of possibility."



“Werewolves?” My eyebrows rose and I knew I was sounding like a parrot, but I couldn’t help it. The word had my mind racing. Even as I immediately denied the implausibility, my mind began trying to fit the pieces of the puzzle together. It was impossible. It really was. So, then why did the imaginary werewolf in my head match up to the evidence? They were supposed to be tall, weren’t they? And they had claws and ate... No. Fuck no. There was no such thing.

“Go on, Mr. Villani.”

“Alex. And it’s simple, really. People are disappearing. Some are turning up dead. For as long as I can remember, people always whispered about the creatures of the night. Men who looked like wolves, yet walked like men. Most of the people of Wolf River believe them to be true, or at least suspect. I’m sure Kelly’s father will hint as much to you when you meet him. Why do you think you’re here? He doesn’t think it was a bear. No one does. And since I survived, guess who their fear circulates around now? Me.”

I tried not to fidget as he shrugged.

“You’re telling me there are residents here who believe you to be a werewolf?”

“Some.”

“Mr. Morrison?”

Alex’s expressions hardened. “I’m sure it’s crossed his mind.”

I couldn’t stop the shaking of my head. “You think he’d come here to mourn his daughter if he believed you were the one who killed her? If he thought you were some creature that could kill him, too?”

“Does it matter? He comes. There’s talk. I’ve seen the way people look at me. As for Caleb. Well, who knows what he thinks. He’d never tell

me to my face, but I'm sure maybe even a part of him may resort to extreme measures to deal with his brother's death."

I stayed quiet as I continued to soak in what I was being told. It was ludicrous that anyone would believe such things, but I knew how small towns worked. I'd come from one.

"So that's what you have to look forward to," he continued. "Legends, werewolves, full moons ... hocus pocus, bullshit. Welcome to Wolf River, Erin. Enjoy your stay." He turned to leave, but paused to look over his shoulder. "Do stay inside, though. *Just in case*. Regardless of their talk, something is killing people. You're safer locked away at night. Although, if a werewolf does exist, I doubt there's any barriers that could keep him out if he decided he wanted to have you."

His gaze raked up and down my body and I watched him turn and begin to walk away. My whole body was humming in some unexplainable barrage of tingling pin-pricks. I fought to find my voice as I scrambled through his words.

"But you have the answers. You have the same size marks and you saw it. *Was it a bear?*"

Alex stopped, keeping himself faced forward. "Bear? Is that what you really wanted to ask?"

I swallowed hard. "What you speak of doesn't exist."

He laughed, even though he still faced away. "It attacked me before I ever heard a sound. When I came to, it was only inches from my face. It ... was the biggest fucking bear I've ever seen. And fast. It was as though I blinked and it was gone."

"You're sure it was a bear?"

Slowly, he turned to look at me. "Well it wasn't a werewolf. Of course it was a bear. What else could it have been?"

Silence settled between us and I didn't have an answer. This entire time I'd been saying it wasn't a bear. My experts didn't seem to think so, but if it wasn't, could it have really been a werewolf? Absolutely not. So, I was back at a bear, plain and simple. Alex saw it. He had no reason to lie.

"Thank you, Mr. Villani. Alex."

"Come on," he said, gesturing his head. "I'll walk you back. Unless you're afraid of me, too?"

There was a playfulness within him. It was refreshing in comparison to the seriousness he'd displayed so far. I couldn't stop myself from grinning as I went forward. For minutes we walked without saying a word. A discoloration within the trees had me jerking to a stop. A wolf stood off in the distance, watching. He was as still as a statue and gray. The surprise had my hand going right for my gun.

"Holy shit." The slight tremble was automatic as I brought the weapon down to rest at my side. For the life of me, I couldn't continue walking. The terror I felt facing a childhood nightmare wouldn't let me move.

"Let's go," Alex said, sternly.

"Will it try to hurt us?"

"That one?" He slid his hand around my bicep, holding securely. As he leaned in close, his breath brushed against my ear. He took a deep breath before he spoke. "He's not the one you need to worry about. If you see a lone wolf, you're meant to see him. He wouldn't reveal himself out of curiosity or carelessness, Erin. He's baiting you. This is the calm before the chaos. While you're fixated on his beauty and shaking in fear, the rest of the pack are closing in. They're hunting you. At this point, there's no hope for escape. Luckily though, you're with me. I'm not afraid of them and they know it. You, on the other hand..." he lifted, leading me at his pace. "Your

fear is so thick right now, it's exciting them. They'd eat you alive if it weren't for me."

I looked over my shoulder, watching the wolf weave slowly through the trees. His head was down and his eyes were intense, focused right on us.

"How do you know all of this? I thought wolves were afraid of humans."

"I grew up here and have hunted my entire life. There are some things you just know. Other things, you learn over the years. The wolves in this town are different. They're braver than in other places."

My feet moved faster as I spotted a black wolf.

"Why? Why are they braver here?"

Alex brought us to a stop, facing me. I wanted to scream for us to continue, but somehow I kept my composure. The need to run was stronger than I'd ever felt. Their threat was real and I could somehow inexplicably feel it.

"Clear your mind and think. Why would a pack be so brave as to hunt a human who they're usually afraid of?"

The gray wolf came even with us in the distance and I blinked past the question. "Their pack is big?"

A finger slid under my chin drawing my attention back to Alex. We were so close, I could smell the liquor on him. Something about that turned me on when it shouldn't have. I forced my mind clear as he spoke, again.

"You're right, but you're smarter than that. There's a better answer."

A twig snapped behind me and I jumped, clutching to Alex's shirt. I felt like a child again. Not at all the cold woman I had turned myself into over the years.

"The leader—the Alpha. They're brave because of him."

Alex smiled. “Correct. They are nothing without him, and they know it.”

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

# Chapter 8

## Alex

Tighter, Erin's fingers grasped my shirt until they suddenly loosened and disappeared. I felt her energy spike before it transitioned into something I didn't expect. She took a step back, glaring at me before she turned and pointed the gun in the direction of the gray wolf.

"Shoo! Get!" Her hand waved the gun around, trying to scare it, while she surged through the trees at a fast pace. My eyes widened and I rushed forward. I could see the wolf's confusion and greed. He was just as baffled by her change as I was. But he didn't move. A low growl began to leave him and I went faster.

"Are you crazy?" I grabbed her waist, spinning her back toward the trail. "What part of *pack* did you not understand? I guarantee you there's a good thirty wolves close by and you want to start a fight?"

"Let go! I will not be intimidated. I have work to do and I'm not going to have them following me around while I investigate these crimes. If they think I'm afraid, they're going to take advantage of that. They'll never leave me alone then."

Erin's body thrashed as I brought her back to the trail. Her elbow slammed into my ribs just as I was about to let go. The pain made my own beast flare inside and I felt my arm tighten, bringing her so close that my body was curved around hers and my lips were hovering just above the outside of her neck. The need to nip, to latch on with my teeth and hold her under my control was almost impossible not to act upon.

“Calm. You can try to show them whatever you want, but the scent of your fear doesn’t lie. They feel you.”

*I felt her.* There wasn’t a single part of me that wasn’t vibrating with the need I suddenly felt to have her. Sexually, yes, but so much more than that. *Domination.* After her little outburst, I wanted to show her who was boss. Who was more powerful when it came to will and determination. I wanted her. I wanted something I shouldn’t.

“Let go.”

No coldness. No anger. Just an order.

I paused, basking in her scent, even as I began to break away. The moment she was free, Erin took off back down the trail, leaving me standing their momentarily dazed. Fuck, I was so hard I couldn’t think. She wanted me. The cherry blossoms of her soap couldn’t disguise what my wolf knew. She’d reacted to my body being against hers and if she wanted me, it made my need for her so fucking much more.

Each step I took was more resolute than the next. One look at her profile and everything was suddenly different. *Again.* She was more beautiful. More ... *mine.* Meal ... no. At least not yet. I wanted to taste her, but not as food. I wanted to experience her flavor, her lips against mine. The way her pussy tasted while my face was buried between her legs, bringing her to pleasures I’d never cared to experience with a woman again.

“Let me tell you more.”

Before I could take back the words, she was already jolting to a stop to stare up at me.

“You have more to tell?”

“Have dinner with me tonight. I’ll cook and bring it to you. Your territory. Your rules.”

“Territory?” Her eyebrows drew in. “I don’t know. Dinner seems a little—“

“An early dinner,” I insisted. “I’ll leave before the sun sets.”

Footsteps had both of us looking up further down the trail. A growl teased the back of my throat and I somehow found myself moving in to stand closer to Erin as Caleb appeared. Anger was pouring from him so thick it almost made me smile.

“I knew I shouldn’t have listened to you, Alex. You wouldn’t know how to tell the truth if your life depended on it. Sheriff wasn’t there. Doubt he ever was.”

I hid my aggravation. Of course the sheriff wasn’t there. I had to have some sort of excuse to go through with my plan of getting Erin on my side.

“It was wrong, I admit, but I had to speak with Investigator Billings alone.”

Erin glanced up at me. I knew I needed to somehow make it to where she didn’t think *I* was the bad guy. I wanted her trust and it was vital if I was going to keep her suspicions far away from me while she was here.

“You couldn’t have just waited or asked me to give you a moment?” Caleb’s lip curled. “Lies. That’s all you’re good for.”

“Enough,” Erin bit out. “I won’t be in the middle of some feud between the two of you. Mr. Villani needed a moment and he got it. Arguing isn’t going to change the way he went about it. Which was wrong,” she rushed out toward me. “If you both don’t mind, Mr. Morrison will be expecting me soon so I should be on my way. Detective Perkins, would you still give me a ride?”

“Actually,” I cut in, “I have to go over there to talk with him about the bench. I’ll take you if you’d like.”



Who the hell was I kidding? If I showed up driving Erin, Gregory was going to shit a brick. We may have been on decent terms, but I saw the way he looked at me. And I'd appear a hell of a lot guiltier to him if I was latched to Erin's side. This was a bad move on my part and I knew it.

"She's going with me." Caleb was already stalking forward and Erin nodded in agreement.

"I should ride with Detective Perkins. We'll talk later. Not tomorrow, but the next day. Five o'clock."

Before I could say a word, she caught up with Caleb and began walking away. She didn't even look back in my direction once. The lack of attention had my wolf-blood boiling in my veins. She gave me a time and then turned her back to me—ignoring me, dismissing me? And set it for days away?

*Obsession.* It grew with every step she took further away. I was angry and captivated all in one. Manic in my need of something I didn't even know. My mouth opened and I had to force myself not to call out to her. Not to invent some ridiculous excuse as to why she should see me tonight. Right now. Dammit! I was out of control, spiraling on some dangerous path of right and wrong. But what was right? Was it my will to do whatever I needed to survive, or was it to attach myself to a woman I didn't even know, for reasons I didn't even understand? *Attach.* The word kept returning in my mind. I might as well of fucking wrapped myself around her leg for the all the desperation that was crowding my inner self. And it was crowding *and* drowning me.

The light buzz of their voices grew fainter, but I kept just enough distance to hear their generic conversation. When they got closer to Erin's home, I made myself stop long enough to listen to the engine turn over and for them to leave. After that ... I was gone. Sprinting in the direction of her

cabin at such a blur that I barely noticed the ice cold wind against my face. Had the alcohol affected me so much? *No*. I was inebriated by naughty what-ifs. Erin was twisting my mind. I could still feel her body along the front of mine as I wrapped myself around her. That ass, her smell, it was all going to be my undoing.

I ran faster, letting the air burn into my face. The fact that I held my breath occasionally so it couldn't cleanse her scent was irrelevant. I could bleach my insides and never be without her. It wasn't something she did or something even I had done, *it was him*. My wolf—the part of me that I couldn't completely control. He desired her and to hell with what she or I wanted. He ruled my body and he'd covet her any way possible until he decided what came next.

The closer I got, the more traces of Erin broke through. Only then could I breathe regularly. She'd walked this very path not minutes ago and with as fresh as the trail was, she could have been here now. I slowed, savoring in the realization that I was so close. My mission, unknown. All that was pulling me forward was the need to discover every single thing I could find out about this woman. To experience more of this unexplained fascination that was blinding me to realities of the situation.

Smoke poured for the small cabin and I let my senses tune in as I began to walk forward. No one was there. I had time to do whatever I wanted. The thought brought a smile to my lips and I picked up the pace until I was twisting the knob and frowning as it stayed rooted in my palm. *Locked.*

I let go, scanning the deck. In a frenzy of quick movements, I began to search for an extra key—atop the frame of the door, under the rug, even under flower pots. Nothing. I headed around to the side, checking the windows. Impatience was pushing through. When I rounded the back of the

home, I could barely contain myself. Still no luck. I rushed around the last side, pushing against the glass. It wasn't until I got back to the front, and to the very last window to the right of the deck, that one finally glided up. I cursed as I pull myself through.

Adrenaline spiked and my beast roared to the forefront as I shut myself inside. The smell of her was all I focused on and for seconds I didn't move. I couldn't. Not with the way every inch of my skin tingled at her presence.

Slowly, my eyes opened and I took in the papers and photos that were spread across the tabletop not far away. Blood and injuries made my pulse increase as I picked up and flipped through the pictures of Kelly. A frown appeared and sadness swarmed. I hadn't known her very well, regardless that she had been Toby's sister. She was a lot younger than us. It still didn't stop the questions I had about her death. There were so many. It was all so confusing. She'd been on my land. Why? Fuck, I didn't know. I had been locked up at the time, but her screams had still reached me and turned me even more crazed. I had beat against my cage like the monster I was, pulling and trying to break free. Luckily, I hadn't.

I took in the claw marks. The hunter in me calculated and critiqued the work. I knew it. It was of my kind and likely the work of one other—*my* attacker. The same werewolf that plowed into Erin's car. It had to be. I'd missed him that night and I knew it was because he'd sensed me and took off. He was always a step ahead, always staying just out of my reach so I never quite saw him. But I had his scent. The bad thing was, in human form, he'd smell different. I wouldn't know him from anyone else.

When completely in werewolf form, everything was a haze. Like a dream. Sometimes it was hard to remember the entire night. It was these days before my forced change that I was able to blur the lines and convert if

I chose. But I rarely did, lately. The human part of me refused to give into the temptation of being a monster. Even if that monster was what my dreams were made of. It was torturous to be two different people. Especially when the bad part of you was stronger.

I put down the papers, heading toward the bedroom. My mind cleared enough to take Erin's attack into account. Would he come back for her? Our wolves didn't like missing out on an intended meal. Was he obsessing as much as I was, or was he more controlled than me?

Surely, he was. He was older and more experienced. After all, even the pack followed him as their alpha. But that was worse. It had my pulse escalating even more. He'd accepted what he was. Probably lived in that form as much as he was able. And the pack had seen her. They were watching her. Whether it was for their own interest or his, I wasn't sure, but I didn't like it.

The air around me caged my beast, calming him and trying to warp my thoughts back to only her. Just like they had since I'd met Erin. This stage would probably continue until after the full moon. All I had to do was make it a few more days and I'd go back to normal.

I lowered to sit on the edge of the bed, bringing myself to push away the compulsive urges. Erin might be in danger. Before this moment, I'd considered myself the biggest threat, but I wasn't. She was investigating *his* crimes. Not mine. If he put two and two together, he'd know she was the woman from the car, and he'd come after her for good. He'd kill her. And once again, people would suspect me. God, I should have absorbed this information before now. I just couldn't. I couldn't focus on anything.

A sigh left me and I fell back, grabbing for her pillow. My eyes closed while heaven engulfed me. Fuck, she smelled so good. For minutes I laid there, once again oblivious to the threats I should have been

concentrating on. Each second that passed brought me deeper into a place of mystery. A place I'd never been before. Fire burned the pit of my stomach and heat warmed my eyelids as my wolf selfishly fed from the emotional sanctuary I floated in. The moon was so close to being full. *A few more days.* I wouldn't be able to see her the twenty-fours before my change. I'd be chained away. But if I could ... dammit ... to have her at my disposal then. To be my wolf and taste her—

My eyes snapped open.

I'd kill her. Jesus, what the fuck was wrong with me? I wanted to in that moment. I wanted to have her as close to me as I could get—in me. It scared the shit out of me. The power of these cravings were undeniable. The human in me teased the thought of feeling something again—love, compassion, a bond with another. The killer in me wanted all of it with her being the cherry on top. It frightened me to think of who might win.

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

# Chapter 9

## Erin

Reserved. I had to act reserved.

Out of all the conversations I'd had with Mr. Morrison, never once did I think this would happen. Alex had warned me, but I still couldn't quite grasp the magnitude of how crazy I thought this family was. Had there not been real victims with suspicious deaths, I would have chalked this case up to a wasted trip.

"I've seen one. It was this tall," Mr. Morrison said, holding his hand up a good foot above his six feet frame. "It had razor sharp teeth that were a good inch long and it growled like nothing I'd ever heard before. I was only a kid myself then, but I'll never forget it. I know what I witnessed back in those woods. I'm telling you, they're real, Ms. Billings. I swear to you. One of those things killed my girl and I want them exposed once and for all. We have to band together and track these creatures. They need to be slaughtered before they kill someone else!"

Red tinted the older man's face as his agitation rose. I took in the other three people in the room—his wife, Kitty, their son, Morton, who was in his early twenties, and their youngest son, James. All of them held true fear for what I was almost certain didn't exist. Yet, I couldn't tell them that. Not with how passionate they were over the situation. Besides, what if there was something? Not a werewolf, but *something* resembling one. The experts held to the fact that they didn't believe this creature was a bear. So what the hell was it?

“I’ll see what I can discover. Is there anything else you can tell me? Maybe something about your son, Toby’s attack. That’s two of your children who’ve been killed by an animal in the woods. Have you heard any information that could be helpful?”

A whimper left the woman’s lips and she turned her head into Morton’s chest, sobbing loudly as she broke down. Her husband lowered his head, placing his hands on his hips.

“Toby’s death was hard for us all. Kitty still hasn’t gotten over it. The shocking way it happened... He was going places. He was the first in our family to be accepted into college. He wasn’t even supposed to come down for the weekend. Said he had studying to do, but he was excited about the hunt. He hadn’t been in so long, and it was all he talked about the day before he left with those boys. We never thought it would be the last time we’d ever see him.”

“I’m sorry for your loss,” I said, lowly. “Losing both Toby and Kelly had to have been extremely hard. I can’t imagine the pain you all must harbor.”

Mr. Morrison nodded, standing up taller. “It’s been very hard, but that’s why I’m not letting it go. To take Toby was heartbreaking. When it killed our daughter, it nearly destroyed me. Two years later and I just can’t do this anymore. I refused to live in fear a day longer. This has to stop. If something else happens...”

Kitty let out a loud cry, her body trembling and wracking through her hysteria. I watched the young man hold to her tighter and lead her out of the room as Gregory continued.

“I know this probably sounds way out there to you, but this isn’t a joke, Ms. Billings. These ... things ... these werewolves, they exist. Everyone here knows it. Some have seen it in the distance around their

homes at sunset. Others have been woken up in the middle of the night, their livestock, screaming and massacred. It kills anything it can get its hands on. I tried to bring in animal trackers, but no one ever finds anything. And they don't know how to talk to the people here like I know you can. You'll be different. You were a real detective. You know how to solve crimes, and this is a crime, Ms. Billings. Please, *help us*. Don't let someone else suffer what my family and others have.

God, I could almost believe this legend. But it wasn't true. It just wasn't. Yes, something was murdering people and animals, but it wasn't a damn myth. It was something else. A freakishly large bear. Maybe even a mutated or deformed one if I wanted to believe Alex. Perhaps it had deformities that made it appear to be something it wasn't. There was no telling. But where was it? Where was it hiding? And had it really lived all these years? Mr. Morrison had supposedly seen something in his youth. He had to be in his mid-fifties now. That would make it too old to be a natural animal. Or was there more of them? Shit, this didn't add up.

"I'll try my best. If you remember anything about either of your children's accidents, I need to know. Even if you think it's irrelevant."

James took a step closer, drawing my attention.

"What about Alex, father? Tell her about him."

My eyebrows drew in at the name. "What about Mr. Villani?"

The two looked at each other before Gregory shrugged.

"I've known Alexander since he was a child. He and Toby were really good friends. Hell, he stayed over here all the time during his high school years, camping out in the yard with the others. We were heartbroken over Toby, but there was a happiness when Alex survived. Things just ... he ..." Mr. Morrison trailed off. "He almost died. I think he might have at one point in the hospital, but there were whispers from Joy, a nurse who worked



on him. She said his eyes changed at one point and his temperature spiked to unbelievable heights. He should have been dead from that alone. Then, suddenly, he woke up perfectly fine. Fever gone, clear and coherent. He was okay for a few weeks. Sad over what happened, of course, but he stayed to himself. Then a tourist wound up torn to shreds. That's when things took a weird turn with him. He moved out of his parents' house. Not uncommon for a guy in his early twenties, but it was the way it went down that drew suspicion.

“His parents said they woke up to their house being destroyed that morning. Holes were in the walls, windows were in the process of being broken out. Blood was all over Alex's bed and the floor. Alex said he cut himself on some glass, but his momma never saw no wounds. Nothing but the blood. That's when he left. Didn't talk to them for years after that. I still don't think he has since that day. The guy lives out in the woods, keeping to himself. No one sees him around the time of a full moon, but we've learned to lock ourselves away during that time, too. That's been ingrained in all of us since youth. You just do 'round these parts. Better safe than sorry.”

I looked between the two, only to bring my focus back to Gregory. “Are you saying you believe Alex Villani to be a werewolf?” I took the next logical—illogical—leap. “That whatever attacked him changed him into what it was?”

“So the story goes, right? If you get attacked by a werewolf and survive, you change too. I'm not sure if that's what really happened or if he is one, but it would make sense. Although ... I'd hate to consider it. Makes me sick to think about. He's a damn good boy. Still seems like he is when I talk to him. I just don't know what to think.”

I paused, trying to figure out a way to word my question without offending, but I didn't know how to get my point across without being

blunt. “Do you think he’s responsible for Kelly’s death?”

Silence.

“I ... pray it’s not true. I loved Alex like one of my own. The proximity of her body to his residence does makes me question it, but she loved to walk those trails. Hell, we couldn’t get her out of the woods. She never believed the stories. She used to laugh when anyone mentioned the possibilities.” He got quiet, his cheeks turning red again as his mind seemed to race. “If Alex did do this, he has to be held responsible. He has to die before he hurts someone else.”

My eyes widened. “Die? Mr. Morrison. If, and to me, that’s a big if... *If* there are werewolves, and I’m not so sure there are, you don’t think that perhaps our government can contain them so they can pay for their crimes?”

“It’s too dangerous,” Mr. Morrison rushed out. “These wolves are killers. Murderers! They have to die. That’s the only way.”

My hand rose, trying to calm him. “Okay, let’s not get ahead of ourselves here. First, let’s see what I can come up with. I need to talk to this nurse you mentioned. I’d also like a list of the names of people you know that may have witnessed this animal. Also, anyone whose livestock has been attacked or mutilated. If I can get those, I’ll begin.”

“James.” Gregory’s hand waved at the boy, who walked forward, handing me a paper. “Already took care of it, Ms. Billings. I don’t sleep much at night. I’ve written names, addresses, and dates I believe the incidents happened around. Everything I could think of.”

The dark ink was easy enough to read as I scanned over the slanted letters.

“Thank you. I appreciate it. If there’s nothing else—”

“You.” He took a step forward. “Something hit your car last night. That’s how you got that cut on your head, right?”

My hand rose, but I stopped midway. “A deer, I suspect. It’s not a big deal.”

“Wrong. I don’t think that was a deer, Ms. Billings. That was *it*. That was the werewolf. Be careful. He might know you’re here for him. He might be watching you.”

I suppressed the shiver at his words. I didn’t like the thought of anything watching me. Human or not.

“I’ve taken care of myself for quite some time. I’ll be safe.”

“See that you are. Maybe only investigate during the day. The night isn’t friendly. Especially this close to the full moon. Lock your doors and keep your gun on you at all times. You can stay here if you feel the need. Ain’t no shame in being afraid.”

I almost laughed at the thought of me staying at a client’s home because of fear over a mythological animal. *Almost*. Had I not truly been afraid of something unknown, I might have. “Thank you for the generous offer. So far I’m okay at the cabin I rented.” I lifted the paper. “Thank you for this. I’ll get ahold of you soon.”

Mr. Morrison led me to the door, opening it for me as I stepped into the threshold. “I’m serious about the offer. If you feel something is around you, or you get fearful for any reason, my door is always open.”

All I could do was nod as I stepped onto the porch and made my way to the new rental car. Even as the engine came to life, I couldn’t shake the shock of what I’d just heard. I was supposed follow the evidence, but keep an open mind. To investigate all angles. I couldn’t dismiss his fear or the fears of this town just because I didn’t believe. Something was definitely out there and regardless of what it was, I had to find out.

I glanced at the first name on the paper, scanning the list until I reached Joy Robertson. The word nurse was scribbled next to it, along with what appeared to be a home address. My fingers were slightly trembling as I pushed the buttons on the navigation. This was all too bizarre. What was I supposed to do if this woman told me anything close to what Mr. Morrison said she had? What did it mean? Was there reason to fear Alex Villani? I didn't think so anymore, but our chemistry was different now. Ever since I saw him smile and he wrapped around me, something within me changed. Hell, I said it was okay for him to make me dinner. Never in a million years would I have let a suspect come to where I was staying. Where I slept! Yet, I was allowing him in? It was so unlike me. It was...

Dust billowed out behind me as I pulled down the road and headed toward the highway. I knew what it was. One, I didn't believe in werewolves. Two, if I didn't, that meant Alex quite possibly wasn't guilty of anything. I felt sorry for him. He appeared to be a victim and the whole town had made him an outcast. Or so I had thought. Now I knew it had to do with whatever happened at his parents' house. What transpired that morning? Or that night? The death of the tourist only made me want to uncover even more.

I glanced at the time, cursing how late it was. I had stayed at the Morrisons' later than I had intended. I was hoping the nurse wouldn't mind me showing up unexpectedly. Would she provide me with enough to sweep this werewolf myth under the rug for good?

Regardless, the next time I talked to Alex, I'd ask him what went down the morning he left home for good. He'd tell me. He already wanted to provide more clues into that night. Cooperation was key, and he didn't appear to have anything to hide.

At the highway, I took a left, only going down a mile before the GPS had me taking a right. Within seconds I pulled in front of a beige house with pale red shutters. Two cars were resting in the driveway. One was newer, and the other an older truck covered in rust spots. I grabbed my folder, running my hand down my blouse before I opened the door. Before I could get halfway into the yard, a man appeared at the entrance.

“You’re not welcomed here. You need to leave.”

Fear. It lined his features as he gestured his hand away from me.

“I beg your pardon? I’m—”

“I know who you are. You’re that investigator lady brought in by Gregory Morrison. We don’t have no time for that.”

Words wouldn’t come as my lips separated in surprise. “I only want to ask your wife a few questions on a patient she worked on some years back. Alexander Villani.”

The door slammed shut, leaving me standing there in disbelief. I’d come across plenty of people who refused to speak to me over the years, but I hadn’t expected to hit a hurdle so soon. Was this what I had to look forward to?

# Wolf

*Kill. Blood. Kill. Blood.*

*The investigator woman had spoken plenty of words, but I heard nothing but the voice of my wolf. His taunting echoed within my mind, corrupting what was left of my humanity. Where I stood, pretending to listen, my eyes wouldn't leave the cut along her temple. I wanted to slice it back open with one of my claws—watch the blood pour down her face before I let my teeth shred through her scalp and crack through the strength of the bones structuring her pretty face. My fascination with her wound, **with her**, became my entire focus as she had continued on.*

*Time passed, and off and on her voice broke through. I caught one or two words before I robotically gave the reaction that was expected.*

*What would she taste like? Would her trained abilities make for a better fight? Did she like to play games?*

*The questions from my wolf poured through like a rushing river and just like that, I had purpose, again—I had a game to play.*

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

# Chapter 10

## Alex

Dishes were piled all over my counter as I spun in a circle, scanning the trays I'd already made. Nothing had gone as I intended. Erin's steak was too rare at first. That only caused me to overcook it as I got lost in the sides. The potatoes were ... a mashed mess, and even the roasted asparagus I attempted somehow burnt in the oven.

Who was I kidding? I wasn't a fucking cook. I lived off meat. Raw, bloody meat. It was fit for an animal, not a human. I couldn't even remember the last time I ate a vegetable.

My eyes shot to the door and I wasn't sure whether to moan or groan as I heard a car pull in and Erin approach. It was earlier than she'd said, but not by much.

The clicking of her heels sounded and then knocking. I counted to three before I headed for the door. Sweat started to cover my chest and it only made me even more nervous. How many shirts had I gone through since I'd started getting everything ready? Three? Fuck, I couldn't think. Even staying as close to her cabin as I could and following her around these few days wasn't helping.

"Coming."

I pulled at the collar of the dark blue shirt and swung the wooden door open. Erin's eyes widened as she scanned over me, but I couldn't stop myself from eating her up with my own stare. The green blouse she wore today brought out her eyes and looked damn good with the slacks. I could almost see her curvy body underneath.

“I’m sorry, did we say we were meeting here? I thought...” I stepped back.

“I figured it would be easier this way. May I?”

“Of course, please, come in.”

Jesus, why didn’t I clean up behind me? I should have expected this. Nothing was by the book with her.

My fingers weaved through my hair as I battled to come up with some sort of excuse for the disaster of my home. From the shirts in the hallway to potato peelings on my counter ... all I could do was throw her an apologetic look.

“Why don’t you show me what you made? I’ll help you clean afterward.”

My world stopped at her genuine smile. This interaction... It was so foreign. So ... *real*. And I’d never wanted it more. What was it to have someone to really cook for? Someone to love and care for? I’d never know.

“I tried. I’m not sure it’s really edible. I tried to get yours done.” I blocked out the sadness my thoughts brought on as I led her into the kitchen. She pulled up the foil and looked at her steak, and then mine.

“Yes, you did. I’d say it’s pretty well done.” She paused, staring at my rare steak. “Are you sure you’re not a werewolf?” I froze at her statement, but then one of her eyebrows quirked up, only for it to fall as she awaited my response. A soft laugh followed as she turned her back to grab a knife from the cutting block. “Werewolf,” she mumbled. “I would have never of thought.” My pulse was racing so fast and it had nothing to do with her words. God, that laugh. I wanted to hear more. I wanted to see her when she wasn’t so serious.

“I’m sorry. I really shouldn’t kid about such things. It was inappropriate. You’ll have to forgive me. I’m horrible communicating with



people outside of work.” She grabbed two plates from the counter, turning to throw me a sincere glance. “I really am sorry. I don’t know what I was thinking.”

“It’s okay. I found it a little funny, I guess.” No way could I show her how she’d rattled me with her teasing.

“Did you? Why? Because it’s the truth, or because you like bad humor?”

My mouth opened, only to shut. “Both?”

She let out a loud laugh, shaking her head. “Good one. I guess we’ll see soon enough.”

The tip of the knife pointed at the steaks. “I’m more of a rare steak person, myself. Would you share it with me?”

She wanted to share food? With me? I softened even more, swallowing hard while my wolf fluttered within. God, I’d fucking *kill* something for her. I’d give her whatever she wanted. “Of course. I’m surprised.”

“Are you? Why’s that?”

I shrugged as she went through the sides, fixing our plates, I couldn’t help but watch how she took charge. She wasn’t silently waiting for me to take charge nor did she seem uncomfortable. If anything, she was making herself right at home.

“Most women I’ve met prefer their steaks well done or medium. Never rare.”

“I’m not most women. And you could have probably taken off five seconds on each side and I would have said perfect.”

Had she not laughed, I probably would have stood there like a captivated idiot all night. “Right. Table ... shit.” I walked over, removing

the remaining grocery bags full of canned goods from the space. It only caused her to smile even more and I liked that.

“There. You cooked, I made the plates. When we finished, we’ll both clean. Even-steven.”

I pulled out her chair, pausing as I took in her statement. “Ah, I see what you’re doing. Don’t worry, this isn’t a romantic dinner. You don’t have to try to minimize what’s happening. Nothing *is* happening. We’re just two people who need to eat. That’s all. See, to prove my point,” I walked to the refrigerator, opening the door. “I bought us beer instead of wine. That says it all.”

The relief was clear as she took a deep breath and nodded. I grabbed two bottles, opening the tops before sitting down to join her.

“You have nothing to worry about, Erin. I’m here to help with whatever I can.”

I felt her mood change before I saw her expression follow.

“Why? When I first met you, you refused to talk to me. Then you suddenly became the nicest person in this town? It’s odd. What made you change your mind out there in the woods?”

I slid my knife over the steak, watching as blood spilled free. Maybe this wasn’t such a good idea. My wolf was hungry and not just for the food. I should have given in and went out hunting. Appeased him so I didn’t lose control. But I couldn’t do that when most of my time had been taken up following Erin. And fuck if I could help myself. I couldn’t!

“We started the morning off wrong. I was upset over what Caleb said. It didn’t mean I was refusing to help. I just needed time to cool off. My past isn’t easy for me to face. Quite the opposite, actually, but I’m trying. That’s why I went out there to talk to you.”

“I appreciate it.”

We both continued to cut the food and take bites, all the while studying each other. She may have been analyzing me, but I sure as hell wasn't playing the shy role. I met her stare, looking deep into her eyes until she broke the connection to eat more. Repeatedly, she came back to me, always meeting her gaze to mine. What was she thinking? How was she *managing* to think? I hardly tasted the food I shoved in my mouth. God, she was beautiful.

"I'm only going to ask you this one more time. Was it a bear that attacked you that day?"

I took a swig of beer, taking my time. "Do I really need to answer that ridiculous question, again?"

"You don't have to just yet if you don't want. Perhaps you'd like to answer another?"

"Alright."

I leaned back in the chair, trying to appear relaxed.

"Were you told how high your fever reached while you were in the hospital?"

I hesitated at the surprise question. "No. Do you know what it was?" It was a lie. I knew, but I had to make sure she did too before I started spilling out information. Especially the kind that pointed into anything abnormal.

"No. Joy Robinson's husband ran me off, twice. They're refusing to speak. And they're not the only ones. The last couple of days haven't gone my way. I stopped off at Fred Jennings house, Jack's brother. He didn't want to speak to me either. Even pulled a gun on me and told me to never come back."

"I'm sorry," I whispered. "He hasn't been the same since Jack's death."

“You don’t have to apologize, Alex. You did nothing wrong. Correct?”

“Correct.” *Nothing other than survive the beast’s attack when my friends died and become a monster myself.*

The beer slid down my throat as I took a long drink.

“So that led me to your parents’ house.”

Beer flew from my mouth as I began to choke. Of all the people Erin could have told me she talked to, it never entered my mind that she’d go and see them. Rage blossomed through my chest, soaring up and down my legs as I tried to get ahold of the creature within.

“Sorry,” I coughed. “Please ... go on.”

Her eyes were narrowed. Each second that she delayed made it harder for me to sit still. I jerked at my collar.

“Your mother...” she paused. “Are you sure you’re okay?”

Again, I coughed, trying to stop the tickling in my throat.

“I’m good. Continue.”

“Your mother wasn’t home but I talked to your father. He’s worried about you.”

The weight of a ton of bricks crushed into me at her words. I pushed from the chair, taking my beer with me as I walked closer to the kitchen.

“He told me about what happened the day you left. How you were upset. There was a lot of blood. Do you want to tell me about that morning?”

My head shook before I could think to speak. The tourist. It was my first kill. The morning I realized what I’d become.

“Okay.” The chair scraped against the floor and Erin’s presence was a surprisingly comforting pressure against my back as she neared. “Just tell me where the blood came from and I’ll let this go for now.”

I turned, meeting her eyes as the lie left my lips. “PTSD. It was my first episode. I ... thought I was still there in the forest. I flipped out. A lot. Fuck, I destroyed my parents’ home and I hadn’t even known it. I think I cut myself on some glass. After I’d seen the damage and their faces, I couldn’t stay. What if I would have hurt them? I couldn’t be responsible for that when I hold enough blame for my friends.”

The lines from Erin’s furrowed expression softened and I saw her sympathy. In that moment, I wanted nothing more than to tell the truth. To make her afraid of the lying, manipulating person I’d become. She deserved to know the truth, but in revealing that, I’d condemn myself.

“Thank you for sharing. There was a missing tourist, coincidentally found the same morning. All of these stories about you that circulate through this town. I swear, you have the worst timing and location.”

I shrugged, letting out a nearly silent laugh. “Tell me about it. I’ve never had good luck. Shit just follows me around wherever I go. That’s why I’ve learn to stay to myself.”

“That makes two of us.” Erin walked back to the table, collecting the plates. As she headed to the sink, I couldn’t tear my eyes from her ass while she shifted and got the water ready. It was a good distraction from what we had just talked about. And I needed to forget. I needed to get lost in her.

“I’ll rinse.”

I pulled up the sleeves, moving in beside her. She was wearing some type of perfume tonight. It was subtle, but definitely altering the way she naturally smelled. I liked it, regardless that my wolf didn’t.

“Can you tell me about yourself, or is that crossing the line?”

“Nothing to really tell,” she said, handing over a plate. “I’ve been solving crime for more years than I care to mention. I’ve seen about

everything there is to see—good and bad.”

“You don’t wear a ring so I’m guessing you’re not married.”

Water splashed as the plate slipped from her hand, soaking through her shirt. “No,” she breathed out. “Didn’t quite make it that far.”

Waves of anxiety had my curiosity peaked. “Because you didn’t find the right person, or...?”

“It just didn’t work out.”

“Cheating?”

“Jesus,” Erin snapped, glancing over at me. “No, he never cheated.”

“You weren’t compatible?”

Slowly, she came to a stop, leaving her hands in the soapy water. The dark green material stuck around her wrists and somehow I knew I’d pushed her way too far.

“He’d dead. He was my partner.”

My stomach dropped for some unexplainable reason. I felt sorry for her just as she probably felt sorry for me in my situation. “I’m sorry. I should have let it go.”

“It’s fine. Martin ...he...,” She grabbed another plate, beginning to rub the sponge along the length. “Martin was killed on the same day he proposed. We were actually here in Wisconsin when it happened. Further up north. It was years ago, I just don’t like to talk about it.”

I nodded, taking the plate. “I can understand that.”

She turned to face me and her energy calmed. “I bet you do. We’re both haunted in that way and we’ll never escape it. Never escape the questions or answer when we have to explain parts of our life. It is what it is, I suppose. It happened. It’s life.”

The coldness that took over her tone at the end had me staying quiet. I didn’t want us to part this way. And we would if I didn’t change things

now.

“Do you ever do anything spontaneous? Just for the thrill?”

A smile tugged at her lips, but disappeared just as fast.

“Not often. I like control. Why, did you have something in mind?”

I took the plate from her, rinsing it before reaching over to turn off the water.

“Let’s go.”

“Go?”

A tinge of uncertainty pushed into her tone, but I ignored it as I walked over and grabbed my jacket, beanie, and a small throw blanket from the back of the sofa.

“Do you have some something warmer in your car to put on? You’re going to need it.”

“Alex, what are you up to?”

“No questions. Just trust me.” I took her hand and tried to slow my breathing as we locked eyes. Something heavy passed between us and I was content to wait for her answer.

“Alright.”

Her agreement was barely a whisper. Fear was present and I tried to ignore the way it excited my wolf. I shouldn’t be doing this. I knew in my gut my plan could backfire with it being so close to the full moon, but the man in me was dying for more.

“Come on.” I took off at a fast pace, pulling her behind me as we broke through the door and made a stop at her car. As she slid on the half trench coat, I tested the energy for any threat. We were good.

“Where are we going?”

“You’ll see.” Again, I grabbed her hand, leading her toward the edge of the woods. There was a slight resistance against my grip, but she didn’t

pull back from me. She let me lead, which in its own told me a lot.

Trees were thick as I maneuvered us deeper though the overgrown trail. I hadn't been back this way in a few years. I prayed it was still safe for what I had planned. If I could just get her to relax. To not be the cop that was ingrained in her, perhaps she'd open up and gift me with the woman who hid behind the mask. I'd only just met her, but a voice within told me it was vital. Not only for the man, but for the beast.

The terrain elevated, bringing us up to battle against the steep incline. Halfway up, Erin swore while she battled with her modest heels. It probably wasn't such a good idea to have her hiking through rolling hills.

"Almost there. We just need to reach the top. Then we climb."

"Climb what?"

I laughed under my breath, wondering what she'd think of my lookout. I'd built it not long after I moved here. It had the best view of the stars at night. But I'd lost myself somewhere over the years. Depression, loneliness... It had destroyed me.

"There we go." I righted her as we reached the top. I couldn't help but smile bigger at her gasp. We were higher than anywhere in Wolf River, and being at the edge of the cliff, the overhead view went on for miles upon miles. The occasional light shone in the distance from random cabins, but there weren't many. And the stars were bright. Not at all covered by the clouds like the last few nights.

"It's beautiful."

"Just wait until you get up there. I plan to build here someday. I can see it in my head, it'll be perfect. Let me go first to make sure everything is okay." I pulled her to my manmade ladder I had nailed to the tree. Above, a good fifteen feet, rested a square deck. I climbed, glancing down every few steps to make sure she was okay without me there. It was ridiculous. I knew



nothing was out here with us, but I couldn't stand to leave her unprotected. Even if it was only a few feet of space between us.

"God, I missed this." I placed the crumpled blanket on the deck, flattening my palms against the wood as I stood and walked the distance around it. It was steady, making me happier. "Perfect. Come on up."

"You're sure it's okay?"

"Positive."

It took Erin barely any time to reach the top. As I flattened out the blanket, I tried to contain the giddiness at having her up here with me. What I was doing was nothing more than giving my wolf something to feed from. He liked my happiness, but he also enjoyed calculating ways to make it good for him. We were one and the same, yet complete opposites.

The moon illuminated Erin's awed expression, sending pride shooting through my heart. To share a memory like this with her—to have a pleasure in common, even if it was taking in scenery or beauty of any kind... I hadn't had that with another person in as long as I could remember. To share that now, with *her*, it left me speechless. I told myself I would get my fix and not dream of having a partner of any kind in the future, but it was hard to deny what I longed for. Whether it be a lover, a girlfriend, or more, I had to face facts. It was impossible. As I looked at her and reality dawned, the earth shattered and sucked all happiness right out of me, filling me with emptiness. Hollowness left me off-balance and I sat down on the blanket, trying to catch my breath.

*I was alone. I would always be alone. There was no hope for me. Not in life, and certainly not in love.*

This was the moon's fault. With pulling out my wolf, my deepest desires were somehow surfacing and conforming my two selves together.

These emotions for Erin were nothing but an illusion. They weren't real and come the day after my change, accepting my path would be easier.

"Alex, this is just amazing. Absolutely beautiful." She lowered to the blanket, lying back to look up at the stars. Puffs of smoke left her mouth and I watched her hug to herself from the cold. I wanted to say *she* was beautiful, but I kept quiet, joining her on the blanket. The sky was so clear and bright, but I didn't get lost in the sights. My thoughts, my sadness, sucked me in, making the agony in my chest increase. I barely heard Erin as she began to talk again.

"I shouldn't be here with you right now. I shouldn't have even come tonight. I know I've crossed an ethical line, but right now I don't care. There's a peacefulness here. I needed this. I wasn't aware of how much until this moment."

She turned on her side, propping her head up to look at me.

"Thank you."

I nodded, not able to speak. She wouldn't be thanking me if she knew what was running through my mind. With my mood, came something I knew all too well. Lust, yes, but a darker version of it.

"Are you okay? You seem ... upset."

"I'm fine."

*But I wasn't so sure she would be if we stayed out here much longer.*

Something flickered behind Erin's gaze and she kept in her position, watching me. My stare lifted back to the stars. I was too afraid to look at her anymore. If I did, I wasn't so sure I'd be able to contain myself. I wanted to kiss her. To pin her down and have my way with her until I ripped the lust free that *she* held captive inside. Afterward ... that part scared me the most. Would I tear her to shreds, then, and eat her alive? Jesus, this wasn't right.

“We should go.”

“Go? But we just got here.”

To say I didn’t see her shaking the tiniest amount was a lie. There was nothing I missed concerning her. Not the increased pace in breathing, or the flush that was creeping into her cheeks from the combination of cold and internal heat. *Blood.*

My fist clenched and I wasn’t sure how I was still lying down. I should have bolted to a sitting position by now. Or raced down the stairs like my life depended on it, because it did. As did hers.

For the fifth time in the last minute, my eyes were sucked to the moon. “Erin?” With her name came a transition to my bones. My ribs shifted and I bit at the inside of my cheeks through the pain. Not hard enough to draw blood, but enough to make me realize I was calling out to her for something I didn’t even know.

“Alex? You don’t look so good.”

“I’m not. Have you ever wanted something so badly that it physically made you sick?” My head shook. “I mean ... do you ever miss things like this? Do you date or ever think of finding someone new since your partner died?”

The raise in her eyebrows had me regretting not leaving before. I was burying myself and sounding even more like a desperate fool. This woman had the power of the law on her side and any slip on my part would be damning for both of us. Humanity. It was going to be my downfall. My wolf I could chain up if need be. I couldn’t put a lock on my heart.

“Um ... sometimes, I guess.” Her stare intensified on mine, belying her tentative answer.

And there it was—hope, blossoming even more thanks to the lie from that glowing orb in the sky.

I rose to my elbows, pausing while I calculated her expression. She was getting ready to pull back. Her uneasiness, her walls, were rising. I was so in tune with her energy, I could feel it as if it were my own. And as if on cue, the bad part of me calculated on how to fix it.

“I miss my parents. You saying you talked to my dad really brought back the pain. Sometimes I think about calling them, but I’m not sure what I would say. I’ve intentionally avoided them for a very long time. I even ran my mom off once. I was hateful in how I went about it. Nothing can ease the guilt I feel over that.”

A softness appeared on her face and Erin moved closer to me. At revealing such a painful topic, I latched to her internal need to comfort.

“You should get in touch with them. I think mending your relationship would do both of you good. If you explained the PTSD and how you feared you’d hurt them, I think they would understand your predicament and why you chose to do what you did. You deserve some sort of happiness. Living this way, alone, can’t be satisfying for you.”

I lowered my gaze to the blanket just before her, only to return her stare.

“I can’t stand it. I know we just met, but I can’t help but feel I can be open with you. I think about them all the time. Maybe I’ll call in the next few days.”

Erin grinned, scanning my face. When her gaze dipped to my lips, it was almost impossible not to lean forward to press them into hers.

“I think that would be great. If I can do anything to help, just let me know.”

I returned her smile for only a moment before I lowered my head back to the blanket. The truth was, I had no intention of doing any of it. My parents were safer that way. PTSD wasn’t my problem, my curse was.

A yawn sounded and as I opened my mouth to ask if she was ready, alarms flared inside of me. The thud of multiple heartbeats in the distance only confirmed my suspicions. Wolves. They were coming, and fast. But, why? Were they hunting in the area? My eyes closed feeling for my connection with them. Twisting in my gut was almost immediate. *Her*. They smelled her.

“Alex, do you think—”

My hand clamped over her mouth and I shifted a good portion of my weight on top of her body, pinning her down. Erin jerked to action, grasping my wrist.

“Shh. The wolves are coming. I can hear them.”

Her eyes flared open and trembling began shaking her body.

“I’m going to try to scare them away. It’s night so they’ll be braver, but...” Shit. In this form they weren’t going to listen to me. My aura be damned, they wouldn’t give a shit. They were coming for her. I suddenly felt their need. Their desire to taste her was so strong that it triggered my own. Everything about what I was doing was suddenly different. I could feel her soft body and how hard her pulse was racing in it. Her scent mingled with her fear making my cock hard and my personality aggressive.

“Mmph.”

The word was suffocated by my tight hold over her mouth and I’d only just realized exactly how hard I was clamped to her face. I blinked rapidly, easing to just above her lips, but for the life of me I couldn’t raise my palm up far.

“My gun,” she breathed out, heavily. “If we did a warning shot, could we scare them enough to make it to the house?”

I shook my head back and forth and I tried my best not to grind myself against her.

“We’re trapped up here until they decide to leave. Nothing will be make them back down. I don’t think even I can.”

Well, I could... In wolf form I would have had them scattering, but I couldn’t do that with her here. Nor did I suddenly care to. I was getting hotter, burning for her.

“We’re safe up here though, aren’t we?”

There was a slight wiggle from Erin as she stared up at me. She wanted me off, but I wasn’t ready. Fuck, I couldn’t move.

“They can’t get up here.” My finger lowered to trace over her lips just as a twig snapped in the distance. Her head jerked to the side to try to look, but I didn’t follow her gaze. I stayed transfixed on what was before me. On what I wanted more than anything.

A gasp exploded as her head lifted and she began to try to scramble out from under me.

“Oh my God. Oh my—”

“Don’t move,” I growled, pinning her even more under me. “They know you’re here, but if you ever want them to leave, you can’t let them see you.”

“There’s so many. They’re everywhere.”

Only then did I glance into the surrounding woods. And she was right. I turned to look on both sides of us seeing movement slake in from every space possible. They kept coming. Slow, scenting for her, hunting her.

My hand lowered back over her mouth and I shook my head as if to tell her not to speak another word. She nodded, understanding, and trembling even worse beneath me. Torturous minutes passed while they gathered, but I barely even noticed. Erin’s body heat had risen. She was warmer now with me on top of her. She was softening and calming as she realized the danger wasn’t as threatening as she’d felt it was at the

beginning. Slightly, her head turned and I moved my hand from her mouth to ease down to cup to her cheek. She didn't speak, but at that point words weren't needed. How long had we been staring at each other? I couldn't remember. I knew nothing but her.

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

# Chapter 11

## Erin

What had I gotten myself into this time?

The question repeated as I kept finding myself caught in Alex's stare. I knew I should be telling him to get off of me, but I was lost in those eyes. Swirling in some gravitational abyss that held me prisoner in its timeless possession. And my eyes weren't the only thing trapped.

*Who was this man?*

Rustling below had me blinking past the pull. Hot breath brushed against my cheek as he lowered. "Don't speak a word. Don't let them hear your voice. If you do, it may excite them and keep them around even longer."

I shivered as arousal had me transitioning my breathing from my nose to my mouth. My fingertips pushed into Alex's side, hoping he'd get the hint to lift, but his weight only lowered into me even more. As if he wanted my touch as much as I wanted to hold onto him. Shit, he had to move. I already felt guilty about being here to begin with. I didn't need anything else to add to my dilemma.

Quickly, I tapped my fingers until he glanced to look down at my contact.

Up, I mouthed.

A rough shake of his head had my mouth twisting in conflict. When he started to lower again, I braced myself not to be affected by his nearness.



“I can’t get up, Erin. The less movement, the better. Unless ... you want to spend the night out here with me?”

Pressure from the tip of his nose began to trace down my face until his lips brushed against my neck. My fingers latched to his jacket while I squeezed tightly. The need to hit his side to try to get him off was there. God, I was so fucking close to attacking. It was what came natural to me concerning any sort of intimacy.

“Shh,” he breathed out, rocking against me as he moved back to my ear. “Calm. You’re putting off so much heat. You’re afraid, but you don’t have to be. I’m not going to let anything hurt you.” His fingers traveled the length of my neck to come up, only for his hand to cup my cheek. In soft caresses he tried to soothe me. What seemed like forever passed and I soon found myself leaning into his touch as it glided back and forth over my face and neck. Our breaths grew heavier and they told me everything I needed to know—that I wasn’t the only one praying deep down that something more would happen.

Random growls sounded throughout the time. All the while, he kept staring and running his fingers along my jawline and over my pulse point. It was hell and relief all at the time same. The cold began to set in after so much time passed. Even with as hot as I was on the inside, my teeth began to chatter.

“You’re cold. We need...” His head rose and he scanned the area before reaching over and very slowly lifting the blanket. Snarls were followed by a pieces of bark being clawed from the trunk. Frantically, I clutched to Alex, afraid that somehow the wolves would find their way onto the lookout.

“Up,” he said, lifting me enough to rip the blanket out from underneath me. Darkness came abruptly as he threw the fleece over his

head and closed us in. I could hear the wolves jumping and clawing at the tree.

“I want my gun,” I whispered. “Let me—”

His palm reappeared over my mouth, cutting off my words.

“They can’t get up here. Even if one did, I’d kill it before it ever got close to you. Now don’t think about them. Clear your mind and try to focus on something else.”

As he adjusted himself on top of me, I nearly cried out at his thigh wedging between mine. I froze, staring up into complete darkness. All I could feel was his breath as he hovered over me. Fingers slid into my hair on both sides of my head and I tried to figure out what was the bigger threat—Alex, or the wolves below? Was I safe from either?

“You can move now. If you say they can’t get up here, I’ll be okay.”

“Stop. Talking. You get them going every time you do. Right now, we need to focus on keeping warm. I think we still have a long way to go and it’s only getting colder. If it starts to snow like I think it might, you’re going to be happy I’m on top of you.”

Would I be? That was a stupid question. My body was so sensitive. I couldn’t even remember how long it had been since I had been so turned on. The need to move against him was hard as hell not to act on. Especially since I could feel his own reaction to our closeness. God, he was so hard. I should have been afraid of that. I should have thrown myself to the wolves and taken my chances with them. The way he was holding onto my hair was muddling my thoughts. The symbolism represented power—domination. It represented a life I hadn’t lived now for years.

At the thought, my hips arched. The small amount of friction had my hands shooting up to his sides to steady myself, again. Or to stop myself. I wasn’t sure, my mind was spinning.

“Jesus,” Alex moaned out. “You smell so fucking good.”

Smell? The odd statement registered but disappeared as his fingers tightened even more. The stinging pain brought my mouth open and I tried to hold in the whimper. It was quickly cut off by his lips crushing into mine. And fool that I was, I broke every single rule and kissed him back.

Pressure increased against my pussy, only to disappear for the smallest moment. Continually he moved against me, building me up as I fought to breathe from the heat of our bodies. At the rotation of his hips, I felt just how wet I was. The friction caused my legs to jolt and I moaned loudly into his mouth.

“Fuck, Erin.”

His cheek pressed against mine as he turned me to face outward. Teeth grazed along my throat, tugging and sucking along my sensitive skin. I couldn’t stop from clawing into his sides. I was trying anything I could to bring him closer.

One of his hands moved from my head and his arm wrapped underneath my neck, pulling me closer to him as his tongue ran the length to my ear lobe. His exhale was loud and my body tingled as I rocked against him, applying pressure to my clit.

“You don’t know what I’d do to taste more of you. I want—”

One minute I was waiting for him to continue, the next, cold air put my lungs into a shock and Alex was gone. I batted the blanket off the side of my face and barely caught the blur of his movement as he jumped over the railing of the lookout. My eyes weren’t adjusting correctly in the sudden light. As I scrambled to my feet, growls were so loud they had me racing for the edge.

“Go! Get out of here!”

Alex was nowhere to be seen. I ran to the small opening where we climbed up, only witnessing wolves standing below, staring to the side. Was he crazy? The man must have lost his fucking mind.

“You heard me. Go!”

The roar that followed was so deep that all thoughts vanished. The terror the sound instilled within didn’t touch my fear of the animals below. I had never heard anything like it before and that’s what scared me the most. The tone was almost like a frequency of its own. One a person shouldn’t have been able to hear out loud.

A small yelp sounded and some of the wolves closest to the trees began to disappear into the trees. Others backed away, slowly. They were skittish, baring their teeth as their hair stood on end. In amazement, one by one they were beginning to leave, growling as they disappeared into the darkness.

“Hurry down, Erin. They’re not going to back off for long. You’re going to get out your gun and run. I’ll be right behind you.”

Puffs of smoke from his breath appeared in the opening and I knew not to think too much over what was going to happen. If I did, fear would keep me frozen in place. I had to go. *Now.*

I went to step down, pausing at my shoes. I could run almost just as fast in heels as I could in sneakers, but not through a forest. Not even close. I’d be asking for some sort of accident if I attempted to flee wearing them.

“Erin.”

My name was ground out, full of impatience. I kicked off the heels, pulling out my weapon as I began the decent. I immediately noticed fog had crept in during our time up there. It was hard to see more than a few feet. I tried not to think of it as hands locked around my waist, pulling me off the make-shift ladder. The moment my feet hit the ground, I didn’t wait for his

order. Survival from the wolves ... possibly from him .... had me sprinting in the direction in which we came.

All of my past troubles and pain surfaced as the threat appeared from all sides. The wolves felt so near that I could almost imagine they were mere feet away, racing along the trail, hiding in the fog as Alex and I tried to escape. Hell, his presence was so engulfing behind me that I felt if I slowed down, he'd run right over me.

Foliage scraped the bottom of my feet, tearing into my stockings as I slid down the steep embankment. Pain shot through my palm as I fought not to fall, but I hardly felt it as I gained balance and continued my flight through the thick, dark haze. Within the forest, it was like running with the blanket back over my head. Branches were visible only seconds before they clawed into my face and hair.

“Faster, Erin!”

Had I thought I was pushing it as hard as I could? The command in Alex's voice sent me forward with a speed I never knew I had. His concern screamed of nightmares to come, and I didn't have to wait long before movement to my right confirmed my biggest fears. They were all around us, running and keeping pace. Growling and high pitched sounds had my chest heaving for additional oxygen. I was taking in so much that it felt like I wasn't receiving any at all. Cramping overwhelmed my lungs and just when I thought they would explode from their hard work, color appeared through the fog and weight crashed into my side, sending me flying. A scream began to break from my throat, choked off as my body crashed into the hard trunk of a tree. Air was gone, taken from my body at the brute force in which I'd hit. But I didn't get to process my flight for long. Just as I was faced with razor sharp teeth going for my throat, the wolf who intended to attack me was gone, thrown across the path.

Alex scooped me in his arms, taking off with such speed that it was as though my weight meant nothing. I held around his neck tightly, noticing there was no pounding of his footsteps. The movement of his rhythm was fluid, only breaking the smoothness when he let go of my legs long enough to knock another wolf out of the way. Their attacks were becoming more persistent. Almost desperate as we neared the hazy glow from Alex's yard.

"My gun!" The realization had me shifting my body in frantic movements, but I knew I'd dropped it when the wolf had ran into me. My eyes closed for the briefest moment, but I dismissed it immediately. I'd get it tomorrow. I wasn't risking Alex's or my life for a weapon. It wasn't worth it.

Illumination engulfed us as we broke into the clearing next to Alex's shed. Panic hit hard as he slid to a stop and turned us around. Wolves were lining along the property line, but they didn't step into his space. They just stood there, making fierce sounds and snapping in our direction.

I glanced up at Alex, more disturbed by him than by the animals who were threatening our lives. His eyes appeared lighter, almost a color my mind couldn't even define. Was it a trick of the light? There was a hardness, some sort of challenging spark deep in his stare. If I didn't know better, I'd think he was goading them. I didn't have to wait long before I was proven right.

"I want you to go get in your car and drive to your cabin. You said your gun was out there?" He paused as I gazed up at him, too shocked to answer. "Don't get out of your car when you get there. Wait for me. I'll be there shortly, and then I'll escort you inside."

"Absolutely not," I finally managed. "Have you lost your fucking mind? You can't go back into those woods. Forget the gun, let's go in your house."

Alex eased me down, grabbing my bicep and maneuvering me behind him. “Ass in the car right now, Erin. Don’t make me tell you again. If you don’t start walking, I’ll put you in there myself. ”

One of the wolves stuck his head past the line and my feet were already moving back on their own accord. Alex took a step to the side, clearly ready to do anything necessary. The protection he displayed over me, a complete stranger, had the fear subsiding and changing into something different. Something ... I couldn’t help but like.

Faster, I moved back. When my hand touched the handle, I jerked the door open, diving inside and reaching for my purse. My eyes darted up to the review mirror and my fingers stopped fumbling for the key as I realized Alex was already gone—back into the forest. My heart stopped. If something happened to him, it would be all of my fault. Jesus, what the hell had we been thinking, going into the woods at night? Never again. This place was out of control. It wasn’t normal.

My fingers connected with the keys and I jerked them out, shoving them into the ignition. Instead of driving away, I turned the car around to face the woods. The high beams gave me a view through the denseness of trees, but the fog made it hard to see anything.

“Oh, Jesus.” A tear rolled down my cheek and I furiously wiped it away as guilt nearly crippled me. What if he died? What if something happened like with Martin? I didn’t know this man. Not really, but there was some sort of spark between us. And now what if he died because he felt the need to go back and get my gun? A stupid gun!

I shouldn’t have come. Questions about my case, or an attraction, wasn’t worth causing the loss of someone’s life. Martin had gone to the store for me that day. If he hadn’t been there, he wouldn’t have been killed. Bad things always revolved around me. When was I going to learn to keep

to myself? If I just stayed away from people, no one else would get hurt. I paused as my thoughts reminded me of Alex. He was the same way with isolating himself, and the only reason I could see him going back into those woods was because of his lack of care over whether something happened to him. I softened immediately, feeling myself pull to him even more.

Minutes passed, and with them, more tears. Each second my brain convinced myself of the worst possible outcome and I couldn't bear it. The longer he was gone, the more I wanted him back. No, the more I wanted him for myself. Even though I didn't know him, I couldn't help but think that maybe I should. That maybe, we were one and the same.

The phone rested in my trembling hands and I pushed the buttons knowing that everything was over with. My career was history. A family was going to mourn the loss of their son, and his death was on me. God, he was finally going to mend their relationship and now he'd never be able to... And I'd never get to know him. This was all my fault.

A sob escaped and wiped my nose on the back of my sleeve. Just as my eyes came up, the phone dropped from my hand. The top half of Alex's body was unclothed and splattered with blood. Red smears covered his cheeks. The sight left me speechless. I wasn't sure what to think or even how to let the possibilities of what happened play out in my head. In the moment, I didn't want to. He was alive, and I wanted see for myself—up close.



# Chapter 12

## Alex

The exhilaration coursing through my veins was out of this world. The taste of blood in my mouth combined with the wolves I'd just fought made me feel alive. And dangerous. I wanted to keep going. I wanted to be one with my beast, longer. If what remained of the pack hadn't scattered with their tails between their legs, I would have gotten to. But they knew better. Although I hadn't transitioned into wolf form completely, my creature had been every bit in the forefront as I'd torn them to shreds with my bare hands and teeth. Fuck, I wanted more. I wanted...

Light filled the interior of the car as I pulled the door open and climbed in. Erin's arousal perfumed the air and one look at her was enough to paint the world red. I could have conquered a million packs merely with her need of me. It unleashed the monster inside, twisting him into some voracious fiend. My wolf looked at her like a poor man greedy for gold. He wanted his prize. His reward for obliterating what had been a threat to her.

"Drive."

The raspy word had her hands pausing mid-way to touch me. I had no intention of starting this here in her car. My focus was on one thing only, and soon she'd find out. There was no stopping me now. The blood of killers were inside of me, mingling with my own. Even if I wanted to stop my intentions, the direction of the night was already set in stone. Humanity was all but gone.

The high beams cut through the trees as she turned the car around and headed in the direction of her home. With as much as she kept turning to look at me, I couldn't return her stare. My sight was too keen. That only meant one thing—wolf eyes. She'd see the difference in not only the color, but the shape of my pupil if she stared at me long enough. It wasn't quite like a human's. Not circular, but oval. Smaller. The size allowed me to see in the darkest night, not to mention the slightest change in my surroundings. I was the ultimate hunter. Nothing would escape me if I put my mind to it. Tonight, it'd be here, with her. Whether I killed her or not wasn't even on my mind. Sex. Her taste. It ruled me in the moment.

The gun made a thud as I placed it in the cup holder. Erin glanced down at it, but continued to study me. A water sat in the other cup holder and I grabbed it, taking deep gulps as I counted the rise and fall of her chest from my peripheral.

“What happened back there? How did you...?”

The car dipped as the elevation dropped the slightest amount. Her cabin wasn't far ahead. I cleared my throat, trying to push the thickness of my wolf back enough to talk.

“I got your gun back.”

She paused. “I know that, but how? There were so many of them. How are you alive right now?”

I licked my lips feeling excitement spark at her pulling up to park. “Death doesn't scare me, nor do the ones who try to bring it.” I glanced in her direction, but turned away just as fast. “The wolves here share the same mentality. They have a respect for what they can't kill. I've battled this pack for years. Although ... I've never seen them act so aggressive. It's you,” I said, taking her in for a few seconds. “You've somehow caught their attention and until they tire of their game or they kill you, they'll continue.”

Erin's scent grew stronger, peaking in different directions as her emotions changed. It almost made me want to smile. It was ecstasy for my bad side, but I was far from done.

"Don't fear, though," I said, turning and wrapping my hand around the back of her neck to bring her to me. "I already told you I wouldn't let them hurt you. You believe me, don't you?"

A ragged breath brushed against my lips, increasing my eagerness. My eyes closed and I put my forehead against hers. We were so close, and she belonged to *me*.

"Yes."

My lips brushed hers. "Good. Let's get you inside."

I broke away, pushing the door open. Erin grabbed her gun and climbed out, heading toward the house. I scanned the area around us and then moved in close, zeroing in on her movements. The moment she unlocked the door, I swept her in, shutting it behind us. I had her crashing into my body before she could so much as prepare. My lips connected with hers hungrily and I gripped her ass, heading toward her room at a fast pace.

There was a moment of hesitation on her part, but I felt her surrender as I broke through her threshold. The mattress bounced under our weight and I grabbed her wrists, pinning her arms down from trying to flatten against my chest. My mouth moved down to her neck and I sucked the soft skin in hard, becoming intoxicated with her taste the moment it registered on my tongue.

"Wait," she moaned.

One of my hands let go and I yanked at the front of her blouse sending buttons popping free. Her words were unimportant in my impatience. My suction eased and I made a path with my tongue down to

her chest, squeezing her breast as my teeth teasingly bit into the plump flesh.

“Oh, God.” Her head lifted to watch, but fell back as she arched against the pressure I applied against her pussy. She smelled so sweet in her passion. So unbelievably so, that it was mind-altering. I could feel myself disappearing all over again. All I was beginning to experience was what my actions were bringing. No thoughts were breaking through. She controlled every single one with her essence. The more it perfumed the room, the more it drove me.

Lower, I moved, holding tighter to her wrist as she began to rock in earnest. Her need was mine and we were both caught in a moment that I prayed would never end—a moment I was going to make sure wouldn’t.

I grabbed the blouse, shredding it in half. Erin, blinked rapidly, but wasn’t able to say a single thing before I had her arms in my hold. I spun her on her stomach, tightening one of the lengths around her wrists before moving the other piece of silk to fit in her opened mouth. She was about to abject, ready to shut this down. Her small thrash and energy told me so, but I wasn’t going to let her push me away. Not now.

“I bet you taste sweeter than you smell.” I fisted the tie, spinning her to lie on her back again. Panicked eyes stared up at me, conflicted, but I couldn’t look at her. Not only because my wolf was still there, but because I couldn’t face morality at the moment. The old me would have been appalled at my behavior, but the new me wasn’t going to contemplate right or wrong. She still wanted me to a degree and I was about to have her on fire, *crying* for more.

Sounds left her as I began kissing and sucking down her stomach. In hard tugs, I unfastened her slacks and lowered the zipper. As the fabric arched through the air and hit the floor behind me, my whole body locked

up. Liquid fire scorched the inside of my nose and throat and my knees collapsed to the floor, bringing my face even with her white cotton panties. I was gone, done for, at the intensity of the scent I had killed for.

My hands locked around her hips, pulling her ass to the edge of the mattress. When my tongue flattened over the surface of her inner thigh and began to work its way toward the lining of her panties, Erin thrashed. It contrasted with the way her heel stopped on my back and began to push me forward. Her internal battles may have been raging, but I could sense her urging me on. Besides ... stopping now wasn't going to happen. I was so close to what I was yearning for.

The tips of my fingers pushed into her lower stomach as I moved in the rest of the way. My lips opened and I placed my mouth over where her clit was, sucking through the panties to make her even wetter. A loud moan muffled against the gag and I lowered enough to push right over her opening. The hint of my prize had my wolf pounding my insides in victory.

"Mmmmmph." The long drawn out word didn't make sense and I didn't care to figure it out. I lapped over her guarded, most intimate area, and went back for more. I sucked against the fabric—lost in the emotional ecstasy that overwhelmed me. Erin wiggled, but I held her secure as I used my teeth to move the barrier over to the side. My tongue was already pushing into her entrance, needing to taste even more of who she was. The wave of heat that followed was just as scorching as when I'd taken off her pants. My skin became enflamed as if I had a fever and it was only rising with each pump of her hips.

Wetness flourished under my thrusting, filling me with a crazed sense of satisfaction. I stayed zeroed in on my movements and how she responded to them. When I pulled off her panties and swept my tongue to flick over her clit, the spasms were automatic. Erin's legs jerked, only to

spread wider and wrap around me, pulling me in as I plunged back into her channel. The sweetness of her cum sent my pulse spiking in a frantic cadence. A sound of pain left me and I couldn't break away to reach for the cracking along my side.

Fuck this was bad. The following twinges cleared the fog of what was happening, but not for long. I was standing and spinning her back over to her stomach as I fumbled with my pants. More sounds came and the fear she suddenly threw off had me diving forward to cover her. Slowly, I kicked the pants off, rubbing my nose along the side of her face while she began to calm.

"Spread your legs for me, baby." I was already holding my thick length, tracing the head of my cock over her wet slit as I brought back her arousal. Erin hesitated before she eased open another few inches.

"After tonight, you're not going to want to be without this. You and I share something. Something we don't even understand. I know you feel it."

My arm looped under and across her chest, holding tightly to her shoulder while I denied my need to rush. I eased a finger deep inside of her pussy. The way her entrance hugged to the digit had me clenching my jaw as I rubbed her insides with my thrusts. When I slid in another, stretching her, continuous sounds filled the room. My pace grew faster, the impatience testing every limit I had.

"Feels good, doesn't it?" I removed my fingers, sucking her juices clean. I immediately went back for more. With each sample, it became even harder to hold back. But for both of us. She was crying out. Begging me for more with her sounds.

I slid my arm down to hook on her hips as I lifted her to her knees. When her head rose, I pushed it back to the mattress.

“Shh,” I breathed out, positioning myself behind her. Her pussy was beautiful, calling me in as I stared at the way she was spread wide.

I gripped around the base of my cock, going back to rub the head along the wetness covering her folds. The tip dipped into her entrance, but I didn’t plunge forward like I wanted. I continued the up and down rhythm until my cock was aching in agony. Only then did I inch into her tight channel. Something between a moan and groan tore from her throat and I held to the pleasure and pain of how perfect she was, enveloping me. She was so Goddamn tight that it was a glorious torture.

“*Fuuuck.*” I withdrew the head, pushing further as she tried to spread her legs even more. Her hips arched and I pushed even further. My fingers laced in her hair and I held to her as I pulled back and buried myself completely. The warmth and pulsing of her channel had me holding still inside of her. I had to remember this exact feeling. *Our first time.*

“No,” I said, yanking her hair tighter. “Don’t move.”

The hum of her voice had me reaching forward in a daze to pull down the gag. Heavy breaths followed.

“I don’t want you to stop. Please.”

“Oh, I’m not stopping. We’re only just beginning.” I leaned forward, placing my palm between her shoulder blades, keeping her still as I started slow thrusts. My other hand reached underneath her and in the same leisurely pace, I rubbed over her folds.

“You wanted me to stop at first, didn’t you?”

Erin’s fingers flexed against my stomach and she nodded through her soft cries.

“I didn’t stop though, did I? I knew what you wanted. What you *needed*. God, you don’t know fucking hot you make me.” I slammed my

cock into her hard, causing her to cry out. Wetness flourished even more and I withdrew, only to plunge even deeper.

“Alex.”

“Say it again.” My fingertips pushed into the softness of her back, testing the feel. I eased, only to squeeze into her flesh harder as my thrusts increased.

“Alex.”

“Again,” I nearly yelled.

“Alex!” Her scream came the moment I slammed into her. Her pussy clenched around me like a vice and I knew she was close. I locked both of my arms around her chest as I lifted us to our knees.

“You’re going to want to come again soon, but you’re not going to. You’re going to wait until I say. I want to taste you again. I want what’s mine.”

One of my hands settled on her shoulder, easing her forward, while the other continued to work over her clit. Without her hands free, Erin’s balance was under my control. Everything about what was happen was because of me. She lived because I said so, she came because I made it happen... Power. It was vital in my moment and I missed *nothing*.

“Alex?”

I pumped into her hard, ignoring her uncertainty. She had her order and she’d obey it. It was ingrained in who she was. I sensed it.

My cock thickened, but I held off the need to release, dragging it out for minutes. Half an hour. Longer. I pushed her to the far reaches of what she was capable of. Tears fell to the comforter and her pussy was so tight around me. I knew the small movement of my fingers was going to bring on her orgasm.

“Ask my permission. I want to hear you say it.”



A sob echoed around the room and dark hair hung around her as she looked back at me through the strands. The sway from my hard pounding burned the vision into my mind, making time our own.

“May I come, please?” she whispered through trembling lips.

I pulled out, letting her fall forward as I buried my face in her pussy. The orgasm was immediate. She thrashed, crying out, wave after wave as her release coated my mouth. The animal in me roared and I barely recalled spinning her on her back and tearing off her bra. Her breasts swayed at the force and I was suddenly filling her again, thrusting so hard that her screams overpowered the pulse I’d spent the entire time listening to. I knew I needed to slow down. Knew I was hurting her, but I couldn’t stop. My monster drove me harder. So much so that her sob grated through my humanity, making it flare. Making me realize how far I’d gone.

Shame still didn’t stop me. And deep down, I did feel shame. I was terrified of what I was doing, regardless that my wolf continued greedily. I was out of control, and for the life of me I couldn’t regain power. I pounded into her viciously while visions blinded me of my teeth biting into the junction of her neck. It was clear I was the dominant one, *but I wanted more*. To prove to her that she was mine and I was never going to let her go. *Ever*. I was teetering on a dangerous cliff I was petrified of falling over. And if this continued between us, at some point I would.

“Alex!”

Erin’s voice calling out had me blinking through the darkness within. Flickers of sanity appeared, but they didn’t last as one word repeated like a broken record in my head. *MINE*.

I lowered, locking my fingers back through her hair, and grinding into her pussy, deep. Her lips parted and she gasped as I let my cum shoot inside of her. There was only reason behind my action. Even though I

couldn't be with her, the wolves would know who she belonged to. My scent would carry and the consequences would be obvious. I would kill them if they messed with what was mine. Fuck, I'd mutilate anyone who got too close. *I'd kill them all.*

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

# Wolf

*I stayed in a constant state of one with the elements around me. The ground I crouched upon, the trees that rustled above, the wolves that always kept close to my side—our energy remained merged, feeding and torturing my monster with the flow of life. It mingled with the fury that pulsed through my veins until I nearly howled in my longing to bring death.*

*Dark hair blew back from the wind and as I stared at the woman getting into her car, I couldn't exactly remember why I was watching her. The desire for her blood was strong, but so was the need to destroy the man hiding a few hundred feet off to my side.*

*I'd been here before. Numerous times—days—weeks? Everything was a blur as I focused on the woman's face. Seconds went by, and memories began flooding in. I was suddenly able to place the investigator and Alex, even though I knew the recollection wouldn't last long.*

*A malicious smile pulled at my lips and my human form began to crawl along the earth. My fingers dug into the damp dirt while I snapped at one of the wolves who got too close. Alex, the one like me, he was always within proximity to the woman. Day or night, it didn't matter. He remained in the shadows, stalking the human I wanted—while I stalked him.*

*His aura was overwhelming. Too strong and protective for the liking of my beast. It kept me cautious as I pushed deeper in the woods, watching, manipulating ways to make him disappear. Hate and jealousy at the intimacy they had shared returned to my memory. I could still see them on the lookout. Still smell her arousal as if it were me causing it. But I hadn't—he had. And even the damned wolves who I led couldn't kill him.*

*My eyes cut up and I growled as Alex ran off to catch up with her. Drool trailed down my chin and the corrupt cravings pushed back through, throwing off my focus to follow him. Pure blood—my blood—called for me. It was almost time.*

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

# Chapter 13

## Erin

I walked the fine line of regret. The emotion was something I never tried to sway toward, but I wasn't sure what to do or what was happening between me and Alex. I thought our night together had been amazing. He'd done things to me that I didn't think I'd ever forget. But it must not have been the same for him. Weeks had gone by since we'd spent the night together and I hadn't seen him since. Well, I had seen him, but I hadn't spoken to him.

He was *everywhere*—like a ghost. One I couldn't get rid of or communicate with. He was in the distance around the homes I investigated, and along my property line. The moment I saw him or looked twice, he'd disappear. Even stopping by his home to see what the hell was going on didn't work. He wouldn't open the door. When I found it unlocked, he was nowhere to be found. It drove me crazy. The only reason I knew I wasn't losing my mind was because he'd mentioned keeping an eye on me. He'd warned me he'd watch over me, and damned if I had taken him serious at the time.

I took a sip of the water provided by Mr. Dennis and glanced between him and his wife. They weren't being helpful. Hell, they'd almost not even let me in. This was my third attempt in trying to speak with them and they had finally broken down when they realized I wasn't giving up. It was further than I'd gotten with anyone else. All I could do was bury myself in my work since Alex wasn't around, but it was for nothing. No one

wanted to talk. It didn't matter how many times I'd show up or try to convince them I was here to help, they were uncommunicative. In short, I was getting nowhere, and I wasn't sure how much longer this could go on.

"So you never saw anything suspicious in this town or the woods around the time of any of the attacks?"

They looked at each other and both of them shook their heads.

"What about gossip? Have you heard any stories that might have stuck out as odd to you?"

Mr. Dennis pressed his lips together and did a quick shake. "Nope. I'm afraid not."

"Alright. I'll be blunt." My temper sparked and I picked up the folder from the table. "What about the wolves here in town? Have you noticed them acting braver than usual? What about werewolves? Heard any stories of those in the last, hmm, let's say forty years?"

The couple were older, maybe in their late fifties.

"Ms. Billings, I'm sorry, but we can't help you. We know nothing."

"Then tell me, Mr. Dennis. What killed off your cows? I'd suggest that maybe it was the savage pack you have in this town, and don't get me wrong, I'm not an expert, but the last I heard, wolves' nails aren't as thick as the ones that tore the hide right off your prize bull. Do you want this to continue? Do you want someone else to die because you can't be honest by supplying a simple theory? Help me," I stressed. "Help me figure out what is happening to the livestock and people that inhabit this town."

I was damn near yelling by the time I finished. I adjusted on the sofa, not all able to push Alex from my mind. God, was it all just a dream? If it wasn't for the new bruises or discomfort I had had during the days following, I may have convinced myself that I'd invented the whole thing up.

“I’m sorry. Clearly we’re wasting each other’s time.” I stood, watching as Mrs. Dennis jumped to her feet.

“We don’t know what it is,” she rushed out.

“Rose!”

“Don’t you ‘Rose’ me,” she said, glaring at her husband. “I’m tired of living in fear.” She gestured to me. “Please sit, Ms. Billings.”

I didn’t argue or say a word as I complied.

“The story of werewolves—”

“Rose,” he hissed.

“The story of werewolves,” she continued, “goes back as far as I can remember. I was a child the first time mother mentioned it as she ushered us inside just before dark. We were raised not to go out after sunset. And full moons...” she shuddered, wrapping her arms around her stomach.

“Whether it’s coincidence or not, something almost *always* ends up dead on a full moon. Now, werewolf, I don’t know. I can tell you one thing...” she glanced at her husband before turning back to me. “Whatever it is, it’s big and deadly, and I don’t want any part of it.”

My head nodded and although I felt happy that someone had actually given me their thoughts, it still didn’t help. I knew nothing more than when I had come.

“Thank you.” I grabbed out one of my cards. “Please, if you can remember anything else, or something happens, contact me. I can be over in a matter of minutes.”

I stood and they followed, escorting me out. I didn’t make it two steps before snow began to fall. The ground was already covered in a layer of the stuff and now it looked like there would be more. *Shit.*

My eyes scanned the area, looking for Alex as I headed for my car. When there was no sign of him, I pulled out and took off down the road.

His truck was at the stop sign ahead and I cursed under my breath, stepping on the gas.

I slammed my hand into the horn, pushing the car even faster when he turned onto the main road. Within seconds I was at the stop sign, turning to catch up with him. He didn't seem to be in a hurry. I caught up, following as he turned on the dirt road that led to both of our cabins. When he headed toward mine, I tried to slow the adrenaline. Anger didn't compare to what I felt. I was desperate. And the following me around... That only made everything worse. His constant presence wouldn't let me forget. My body stilled burned for him and every day the need grew.

The truck pulled off to the side of the main parking and I moved in beside him, slamming the car in park. I was out before he so much as rolled down his window. As I approached, he stared ahead, a hard look on his face.

“Roll it down.”

I didn't knock on the window like I wanted. I knew he heard me.

Slowly, he cranked it down.

“What are you *doing*? You can't just disappear and then follow me around like some ... stalker.”

Alex glanced over, turning to face the front again. “I told you I would. Just because its daytime doesn't mean you're safe.”

My lips separated and I shook my head, confused. “Safe? From what, the wolves? I haven't seen a single one since you ran them off.”

“They're worse than ever. Just because you don't see them doesn't mean they're not there.”

I pressed my lips together, hating what I was about to say. It made me feel vulnerable, and his rejection brought on pain I wasn't used to.



“Alex. What the hell happened? I didn’t think anything more would occur between us, but a simple goodbye when you left would have sufficed. Following me around, but avoiding me... I’m so confused. If you regret what happened, just say so.”

His head lowered and I watched his jaw repeatedly tighten. “Regret? I don’t regret it at all.” He grew silent and time stretched as the snow began to soak through my hair. I wanted to yell at him to talk to me. To say something. Luckily, he continued before I made things worse. “That was the best night of my life, Erin. I know that probably sounds stupid to you, but it’s the truth. I haven’t been with a woman since before...” he trailed off, angrily tossing his ball cap on the dash to run his fingers through his hair. “It was amazing. Too good. But I got out of hand. I want more. I want...” He pinned me with a stare and I couldn’t stop the gasp. The golden color I’d seen before was so prominent that it took my breath away.

“Get inside,” he growled. “I want to be sure you make it in safely.”

He was already turned away, already staring ahead. I noticed his knuckles were white as he went back to holding the steering wheel.

“Alex, look at me.”

“Inside.”

“I will not go until you look at me,” I exploded.

“That’s it.”

The engine to the truck died and I stepped out of the way as he threw the door open and got out. His steps were fast, but I managed to duck and side-step out of his reach as he lunged forward.

“Erin, this isn’t a joke. Get inside.”

“Or what? You’re going to make me?”

“It’ll be dark soon. I don’t want you out here.”

I laughed, maneuvering just out of his reach for the second time. “Oh, that’s right, because tomorrow is the full moon and it’s supposed to be just as dangerous tonight as it will be then.”

“Laugh all you want. I don’t think you’ll be laughing when that sun sets tomorrow.”

My eyebrows drew in and I paused just a little too long. Alex’s arm swept around my waist and he was rushing us to the cabin at a swift pace.

“What do you mean by that?” I struggled to get down, but his grip was too secure. The door knob caught in his hand and he let out a threatening sound as he lowered me.

“Unlock it.”

“Answer me. What do mean, I won’t be laughing? Do you really think something will happen this time, or are you speculating? Because last time, no one told me anything happened. As far as I know, it was a peaceful fucking night. I wanted to ask you if you heard anything, but you were nowhere to be found.”

A sigh came from his mouth and he turned, scanning the woods to the side of us.

“There’s no telling if something will happen or not, but you’re not going to risk it. You,” he said, reaching into the pockets of my tan slacks, “are going to be locked away inside of this cabin. You are not going to take a step out of here no matter what.”

I stepped back, dislodging his hand. “The keys are in my purse, in the car.”

Alex took off jogging and I glanced behind me, scanning the darkness within the trees. It was getting late. Soon, it’d be dark and I’d have to hear the damn howling again. I didn’t want to admit it to Alex, but I knew the wolves were there. I could hear them howling at odd times. I had

thought for a while that they'd gone away, but the last week it had started up again.

Alex reappeared, handing over my purse. I grabbed out the keys, unlocking the door so we could both go in. But he didn't come. He stood in the doorway with his head down. Snowflakes were settling on his hair and I bit my lip so as not to reach forward to brush them free. It killed me that he was clearly so upset and he wouldn't tell me his thoughts.

"O-kay..." I dragged out the word, gripping the edge of the door. "I guess you're not coming in."

"I," he paused. "Can't."

His voice was so low I could barely hear him.

"Why can't you?"

"You don't understand."

"So *tell me* and then I will."

He took a step back, putting more distance between us. "I can't do that either. Lock your door. Both locks. Whatever you do, don't answer it. Not to anyone. Not tonight and sure as fuck not tomorrow. Do like you did the last full moon and stay indoors." His jaw started clenching again and his features drew in as he continued to stare at the ground. "I help a man with his cattle in the next town over. He's pretty close to the border and they've been attacked before. I'll be back late Friday night so I won't be here, but you have to promise me that you'll listen to what I'm saying."

I could tell he didn't want to go. The emotions he displayed had my fingers twitching. If I could just touch him. Comfort him any way that I could. "Okay. I promise."

Alex peeked up, giving me a glimpse of his eyes again. With as much as I wanted to stare into them, he didn't give me time.

“You have no idea how much I’ve hated staying away from you. I don’t want to. I can’t stand it and ... I think if you thought that I didn’t care.... Just know that it’s not you, it’s me.”

Only then did he meet my gaze. There was such sadness, such heartbreaking loneliness that I suddenly knew what it was. I had suspected before, but now it was obvious. “You don’t have to push me away, Alex. I know you’re afraid of your PTSD, but I’m not scared. I want to spend time with you. I ... *like you*. I like you a lot. Maybe a little too much,” I breathed out.

He stepped forward at quick pace, wrapping his arm around me and pulling me into his hard body. “Dammit, Erin. You weren’t supposed to say that.” His lips pressed to the top of my head. “I like you more. Too much, too.”

In that moment, I could have melted. I’d missed his smell. Missed everything about the way he felt against me. That night we spent together had changed something inside of me. After the guilt surfaced, it didn’t stay. Even regret wouldn’t sink in all the way. I just couldn’t help the feelings he brought out in me.

“I shouldn’t ...” He got quiet, groaning and holding me to him tighter. “I want to do dinner again on Friday night. You and me.”

“Really?”

“I can’t stay away much longer. I just can’t. Friday.”

Before I could say any more, he kissed me. It was light and quick, but the contact alone stirred strong emotions. It left me blinking through the confusion that swamped me as he let go and hurried away. I couldn’t stand how he’d isolated himself again. I knew it had to do with his condition and I hadn’t wanted him to endure that kind of pain when I was more than willing to be there for him. I also knew, I wouldn’t be here forever. Maybe

not even much longer. The realization was hard to face, but I couldn't help but want to see where this could go. He had a fire inside of him that called to me. For the first time in forever, I didn't want to consider the consequences. I just wanted to burn.

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

# Chapter 14

## Alex

There were moments throughout my life that I thought things could never get harder or more complicated. But they always did. I'd get through one hurdle, only for another to come barreling along. I finally thought things were going to get better for me, until Erin showed up.

What do you do when what you wanted most was the same thing your evil side yearned for?

I only knew one thing and that was what my heart told me. *You do what is best for the person involved.*

Staying away from Erin was the hardest thing I had ever done up to this point. Even though I saw her every day and watched her every night *for weeks*, it wasn't enough to keep me or my wolf content. We both craved her interaction, the taste of her skin. I was lost, yet finally found. Every day was harder than the next. Seeing her smile. Seeing her upset. It pained every bit of the man I was. No, the man I knew I could be, if only given the chance. But I wouldn't allow him happiness if it meant my wolf would destroy it. *But would he?* And should I be denied what I wanted if Erin obviously wanted it to? Fuck, I had tried to so hard and it was all for nothing.

I was weak. There was no other excuse. I knew the chances and I'd poured my bleeding feelings out to her and she'd confirmed her own damnation by admitting she liked me back. And I had caved—letting myself invited her back into my life. Back for dinner. Jesus, help me, I was a horrible person to not put her safety above my own greed.

My head shook as I squeezed into the steering wheel. It was done. There was no going back now. Even as I had sat outside of her house last night, watching the perimeter, I couldn't deny the truth—I couldn't be without her. Not her presence, or her attention. I needed her with me. *All of her*. Whatever that meant, I'd have to face when the time came.

As for the rest....

I let the information I'd collected over the last few weeks filter through. Aside from the wolves stalking the forest by Erin's home, I never let them get close enough to breach her property line. They knew I was there and they weren't stupid enough to get within distance when it was so close to the full moon. But what would happen tonight when I wasn't present to make sure?

It scared the hell out of me. It made my wolf even more violent, which convinced me without a doubt that I needed to lock myself away. I didn't want to, but I knew if she saw me in this state or if I had access to her, she might end up dead anyway. It'd been so fucking hard to restrain myself the first full moon. Especially after having her, but by some miracle at the last minute, I'd set the lock. Tonight, I was asking for trouble if I didn't follow through with my plan.

As for going out of town for my job, Erin would never know the difference. If she came looking for me, she'd wouldn't find where I was hidden.

The story I told her was easy enough to stage. Even now as I drove, I couldn't help but think how perfect this set up could be.

My dad's hunting land on the outskirts gave me the perfect place to park my truck. The woods led all the way back home and I could easily slip into my cage without her knowing the difference. I'd still be close enough to appease my wolf through the change. It worked.

Sweat poured down my face and neck as I told myself this was how it had to be. It just was. I pulled at my shirt even as my wolf said it could be different. He just wanted her. The need to kill her wasn't priority, but I refused to believe him. He wasn't to be trusted any more than the pack that had their sights set on Erin. It only took a split second for things to change. Giving in wasn't worth it. Maybe in time, but that was yet to be seen.

A tremor raced down my side and I cursed through the stubbornness of my wolf. It wasn't even dark yet and he was already fighting to get back to her. A car passed and I slowed as my turn approached. The drive had only been a good ten minutes, but it felt as if I'd been driving forever. The running would help. There, I wouldn't be contained. But being caged was coming. I knew it and that's what made this even harder.

The dirt road appeared that led to my father's land. It made my skin crawl even more being so close to the scene of my own near-death experience. This was the second time I'd been here since the attack and I couldn't help but wonder if my father came out here anymore? I doubted it. I was half surprised he hadn't sold the acreage just to get rid of any reminders of me.

"Shit." I let out a deep breath as my thoughts were disrupted at the sight of crosses sitting next to the gate. They hadn't been there before. Fuck, I didn't want to be here. My eyes searched the path that went ahead and I swallowed past the apprehension that someone might be here. Had I thought this was the perfect plan?

I climbed out of the truck cautiously, removing the hidden key my dad had yet to take back. The lock opened in my palm and I swung the gate wide, driving my truck in before re-securing it behind me. The quarter mile to the clearing had my heart racing even faster. There were no vehicles



within sight and they *would* have parked here. The crosses had to have come within the last week.

I pulled deep in the trees, not bothering to lock my doors before I shoved my keys in my pocket. My eyes went right, to where the attack occurred. Nausea roiled in my gut and I took off in a sprint. The cold air against my face helped, but with the amount of heat against my back, I could have believed my demons were truly chasing me. I couldn't get away from the area fast enough.

The incline came and went and I kept pushing myself harder until I wound down by the river. I could follow it all the way to my house. No one lived between here and there. The occasional fisherman were out and about, but I didn't expect anyone to be today. Not when they knew what would come once the sun went down.

Pants escaped my mouth and I continued on, lost in thoughts of Erin and our upcoming dinner ... and of a future I shouldn't be considering. It wasn't like she'd stay, but if she did, what would she be like in everyday life to live with? Did she ever take time off from burying herself in cases? What were her interests or hobbies? Did she want to get married and have children? She'd been engaged before, so marriage obviously hadn't been too off-putting to her, but things had changed when she lost Martin. It was obvious how tough she was. Was she open to it anymore?

Stupid question. Like I should even be thinking that route. It was way too early. Besides, it was impossible. What was I going to do, park at my dad's land every freaking month and build a cage out here? I couldn't keep going back to my place with her inside. She'd catch me at some point. As for a family, I couldn't risk attempting that one. There was no telling what would happen if...

My feet slowed as nausea hit me harder. I hadn't used protection with her. Surely, she was on something. She would have said otherwise that night, wouldn't she have? God, I was the most irresponsible person in the world. I knew she couldn't turn into a werewolf while I was in human form, but I never considered pregnancy. No.... Erin was responsible. She'd be on something.

Pain bit into the back of my thigh and I jerked to a stop, turning to look down at the stinging sensation. My eyes widened in panic at the sight of the dart sticking out from my jeans. My legs were already going numb and tingling from whatever poison was being emitted into my system.

*You're going to be okay. It won't hurt you. You're a—*

Thoughts faded and my eyes rolled as I felt myself sway. I was going down. Somehow in my mind I knew that. I hit the ground hard, only knowing I connected because of the air locking in my chest from the impact. Even as the footsteps approached, I couldn't open my lids to see who was standing near me. Smell wouldn't even register. I waited for them to speak. To say something. Before they managed a word ... darkness.

\*\*\*\*\*

“No!”

My eyes jerked open at the cracking I could feel jolting my limbs. Heat blazed over the surface of my skin and I clawed down my neck and chest as my bones shifted and snapped. Tears rolled free from my eyes due to the pain, but I somehow managed to push myself to my knees as the twinges raced through me like electrical currents.

Fuck, I had to get out of here. I had to lock myself away before I hurt Erin or someone else.

Blindly, I removed the dart, glancing into the night sky as I tried to gauge the time. It was late. Seven-ish? Eight? Shit, I didn't know. My wolf was howling inside of me, ready to be set free in the one place he'd longed for for years. He felt freedom within grasp and he was ready to take it for all it was worth.

Vertigo had me stumbling to the left as I tried to stand. Again, my body seized through the adjustments, causing me to yell out in agony. This wasn't happening. This *couldn't* happen! Who the fuck had shot me and just left me on my own?

The questions came, but an answer didn't as I staggered forward. My mouth was so dry that I could barely swallow. What the hell had been on that dart? I'd swallowed a bottle of pills and didn't even pass out. Whatever the person had given me was strong. Too strong to get over the counter somewhere.

My hand lifted to rub my eyes to try to bring them into focus, but halfway up, the pain crippled me. I hit the ground again, rolling as the bones in my face moved under my skin. With the transition, it was a domino effect. *I was done for*. There was no stopping me now. My wolf was coming and it had every intention of going after only one person.

I'd kill tonight. I knew that in the very bones that were getting me ready for her.

A deep yell turned into a growl as I felt the thrashing that was common with my change. My back bowed against the earth and the material of my clothes shredded loudly to my sensitive ears. Erin's name was repeating in my head, making me deaf to everything but the identification of my prey. Over and over the mantra looped until the torment stopped. And just like that, the world went silent.

# Chapter 15

## Erin

The hysterical cries of Mrs. Morrison echoed through the home, knotting my stomach as I took in the other two sets of parents present. I had promised Alex I wouldn't leave the cabin and although I had every intention of staying locked inside for my own safety, I never expected to get a call from Gregory Morrison. He was frantic, yelling and sobbing over the phone about their youngest son not making it home from his trip to the store with his friends. He was supposed to be home before dark, but it was a good hour after sunset and he was nowhere to be found.

"Please calm, everyone," I said, softly. "The sheriff is out looking for them, as is Detective Perkins. I'm sure the boys just got sidetracked and will be coming back any minute now."

"You don't understand," Kitty cried out. "James knows better. He knows to be inside the house before sunset. He knows," she repeated, breaking down even more.

"So does, Riley," another woman called out. "Something's not right. He wouldn't have wanted to upset me and his father this way."

My fists flexed as I glanced at the clock. For not believing in silly things like werewolves, I still couldn't shake the feeling as though something bad was going to happen. Maybe it was the vibes I was getting from everyone, or how genuine their fear was. All I knew was that my instincts were flaring, and I'd made sure to bring my weapon and plenty of ammunition.

“Dustin wouldn’t have done this either,” Megan Pratts said, wrapping her arms around her husband’s waiting form.

All three couples were upset and I felt helpless as I stood, waiting. The boys were young. Two were thirteen while the oldest boy, Riley, was fourteen. From what I gathered from all the parents, walking to the local convenience store was something they did out of boredom. They’d buy a bag of chips, maybe some candy. This trip had started off just like any other. Now they were missing. I’d seen it before. Too many times. The only difference was the identity of the killer and the fact that all three were missing. Whether this attacker was man or animal, I wasn’t sure, but I was leaning more toward animal now that I’d actually met someone who’d been attacked by this thing. *Alex.*

I turned, pulling out my phone and walking deeper into the living room. Another sob echoed in the background and Mrs. Pratts hugged tighter to her husband. I pushed in Detective Perkin’s number and waited as it began to ring. When he didn’t answer, I tried to stop the anger that flared. Dammit, I missed being a detective sometimes. I liked the steady stream of action. The scenes were hard at times, but I got satisfaction in solving cases and putting the bad guys away. Now I couldn’t necessarily do that. Sure, I solved cases, but not the way I loved. I felt helpless.

My phone rang and I hit the button.

“Investigator Billings, you called?”

Relief flooded me at the detective’s voice.

“Yes, I was wondering if you’d come across the kids, yet? Their parents are extremely upset,” I said lowly.

“Nothing yet, but we’re looking. It’s only a mile and a half walk from the store and back. Mr. Morrison said they always stayed on the main

road to avoid the woods. There's not a soul in sight anywhere that I've seen. This place looks like a ghost town."

I heard the way his voice grew quieter toward the end. I glanced over at the parents again before looking back down at the floor.

"Can I help with anything?"

"Are you hinting to ride with me?"

I frowned. "Yes. Maybe if we both keep our eyes out, we'll find something."

There was a moment of silence before he continued. "I'm actually right down the road. I'll come get you. Give me about two minutes."

"Thank you."

I hung up, grabbing my purse to sling over my shoulder. I was glad I was wearing jeans and a sweater. With my boots, I wouldn't have to worry about heels if something did go wrong. And fuck if I couldn't shake the feeling like all hell was about to break loose.

"You leaving?"

Gregory stepped away from Kitty as he began to walk over.

"Yes. Detective Perkins is coming to pick me up. We're going to drive around and look for them. Two sets of eyes are better than one."

"Morton is somewhere looking, too. I tried to stop him, but he was already out with friends. He wouldn't listen to me. If you see him, will you tell him to get home?"

"I'll be sure to pass the word along." The last thing we needed was a group of untrained young men, gung-ho and on some mission to stop some sort of creature that was so skilled in killing.

I walked out of the door, just as headlights broke into the driveway. I jogged toward the car, climbing into the passenger side. Detective Perkin's had dark circles under his eyes and his face was pale. He let out a cough

and I cringed. “You’re sick.” It wasn’t a question, but a statement. He looked like shit.

“Just a cold. Best keep your distance if you don’t want to catch it.”

“I’ll be sure to do that. I can’t afford to be sick right now.”

The car began to reverse and I took a deep breath as we headed down the road at a slow pace. We were both scanning the woods that rested on each side.

“Detective, do—”

“Please, call me Caleb. I think we’re over formality.”

I nodded. “Okay, Caleb.” I paused, deciding on how to put my question. “Do you think the boys are okay? This isn’t a normal night here. Should I be preparing myself for the worst?”

His eyes darted over, only to turn back to the woods. “You always have to prepare yourself for the worst in Wolf River. We have some false alarms, but they’re rare. Usually when a missing person is reported, there’s usually a reason.”

“Jesus,” I breathed out. “I pray you’re wrong. How is Mr. Morrison going to take another one of his children being killed by this thing?”

Caleb sniffled, but stayed quiet as we approached the main road. His outlook didn’t give me hope. I wasn’t sure what I was going to do if this job took a turn from a cold case to an active one in the form of another Morrison death.

“I think I’ve been up and down this damn road twenty times. They’re smart enough not to go into the woods. Either someone picked them up, or...”

“Stop the car,” I whispered.

“What?”

“Stop the car. I’m going to walk the distance. Maybe something will present itself and we’ll find clues or evidence to go off of. In truth,” I said glancing over, “this should have already been going on. We need people in the woods searching for those boys. We need officers here on the road combing the grass for traces they may have left behind. If they were attacked, there has to be some kind of evidence lying around. We’re talking about *three* boys.”

Caleb’s eyes widened. “You don’t think I know that? You have no idea what you’re saying. No one is going to walk those woods. Even being by the highway poses a threat. Obviously! They’re gone. I’m betting ten to one, they didn’t jump in anyone’s car. No one is safe until the morning. But you don’t see that yet. You’re not from here. You haven’t gone through this month after month. Whatever is out there doesn’t just kill one person and is sated. The fucker does this for fun. I’ve seen twenty head of cattle slaughtered in one night. Aside from being shredded to pieces, it didn’t appear anything even ate from them. *It’s not safe*. Not out there and maybe not even in here.”

My eyes narrowed as I took in his words. “We’re not talking about a bear are we?” When he didn’t answer, I stressed the question. “Are we, Caleb?”

He exhaled loudly, coming to a stop on the shoulder. “There’s no such thing as werewolves.”

“You say that, but it doesn’t appear you believe it.”

“I don’t know what to believe anymore. I’ve headed up every case concerning these attacks since I started here. Do you know how many I’ve solved? None. None, Erin. My brother was fucking killed by whatever is out there and I can’t even find the son of a bitch that murdered him. Do you know how that makes me feel? What that does to me?”



A round of coughing filled the car and I took in the anger and sadness on his face. How were we going to find the thing if this blanket of terror continued?

“There have been hunts for this animal, correct?”

“Yes, multiple times.”

“What about during a full moon?”

Caleb coughed, but groaned. “No. No one is looking to leave a widow or having a death wish.

“But...” I closed my eyes knowing I was going to sound just as crazy as the people in this town. “Let’s just say hypothetically that what is killing people *is* a werewolf. That’s a man who turns into a wolf during a full moon. How do you expect to find him if not during the period in which he hunts for food?”

He shook his head, slowly. “I can’t believe you just said that.”

My hand shot up and I gave him a look. “Neither can I, but from what I gather, no one wants to say it out loud so I might as well. This creature kills during a full moon. It’s a full moon. We need to be out there looking for it instead of hiding from the damn thing. That’s why it continues to do this. We have to stop it before more people die. We have to go into the woods, Detective.”

“Shit.” Caleb closed his eyes and rested his forehead on the steering wheel. “What a shitty time to be sick. Even if I wanted to, I’m not sure I can go traipsing through the woods feeling like I do. We’re talking life and death. You can’t go about it lightly. Besides, it’s only me and you. Sheriff will make excuses about searching in town, as will his deputies. We’re going to need more advance to plan this out if we’re going to do it right. It’s going to have to wait until next month. We can plan, then. We’ll be ready.”

I couldn't stop my head from shaking. "I'm sorry. I can't just leave those little boys to fend for themselves out there in those woods. If no one else is willing to look, I have to go try."

"You're going to go by yourself?"

I shrugged, reaching for the door handle. "Give me a radio and a flashlight. You can sit out here and talk to me to make sure nothing happens."

"I can't let you go out there by yourself!"

"We're wasting time arguing about this," I snapped. "I'm going out there. You can go or stay. If you ask me, you should stay. You're not feeling well and if something happens, one lost is better than two. We can't both get killed. Then who is going to solve this mystery?"

Another groan sounded and he popped the trunk. "I won't allow you to go into the woods. I want to see you at all times. You stay by the road and search. There's a flashlight, a rifle, and a big jacket in the back. I'm guessing I don't need to ask if you know how to shoot one?"

"You won't find a better shot," I said, opening the door. "If I see anything coming after me, I'm blasting the fuck out of it. Feel free to shoot, too. This thing likes multiple victims. If I don't take it down and it gets me, you can bet your ass it's coming for you next. Heart and head, Caleb. Don't miss."

"I won't." He gestured to the back and I threw him a grin, shutting the door. The light illuminated from the trunk and I lifted the top higher as I began to go through everything.

The jacket was on top and mid-way to grab it, I noticed a spare bullet proof vest in the back. My mind swam at the sight. This thing didn't have a gun, but its claws were weapons. Anything to put resistance between it and me would work better than nothing at all. I put it on, pulling the

jacket on next. It swallowed me, but it was warm. With the temperature dropping, I knew I'd need it.

I grabbed the rifle, checking to see if it was loaded before I picked up the flashlight. The click from the bright light sounded and I tried not to think about anything but the boys. They were out here somewhere and what if they were hurt. What if they needed help?

“Erin.”

My head spun toward Caleb as I passed his window.

“You’re braver than I thought. If you hear anything. Anything whatsoever that doesn’t sound right, you get your ass to the car. There’s talks of growling. Of moaning of some kind. Don’t try to analyze what you’re hearing. Run.”

“Alright.”

I took off at a slow pace, panning the flashlight back and forth the fifteen feet that separated the road from the edge of the forest. Trash was randomly buried in the dead grass, but aside from old bottles and the random, faded wrapper, I didn’t see anything.

Minutes passed by as time dragged on. I knew I was a little over halfway to the store. There wasn’t a stone I was leaving unturned as I tried to be as thorough as I could. My ears took in every little sound in the area, listening for a yell or cry from one of the boys. But I heard nothing. Even the birds were absent. It wasn’t until I reached the overpass that covered the river below, that I heard it.

What at first I thought was a clicking noise, turned into something more. Wet sounding. I glanced at the darkness below, knowing the river wasn’t what I was hearing. Caleb’s window was down and his face was illuminated by the dash lights. He was staring at me curiously. My hand came up and I saw his questioning expression harden and turn to anxiety as

I pointed below the underpass. The gesture of his finger from him to the bridge told me he was asking me if I wanted him to get out. I quickly shook my head. The more I heard, the more fearful I was becoming. Wet...tearing. Not clicking—tearing. Fuck.

My pulse was slamming into my chest as I held tightly to the rifle. Each step was slow and calculated. I didn't want to make a sound to disturb whatever was underneath. And there *was* something there. A slight growling had my body jolting to a stop. I wanted to run. Wolf, bear, whatever it was, I was betting it was faster than I was. But I had to see. I had to know what we were dealing with.

I kept the lighted end of the flashlight pointed to the ground and angled behind me as I moved forward into the darkness. As I came to where I anticipated I'd get a view beneath the bridge, I stopped my approach. I wouldn't go further. I'd shine the light underneath and depending on what I saw, I'd either shoot, or run like hell. With the angle, I didn't think I'd be able to get a shot off. Not an accurate one anyway. I knew the area where they were located would be slanted down so I had to angle the light right the first time. There was no room for mistakes. Not when I didn't know what I was dealing with.

My entire body was shaking as I crouched and leaned forward. The opening between the beginning of the bridge and where I stood wasn't very large. Maybe two feet wide. I swallowed hard, spinning the flashlight beam into the space. Words, thoughts, a scream ... nothing would come as I was rooted by terror.

Not ten feet and a little ways down, a body was sprawled out on the cement. Two bodies weren't but a few feet from that one. The furthest one away was surrounded by two wolves whose faces were matted with blood, and a ... *thing* crouched between them. It was covered in black hair. It was

so large that my mind couldn't fathom the size. It was hunched over a little boy's body, holding what I knew to be a looped coil of intestines in its hand. Wetness glistened over its wide muzzle and its large, black eyes were pinned right on me. A grunt of some sort came from its mouth. My skin turned ice cold as the wolves began to growl and bare their sharp teeth.

***"Caleb!"***

My scream tore from me in a high pitched tone, echoing as I was already spinning around and running for my life. The door to the cruise flung open, but slammed shut as his eyes widened. I could hear something behind me getting closer.

*"Shoot! Shoot!"*

His gun pushed through the window and a shot exploded. It matched the force of my heart rate. For the briefest moment, I thought he'd shot me, but I was still running, flying around the front of the car, a wolf crumpling almost at my feet. As I turned, I saw the second wolf was gaining on me. Another shot went off and it fell, sliding against the earth at the force from its speed.

I jerked open the door, diving in.

*"Go!"*

Caleb didn't question me as he stomped on the gas. Tears streamed down my face as the first sob ripped its way free.

*"What the hell is going on?"*

I tried to catch my breath as images of the creature projected in my mind. For the life of me I couldn't get words to come. Just my hysteria. I turned in my seat, searching the darkness for the monster to come out. For it to be running after us. But I didn't see anything.

*"There's three bodies. It has to be the boys. I think they're dead. All of them."*

“Under the bridge? From the wolves?” Fear and impatience laced his tone and I turned back around, nodding, but ultimately shook my head.

“Yes, but something else was down there with them. Something... It was ... eating the inside of one of the boy’s stomach. Oh, fuck. Fuck, I can’t breathe.”

Caleb’s eyes widened even more and he reached for his radio. As he spoke, I heard none of it. I kept seeing the creature. Seeing the way it was looking at me—the way it ordered those wolves to attack me.

“Tell me what you saw. What did it look like?”

My head slowly turned in his direction and I managed to calm myself enough to stop the current sobs that were wanting to come. I couldn’t react this way. It was unprofessional. Shock, it had triggered the reaction before, but I couldn’t let him see me like this anymore.

“It was what they say—part man, part ...animal. Caleb.” I couldn’t stop shaking my head. “It had arms and legs and it was covered in hair. But its face was that of a dog or wolf. It had a muzzle. Big eyes. It was crouching, not standing on four legs or sitting. It was eating that boy.” I grabbed the gun, pulling it further up to me. “We have to go back. I’m not for certain. The others may not be dead. We can still help them.”

The car turned around in the parking lot of the convenient store, but Caleb put it in park.

“We’re not going anywhere near that scene until we have backup. The sheriff and his men are on their way.”

Coughing filled the interior and Caleb brought his head back to the wheel.

“Are you okay?”

Before he could answer me, the door flung open and he started to throw up. My stomach turned even more and I wasn’t sure if I was getting

sick too or if it was because of what I'd witnessed.

"You shouldn't be here," I said, lowly. "Jesus, you're so sick. That's no cold, Caleb. Maybe you're getting the flu."

"Maybe," he answered, lifting and wiping his mouth. "Fuck, I knew I should have called in. Kind of glad I didn't though," he said, looking at me. "Now we know the truth."

"The truth?"

"It wasn't a bear attack that killed my brother." He paused. "Which means... Alex," he breathed out.

"Alex?" I repeated.

The car tore out of the parking lot and I held to the door, fear overwhelming me. Detective Perkins didn't have to say his suspicions. I knew what he was implying, I just couldn't believe it.

"We don't know if it was a werewolf," I shouted. "It could have been anything. A mutated bear. A... We just don't know."

"Bullshit," he snapped. "I'm going to see Alex right now and if he's not at home, we'll know."

"He's *not* at home," I countered. "He's working out of town."

Caleb threw me a glance and a sarcastic laugh. "Alex doesn't work out of town, Erin. He doesn't work!"

"What do you mean? Of course he does. How else would he afford to live if he didn't?"

"It's complicated. He sells his lumber, he's very self-established to survive ... just listen to me, he doesn't work out of town."

*Nausea. Yes, I was going to be sick, too.*

I rolled down the window, heaving through the slightest possibility that that thing could have been him. No, it wasn't possible. I'd kissed him. I'd let him...

Again, I heaved, trying to push away the clash between memories of us and those kids.

The car slid sideways as we turned onto the dirt road. The siren was going now, so loud it was echoing in my ears. Jolting sent me crashing into the seat from Caleb's speed and I held on as he pulled into Alex's driveway. The lights inside the cabin were off and the house was dark. I knew no one was home. His truck wasn't even here.

"Stay in the car."

Caleb got out and so did I. He threw me a look, pausing for only a moment before he stayed quiet and walked up, pounding on the door.

"I told you, he said he was going out of town for work. He left yesterday. Isn't it possible he was telling the truth?"

"Why are you so quick to defend him? You saw that thing!"

"I did," I yelled back. "And I'm telling you, it wasn't him. Alex Villani was just as much a victim as those boys and your brother. Just because he survived doesn't mean he turned into one too. Besides, he saw what attacked him and it wasn't one of those. It was a bear. A really, big ... bear."

But didn't I just say it could have been a mutated bear? I had said it, but I didn't believe my words. I knew that was no bear. What if Alex had seen the same thing and that was the best way he knew how to express it? He had been injured. He could have thought it was a bear in his state of mind.

"Alex doesn't know—"

The door opening had both of us spinning in the direction.

"Know what?" Sweat poured from the top part of Alex's body and he swayed as he held to the door.



“Shit,” I breathed out. “See,” I snapped at Caleb. He’s right here and just as sick as you, if not sicker. Are you happy?”

There was a shock on the detective’s face, almost as if he couldn’t believe what he was seeing. It gave me hesitation before Alex’s voice drew me back to him.

“What are you two talking about?”

The words were almost unrecognizable as he slurred through them. Deep breaths left his mouth and he coughed while he leaned his head against the wooden barrier.

“She saw one,” Caleb burst out. “She saw a werewolf eating a kid. You happy now?”

Alex’s eyes cut up to me and his breath turned to pants, but that wasn’t what caught me off-guard. *His eyes*. They were extremely bloodshot and the gold was prominent again. So much so they were practically glowing. I swallowed hard, forcing myself forward. I knew fever could have somewhat the same effects. I had to find out if he was warm so I wouldn’t jump to conclusions. Because I was. So much so that I feared Alex. I had to stop this. It was impossible.

My hand rose and Alex didn’t move as I came up and placed my palm over his wet forehead. I immediately jerked back.

“Jesus, you’re burning up. You need to lie down before you pass out. You can barely stand as it is. How did you even get home? Your truck isn’t here.”

“Got a ride from my employer.” His grip tightened on my arm enough to have me staring at him concerned. Fuck, he was going to fall. “I told you to stay inside,” he rushed out. “To lock the door.”

I helped him lower to sofa. The cushions were wet, telling me he’d been lying there for quite some time. The realization put me at ease and

immediately erased all suspicions I had. He wasn't that thing. He wasn't. The evidence was right before me.

I grabbed the blanket, putting it over him as he immediately closed his eyes.

"Mr. Morrison's youngest. I believe he's one of the victims, Alex. He and his two friends went missing and I found three boys. I have to go back. I have to make sure of their identity and if there's any survivors."

"No. You have to..." The words again were almost unrecognizable. Coughing had him curling into a ball as he groaned out in pain.

"Come on, Erin, we have to go."

I looked between the two men, torn about what I should do. Alex was extremely sick. To the point where I feared he needed to go to the hospital. His temperature had felt so high. But those kids... There still might be time. Maybe I scared the thing away and they were injured, but alive.

*I had to return.*

"Give me an hour or so. Leave the door unlocked." I froze in my retreat. "Actually, don't. Where is your key? I'll lock you in behind me."

Alex pointed to the far table, but he didn't speak. He was beginning to shake almost convulsively. I paused in my conflict, only to lunge to the table.

"I'll be right back."

I grabbed the keys, practically running out. Caleb kept quiet as we headed back to the car. The moment the door shut, he cursed under his breath.

"This changes things. This changes everything," Caleb muttered.

I wasn't sure what he'd meant, but I prayed he was ready to drop this crusade against Alex. Alex wasn't the bad guy here. Not even close.

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

# Chapter 16

## Alex

The engine dying off in the distance following their departure had my wolf going wild inside of me. He wanted back out. He wanted to hunt. I had never in all my years been able to shift back into my human self on a full moon, but tonight had been different. I'd gone looking for Erin, tearing into her house like the predator I was, only to find she wasn't there. The anger in that moment didn't compare to anything I'd experienced before. It was instant and sent me into a blind rage. But after the fury began to fade, concern somehow crept through my fog. It ate away at the evil inside of me until I was able to use my mind even more. *Erin was gone*. Out of harm's way from my wolf. She'd have been dead if she had listened to me and stayed inside.

As the realization dawned, I was able to somehow steer my way to my cabin instead of the woods. I held enough control and I used it to make it to the shed. That's when I had heard it. The siren. The loud noise was headed in my direction and I knew I'd never get myself locked away in time. Something had happened in our town again. There was no other explanation as to why they'd be out on a full moon. And Erin. She was close with Caleb. The fear that she'd be with him, that they'd catch me, had me stumbling into the cabin and using every ounce of will I possessed to push my wolf away. My feelings for her, my care over her safety, it was all that mattered to me. I wanted her, dammit. I wanted her in my life! Not dead. The pleading and urgency consumed me and I crashed to the ground,

turning into my human self. I barely had enough time to slide on a pair of jeans before the pounding started on my door.

At catching Erin's voice and scent so close, my wolf almost came back. Caleb's words about her seeing a werewolf caused a shock to my mind, preventing my wolf from returning. But it was only temporary.

The tickling in my throat caused me to curl more into myself as I fought the hacking. *He* was raging a war inside of me. He was coming. The question was when. I needed to get caged before she returned. But she'd know something was wrong if I disappeared.

I ran my hand down my sweaty face. Did it matter if she suspected me? It was better than her being dead. But what if Caleb returned with her? He might want proof that I was still human. That I was here instead of out there killing.

Jesus. I couldn't think. I was going to be sick again. And it was all a reaction to the power the moon held on me. The tickling triggered my gag reflex and the pain twisting my insides were enough to do me in.

Somehow I managed to stand and stagger toward the restroom. My shoulder slammed into the door as I fell to the floor and heaved. The bones in my hip locked and then shifted. The scream that left me was murderous. One by one, my bones started adjusting and breaking to fit my other form. My nails tore into the wood next to the shower sending shavings falling to the ground at the sharp tips that had push out and morphed to my other form.

"No. No!"

My body thrashed as I fought what I was so sure was coming. But it didn't. At the heaviness that settled over me, I almost couldn't believe that my human body had gone limp. Again.

Deep breaths left me and minutes passed before I could stand. Every inch of me ached as I pushed to my feet.

Fuck suspicions. Fuck Caleb's blame. None of them mattered when compared to human life. And I wasn't going to take anyone's tonight.

I headed out of the front door and stumbled to the shed, closing myself in. The trap door rested ahead, under the tarp. I moved it out of the way, grabbing the circular handle to pull it open. The black hole that appeared held my salvation.

The lantern sitting off to the side was waiting for me and I grabbed it, turning it on as I lowered myself inside. The sight of the titanium cage had my wolf panicking. It knew what was coming and the roar that filled my head was enough to have me nearly collapsing in pain all over again.

I pulled the trap door closed, barely able to shut myself in the cage before my transition began all over again. This time I couldn't hold it back. The silver combination lock burned into my fingers like acid as I pushed and secured it closed. My body collapsed against the earth's floor and I didn't fight what I knew was coming. Thrashing was immediate. My tall frame jolted back and forth as the wolf blood inside of me coursed through my veins at the speed of light.

Erin's face flashed in my mind, the man in me holding to the endearing image. The wolf in me showed nothing but ire at having what he wanted taken away. My legs kicked out against the bars, lengthening as they contorted and grew thicker with muscle. Like a wave, the change traveled up me, tearing through my jeans as I rolled through the cracking sensations.

"Fu-ck." The word drew out while my voice changed. It was almost here. Loud pants were followed by an even louder growl. The room flickered in vivid colors as my eyes adjusted and I was up, crashing into the

bars before the room came into focus. Erin was still there, tempting every part of me as I repeatedly threw myself into the titanium cage. The power at which I hit would have injured any man, but not my beast. My skin was thick, my muscle damn near impenetrable.

Sharp claws ripped into thin air, reaching for nothing, searching for anything. I was truly gone in my mind as I pushed from the bars, jumping across the space to hold myself sideways near the top. I lunged and hit the opposite wall with everything I had. The killer only saw the need to bring death and he was in such an unstable state that nothing I was doing was making sense. Clarity wouldn't come until this part passed. Until my wolf got ahold of himself and tried calculating a way to break free without using sheer force. It'd be a good hour or two of demented actions, but it would come. Even as I went through the motions, I somehow knew that. Usually it wasn't this bad. Only when I fought the change. And I'd done so like hell, tonight.

The light from the lantern casts shadows along the wall, driving me on as I took in my massive frame. My speed, my size, it boosted my ego showing me just how deadly I truly was. I could have anyone. I could tear open their flesh and leave them in pieces if I chose. And I wanted to. I wanted to bathe in their blood and have the satisfaction of taking any life that crossed my path. *Power*. Yes, the need to display it was ingrained in my DNA right now.

Time passed until my movements became slower. I stalked the bars, back and forth, snarling and snapping at my prison. The moon was slipping away, leaving the worst sense of mourning in its departure. I never heard an approach, nor did I have a recollection of Erin's scent. The night was becoming a blur of hatred and loss. Of sadness and defeat. My wolf was accepting that it wasn't getting out of here. I was growing tired and heavy.

Soon this would all end and I'd finally be able to breathe and prepare for another month of it all happening again.

My wolf collapsed to the floor, unable to continue. Ragged inhalations shook my frame and the minutes flew by as I drifted in and out of consciousness. When the shifting of my bones began to transform back into my human self, it awoke me enough to know I needed to get back inside. It was over and Erin had survived ... this time.

\*\*\*\*

I awoke to the sound of my front door opening. My wolf stirred, but rested so far back that I could almost believe he wasn't there. It didn't change how sensitive my senses were. I caught Erin's scent, followed by footsteps.

My eyes closed again and I rolled over in the bed, facing away from the door. I couldn't help but wince from the soreness.

A mixture of pine and earth filled the room as she got closer. Sniffing had me blinking through the sensitivity. Even my eyes were aching. I turned back over, feeling my heart stop at how swollen and puffy her face was from crying. Emotions stirred, so strong that it threw me off for a moment. I couldn't breathe as I recalled what she'd said the night before. It was hazy, but I did remember her mentioning something about three boys. And my wolf ... he was back, watching her through my eyes. Wanting her, regardless of my concern over her state.

I lifted my hand and I didn't have to wait long before she rushed toward me and climbed into my bed. Wetness slid over my skin from her tears and she buried her face in my chest, holding to me tightly. Sobs shook her body and her cheeks and nose felt like ice.



“Talk to me. What happened?”

I stroked her hair, eating up the intimacy like it was the best thing there ever was. The crying slowed and she leaned her head back to look up at me.

“We searched the woods all night. Mr. Morrison went crazy. He and the other two fathers of those boys lost it. When I relayed that they were dead,” again, she sobbed, “they broke in front of me. I’ve never seen so many guns in one place. They were on a mission like I’d never seen. Us, the deputies, and even a few townsfolk searched all over. I’m not sure how many miles we walked through the woods.” She sniffled. “I feel so...” She trailed off as she began to cry again. “There’s something wrong with this place, Alex. What I saw last night...”

I clenched my jaw as she grew quiet. I waited for her take on what I was, but it never came.

“Tell me again what you saw? I’m sorry, I barely remember last night. I wasn’t very well at all.”

Erin squirmed and pushed herself to a sitting position. She was pulling away from me now. I could feel it not only in her actions, but in her energy as well.

“What attacked you wasn’t a bear, was it?”

“It was a bear,” I said, cautiously.

She narrowed her eyes. “I don’t believe it was. I saw the photos from your attack, Alex. Those marks on your friends, on you, on Kelly Morrison and all the others; they were the same marks covering those boys. You may have thought you saw a bear, but I’ll bet you anything, what hurt you was no bear.”

I pushed to sit up, groaning as my muscles stretched. “What are you saying, Erin? What exactly do you think attacked me?”

Her eyes searched mine. “I don’t think you’re one, too. I don’t. And I don’t know what it is. What I do know is I watched it eat a boy’s intestines and share its food with two wolves. It appeared to be half man, half ... animal. It was covered in black hair. Its features held no resemblance to a bear, nor any other animal I have seen. Werewolf? I just don’t know.”

For what felt like forever, we stared at each other. A part of me wanted to spill everything. To tell her the truth and beg her to help me. But she couldn’t. No one could. And if I exposed my secret, I’d become a monster trapped in a cage forever. They’d experiment on me and I’d never be set free. No one could know. *No one.*

“I’m sorry. I wish I knew what to say. I see it in my head and what I see is s a really large bear.”

She nodded after a few moments and stared ahead. “Maybe it is some form of bear and the darkness was playing a trick on its features.” She went back into a daze, gazing into the distance, but it didn’t last long before she began shaking her head. “No. I will not allow my mind to trick me into comfort. That thing wasn’t a fucking bear. I know what I saw.”

“Don’t think about it,” I said, pulling her back to lie down against me. “You’ve had a long night. You have to be exhausted. Let me hold you.”

“I should really be going home. I just wanted to check to make sure you were alright. I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have cried on you.”

She went to ease off the bed when flashes of my rage in her cabin registered. Panic had my arm looping around her waist to keep her from leaving. She didn’t need to see that right now. Not while she was clearly so upset.

“Please,” I said, quietly. “Don’t leave. Stay with me.”

Erin searched my face and just when I thought she was going to tell me no, she reached up and unzipped her jacket. I took a deep breath, letting

go as she finished undressing. When she was just wearing her bra and panties, I drew her body into mine. I was already so hard, watching her skin become exposed. God, she had the most amazing body. Feeling the curve of her hip as I moved her in closer nearly did me in.

“Make me forget.” Her lips pressed against my chest and I closed my eyes at the feeling. Knowing that she wanted me, there were no words for the happiness it brought. In the moment, I wasn’t forgotten or alone. I *was needed*.

My thigh pushed between hers, bringing her up closer. My head lowered and I sucked the side of her neck into my mouth causing her to push her pussy against my leg. That action had her rocking against me. I couldn’t bear knowing her urgency. Mine was just as strong. I rolled us, placing my body on top of hers. Before I could kiss her again like I wanted, the engine of a car registered. It was coming in our direction and only one person came to mind on who it could be.

“Someone’s coming,” I said quietly.

Erin tensed, listening. “You have to let me up,” she said, already trying to wiggle out from under me. “I have to get dressed.”

More of my weight settled on her and a smile pulled at the side of my lips. “One condition.”

She stilled, narrowing her eyes. “What’s that?”

“You can’t run. When they leave, you come back to my bed. We’re not finished.”

Panic was surfacing within her. She nodded, quickly. “Deal.”

My arm lifted and I rolled to my back as she scrambled from the bed and began pulling her clothes on. I took my time, climbing out to grab a new pair of jeans and a T-shirt. I was so damn sore I couldn’t move very fast. Odd how I didn’t feel the pain when I was so caught up with her.

Just as Erin slid on her jacket, a knock sounded at the door. I glanced at the clock, taking in the blurring numbers.

“It’s eight in the morning.” My statement had Erin glancing over at me. “You were out walking the forest until eight in the morning?” As I asked, I was already heading for the door. She followed.

“Yes. We went everywhere you could possibly think of.”

I frowned as I reached for the knob and pulled the door open. My body immediately went rigid. “Dad. What ... are you doing here?”

He glanced at Erin, and then came back to me. “I helped with the search last night. Erin mentioned you were sick with the flu. I thought I’d come over and check on you. See if you needed anything.” He gave me a sad look. “See how you were. How are you, son?”

My lips separated and I felt myself take a step back. My mind was muddled with confusion. How should I act? What should I do? He wasn’t safe around me. But hell... I didn’t want him to go. Tears burned my eyes and I swallowed hard trying to push it all away. I couldn’t remember the last time I had cried, but seeing him so concerned... That he’d come at all after the years of isolating myself and pushing them away...

“I’m feeling a little better. Please, come in.” I stepped back even more.

Erin had a grin on her face as I turned around and I wasn’t sure whether to explode at her for having him worry about me, or give her the biggest kiss in the world. I couldn’t think.

“Why don’t I make some coffee?” Erin asked, still watching me.

“That would be great. Cabinet next to the stove.”

She nodded and disappeared as I turned back to my dad. He’d aged since I’d last seen him. *A lot*. His hair was no longer black, but salt and

pepper. It made who I was harder to face. I'd done this. I had turned my back on my loving family, all to keep them safe.

"You been okay, Alexander? We've missed you."

Heartache had my chest feeling as though it was caving in. "I've been good. Keeping busy with work."

He shut the door and I led him over to the sofa. We sat on opposite ends while he continued.

"What kind of work are you doing these days?"

Uneasiness crept in and I shrugged. "Odds and ends—logging. Sometimes I work for a man named Mr. Gretzil, half an hour out, helping him with his cattle. Stuff like that."

He nodded, rocking with the motion. I'd seen it my entire life and seeing it now was like home. One I didn't deserve.

"You know your place at the shop is still open. You were a hell of a mechanic. You're always welcome back. I'd sure love to have you around."

God, why did this have to be so hard? Why hadn't I looked before I opened the door? I had assumed it was Caleb.

"I'll think about it." My voice was quiet. The knots in my stomach twisted tighter. I wanted to take him up on his offer more than he knew. I could sure use the money. And for it to be like the old days, him and I, together. Why couldn't this nightmare end?

"How's mom?" I could barely meet his eyes as I asked.

"She's been keeping busy. She started these online courses in accounting. She seems to like it."

Confusion filtered, but I was smiling. "Like, college classes?"

"Yeah," my dad laughed. "Who would have thought? Your mother, a college babe."

A laugh burst from my mouth and I felt the familiar bond I had with my father weasel its way in. My love for my parents thrived and it wasn't a good thing. My wolf manipulated everything. What if he transitioned his focus from Erin to them? It wasn't likely, but there was still a possibility.

"I'm glad she's taking them. You two seem like you're doing good."

"Eh, we could be better." He grew serious and I felt the joy being sucked right out of me. "Why don't you come over for dinner tomorrow night? You can bring your investigator friend. There's not much in the way of restaurants in this town and I'm sure she'd like a decent meal."

"Oh... I don't know." I turned to look toward the kitchen, catching Erin standing there, caught off guard. I felt just as trapped as she looked. We were both being put on the spot. But I wanted to accept the offer. I wanted to see my mother and introduce her to Erin. It wasn't like Erin and I were an item, but fuck, I wanted to get to know her more. I wanted to keep her close to me.

"What do you think?" my dad asked, already staring in the direction I was. "Would you like to come over for dinner with Alexander tomorrow? Eat some real food."

She looked between us and I could see her dilemma. She was afraid to get too close to any of us, just like I was. Maybe that's why we had chemistry. We were both searching for something neither of us wanted to admit to.

"I would love to. If that's alright with Alex."

I hesitated, so confused. "Sure."

"Great," my dad said, standing. "What should I tell your mother? Six?"

I stood, joining him. "Six would be great."

His large arms embraced me and I hesitated before I returned the hug. It felt so out of place, yet, it was as if he could read my mind. As if he knew what I needed.

“Your mother is going to be so happy. I look forward to our dinner.” He pulled back, waving at Erin. “Sorry about the coffee, but I should be getting home for some sleep. You two take care. See you tomorrow.”

I walked him out, shutting the door behind him in a daze. Had that really just happened? Had I really agreed to go to dinner at my parents’ house? Parents I hadn’t seen and hid from for over a decade? God, speaking with my father had been like nothing had changed at all. Like I’d only left yesterday.

“Come show me how you like your coffee.”

Erin’s voice broke through and I headed in her direction.

“I’m sorry about that back there. I know you probably feel uncomfortable going. I can call and tell them we changed our minds.”

“You’ll do no such thing.” She handed me a mug filled with coffee. I waved off the sugar and cream. “I think it’ll be good for you to reunite with your parents. And I’d like to meet your mother. Your dad is a great guy. We talked a little last night while we were walking through the woods. He told me some interesting and funny stories about you. I’m not sure if he needed to tell them to get his mind off of what we were doing, or because he could sense how hard it was for me. Regardless, they helped us both. I have to admit, they were pretty funny.”

“Stories?” My cup paused mid-way to my mouth. “Stories about what?”

Erin just smiled as she took her coffee and headed for the living room. When she sat on the sofa, I joined her.

“Let me see. You once had a pet turtle named...”

“Weber,” I said, cautiously.

“That’s right, Weber. And one Halloween—”

“No, no, no.” I said, cutting her off. “I can’t believe he told you this.”

“And one Halloween, you decided to dress him up. The entire night you carried him around in your orange, plastic pumpkin. Your mom had to carry around an extra one just so you’d have something to put the candy in.”

“I can’t believe he remembered that. I was six,” I laughed.

“It was cute. What were the two of you dressed as? Your dad didn’t say.”

I let out a laugh as memories of that night flooded in. “I was Batman, and he was Robin. Although, looking back, I didn’t think his costume through very good. The cape came off every time he pulled his head in. Which was a lot. My mom would have to stop and wait while I attempted to get it back on. It was a mess.”

Erin giggled, blasting me with the most beautiful smile. My mood went from happy to a mix of feelings I couldn’t even grasp. She’d never know how much it meant to me just to carry a conversation with someone. Too many day and weeks I’d go without communication with anyone at all. I was so tired of being isolated. *Alone.*

She took another drink, setting the mug down on the coffee table. “I heard about your first kiss, too. Little Missy Baxton behind the school’s cafeteria. What teacher caught you? Mr...”

“Bates. And he was wrong calling my parents. I was eight. And it was just a fast peck on the lips. She hit me too. Missy Baxton,” I repeated, laughing. “I think she ended up marrying Tommy Leal. They were engaged last I heard, but that was years ago.”



Erin stood, sliding off her jacket and tossing it on the couch. “If you ask me, she chose the wrong man. She has no idea what she’s missing.”

My coffee was on the table before Erin removed her shirt the entire way. I lunged forward, sweeping her into my arms and kissing her mouth before it hit the floor. The eagerness that met me was all I needed to see. This was the start of something huge. Something that didn’t happen every day. Especially to people like me. I shouldn’t have wanted it, and I shouldn’t have fallen into temptation when I knew better, but rationality was gone. *I was gone.*

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

# Chapter 17

## Erin

Air wouldn't come as I felt my back connect with the wall. Alex and I were all over each other, pulling at each other's clothes, kissing the entire time. Whether my lack of oxygen came from his weight pinning me against the wall or how swept away I was in the moment, I wasn't sure.

"You'll never know how much I love the way you taste."

He moaned into my mouth, tugging at the button on my jeans. It came loose and the zipper lowered. A cry broke from my mouth as his hand pushed into my panties. The tips of his fingers flattened over my folds, rubbing into the wetness until one plunged into my opening.

"I'm about to fuck this pussy so good. You want my cock. Tell me."

Another of his digits slid into my channel and I couldn't help but jerk at his shirt. He bent down enough for me to pull it over his head, but came back, slamming his weight and fingers back into me. Thrusting had me breathing hard as I returned to hold his broad, muscular shoulders.

"Tell me. Let me hear you say it."

"Yes, I want your cock."

"How bad?"

A small cry escaped and my impending answer was cut off by his lips connecting back with mine. The pressure of his palm rubbed into my clit and I broke my mouth free to gasp.

"Bad. Fuck me," I begged. "Don't stop until it's impossible for you to go anymore. However long it takes."

Alex's fingers slowed inside of me and a grin pulled at the side of his lips. "Do you know what you're asking? If you have the time, I'll stretch out every second you give me, greedily. Food, sleep, none of that matters compared to you." He leaned forward, running his nose along my cheek. The atmosphere changed and everything slowed. Our panting was the only thing that sounded.

"How about we go until *you* can't continue. My wellbeing means nothing to me. Yours is what I care for."

He pulled back and I took in his serious expression. I knew he'd meant every word he said. I didn't want this feeling I was experiencing to end and apparently neither did he. The realization that we had such passion for each other cleared my mind. It reminded me of the pain that came from the last four weeks. Sexually, we were electric, but what about the tomorrow, or a week from now? What happened when it was time for me to go? Alex was unstable. He wanted a connection, but he didn't trust himself to have it. What if I fell harder for him and he ran me off? Or pushed me away like he had already done? We needed to slow things down. That was our problem together. Everything was too intense.

I looked over and from the way Alex was studying me, I almost felt he could read my mind. As his fingers moved, massaging slowly inside of me again, I couldn't help but turn my head off to the side. Confusion plagued me and I couldn't block it out.

"You like me. You like this, and that's causing you to want to pull away. But I'm not so sure I'm going to be able to let you," he whispered. "Not now, not tomorrow. I want what I shouldn't. I'm desperate to *make* you want this." He pinned me harder into the wall with his weight, moving his face to fit against mine. His breath tickled my ear and I shivered at the lust that was still thriving.

“You want to make me want this? Alex, it’s too loo late for that. *I want it*. You know I do.” I tried to put my thoughts together as he kept thrusting. “Are you going to pull away from me again? I don’t want you to. I fear ... you’re going to hurt me. Are you listening?” I asked, as his eyes lowered. “It hurt me when you did that. Are you going to do disappear again?”

The pleasure dissipated as he removed his fingers from my pussy. When he lowered and jerked my pants free, I wasn’t sure if it was an answer or not. Slowly, he rose, towering over me with determination heavily in his stare. I blinked past the odd sensation as I looked into his eyes. The gold specks were bright, mixing with the brown. How could eyes do that to someone? Make them forget almost everything?

“The last thing I want is to hurt you. But you’re right to worry. I can’t see the future. I don’t know how things are going to turn out. What I do know is, I’ve never felt this way about anyone before. I’m not sure if I *can* leave you alone.” His hand wedged between my legs and he cupped my pussy. “Let’s not talk about that now. I’m dying to taste you again. Tell me you want me to suck on your pussy.” He moaned, tracing over my wetness. “Tell me, Erin. When I think back on this, I want to hear the need in your voice.”

I sucked in air as his fingers circled repeatedly over my opening. *When he thought back on this?* Was that my answer? He’d think back because I wouldn’t be there? The phrase repeated continuously as I tried to decipher some sort of hidden meaning behind it. He didn’t want to talk about this now. He couldn’t tell the future...

“Look at me.” Alex made me hold eye contact as he began to lower to his knees. He was waiting for my reaction. Waiting to see if I’d say his words or make him stop. Something dark flickered as he pushed my legs

wide. His personality was shifting. I'd seen it that night we'd spent together. The thought made me weak in the knees, but I wasn't sure I should give in.

"Tell me, Erin. I want to hear it."

"And if I don't?"

A small growl left him and his tongue flicked over my clit, pushing between my folds as he made a path to my opening. My fingers pushed into his hair and I gripped, still not sure on what I should do. I should slow things down. Fuck, I knew I should.

My grip tightened as his hand squeezed into my thighs. Suction against my pussy delayed my decision and when his tongue pushed into me, all thoughts or concerns vanished. Sucking, fucking, back to sucking. His tongue tortured me.

"Wait," I managed through heavy breaths.

"No." The one word sent vibrations to all the right places and I cried out, fisting his hair with almost all of my strength. Harder, he pushed his face into me. The depth he reached within my channel was perfect. It felt too good to debate with what I really desired. "Tell me," he ground out.

His hand rose and he pushed his thumb against the top of my slit. When he moved his focus to the sensitive nub he was so good at teasing, my resolve faded into nothing but embers. But they were transitioning in their heat. I was on fire for him. The more time that went by, the hotter I became.

"I can taste how much you want to come. Give it to me, Erin. Give me what I want."

There it was, that deepness in his tone. It was sexy all in its own. Demanding without mercy. I knew he meant the command and damned if I wanted to fight it to see what he'd do.

“I ... can’t,” I said, meeting his intense stare. “Not if you’re going to hurt me.”

His eyes narrowed the slightest amount. Pressure from him diving back to my pussy pulled against my fisted grip. I knew it had to have hurt, but he didn’t act as though it did. Each stroke of his tongue was determined. Each thrust, deep. I bit my bottom lip, trying my hardest not to cave to the pleasure.

“Alex?”

I tried pulling his head back, but he didn’t budge in his sucking over my clit. Hands locked on my hips almost painfully and his message was clear. Unfortunately, pain was my weakness. His nails dug into my lower back and the sting unlocked and blew open doors I thought I had locked for good. My orgasm surged through me and I screamed while the spasms left me shaking and jolting at their force.

Loud moans hummed against my pussy. Alex’s tongue pushed into my channel and all I could do was hold on as he wrapped his arms around me like a vice and began licking my release free. Minutes passed and I was so weak and tired, he was more holding me up than anything. He was still going, still tasting me. Where he was almost rough before, he was gentle, taking his time. Just when I thought I couldn’t stand another second, he lifted, sweeping me into his arms. The hallway blurred and I was placed in his bed. I half expected him to position himself on top of me and fuck me hard for not obeying, but he didn’t. He wouldn’t even look at me.

“Get some sleep. I forgot I have some things to do. I’ll wake you up in a few hours.”

His deep, raspy words were sobering. A slap in the face for me giving in to begin with. I fought to sit, pushing away the fatigue. “I beg your pardon? You’re suddenly busy?”

He glanced up long enough to acknowledge me, but turned for the door, holding to his side. “You’ve had a long night. I’ll be back soon. *Do not* leave this room.”

The last was said with such authority, it had me hesitating before responding. Unfortunately, the door was already thudding shut. My lips stayed separated as I stared at the wooden barrier. *Was he running again?*

My head shook, even though I was almost sure. What the fuck was going on with us? Why did I care? He had already basically told me I wasn’t going to be in his future anyway. This was probably for the best. But I wasn’t staying here in his bed. That was crossing the line for me.

The front door slammed shut and I threw back the blankets. This is what I got for hoping. For even letting myself think that what was happening could be anything more than what it was—lust. It had both of us under its power.

I walked into the hall, picking up my clothes along the way. When I was dressed, I grabbed my keys, heading for my car. It didn’t take me but a few minutes to pull into my driveway. Alex had been nowhere to be seen. It baffled me, but I wasn’t going to fret on it. This was for the best. I’d go to dinner at his parents tomorrow, be there as a friend to support him through this huge event, and that was it. I knew if I didn’t go, he wouldn’t either. I cared too much for their broken relationship to hurt his parents by having him pulling away from them also. What happened after we left would be up to him. I’d have to see if he even came back to begin with. Knowing his previous actions, I might not even see him for another few weeks. If I did at all.

I shut the car door behind me, digging through my purse as I approached. My steps faltered at the broken wooden door frame. Pieces littered the deck, drawing my attention to the surrounding mess. My pulse

exploded as I reached into my bag and grabbed my gun and phone. I didn't have to guess what broke into my cabin. A sickening feeling rooted deep and images of the creature eating the boy's insides blinded me. I dialed Caleb's number, moving toward my car at a quick pace.

"Erin."

My brow creased at hearing my first name. I was getting too personal with these people. It was so unlike me.

"Detective, I need you to come over to my cabin." I paused remembering how he'd gone home before the search. He had gotten sicker, unable to continue. "I'm sorry. I forgot you're not well. I'll call the department and have them send over a deputy."

"Wait, what's going on?" His voice was scratchy and I felt horrible. He sounded as though he had been asleep.

"Something or someone broke in. My door frame is broken. Some of the potted plants are knocked over. I haven't been inside yet. I was just about to go in."

"No, no, no. Give me a little bit. I'll be right over."

My head shook as I grabbed the door handle. "Really, please, get some rest."

"Nonsense. I'm already feeling better. I'll be there shortly."

The line went dead and I groaned, dropping my phone back into my purse. As I waited, I climbed inside and watched the woods. Although I didn't see any wolves, I wasn't certain whether or not they were watching. The kinship they had with the creature was obvious from his grunt. Somehow they were connected and he'd ordered the ones who fed with him after me. Was that monster still out there somewhere? Was he stalking me with the wolf pack? Was he inside waiting for me now?



I suppressed the shiver, pulling my gun free to hold. I had every intention of going in without Caleb, but I wasn't going to deny his presence would put me a little more at ease. At least if I got attacked, he could try to kill it off before it got out and hurt anyone else. Then again, its track record for killing multiple people outnumbered the ones who escaped its clutches.

A few minutes went by before the unmarked cruiser pulled in behind my car. Caleb got out, walking around to his trunk and getting out the shotgun. Compared to the previous night, he looked absolutely fine.

I got out, meeting him between our two vehicles. He scanned the area, stopping to stare at the door.

“Son of a bitch. You didn't go inside, did you?”

My head shook as I stared at it, too. “No. Not yet.”

“We're going to go in and get your things. You can't stay here anymore. You know that, right?”

I turned to glance at him.

“It found you. If you don't get out now, it'll come back. You'll be next.”

He was right. I knew it in my soul. Something was after me. Something nightmares were made of and I wasn't stupid enough to push the truth away.

“Alright. Although ...” There wasn't a motel in Wolf River. Was it even safe to stay here anymore, anyway? It could find me again.

Caleb seemed to pick up my dilemma. “The closest motel is a good half hour away. And all of the seasonal rentals are accounted for that I know of.”

I nodded, stiffly. Half an hour wasn't a bad thing. It was an inconvenience if I needed to get here in a hurry, but I might be safer that way.

“You can stay with me if you’d like. Not in my home,” he rushed out. “I wouldn’t want to make you feel uncomfortable. I have a little guest house out back. It used to be my shop, but I converted it a few years back. I had friends that sometimes would come stay during hunting season. Key word, used to. No one really hunts here anymore.” He paused. “You can stay there if you want. No hotel fees.”

I tried to think of how long I was going to be here. Maybe another few weeks at the absolute most? It would save money. “Thank you. I appreciate the offer.”

He threw me a slight grin. “Great. Let’s go get your things and get the hell out of here. Then you can tell me about what happened last night after I went home. I felt horrible for having to leave.”

We were already walking. Already training our weapons on the door as we approached. The moment Calen turned the knob and eased the barrier open, it fell from the broken top hinge.

“Shit,” he whispered.

But it wasn’t the door he was cursing over. Large claw marks were raked down the sofa. The outcome, a white mass of fuzz littering the floor. Glass from vases and knickknacks were mingled within. Nothing prepared me for my room. The comforter and mattress were destroyed, shredded to pieces in the exact place I slept. It was shocking and terrifying. I knew what did this and that was enough to make my feel even sicker.

Feathers from the destroyed pillow floated out of my path as I walked closer. The damage to the walls that surrounded the bed was just as bad. Lines from the clawing were imbedded in the thick wood. If the creature was able to cause such havoc to such large logs, no wonder it had no problem filleting people alive.

“Let’s get the fuck out of here,” I said under his breath. “I don’t want it to come back while we’re still here.”

I put my gun down on the bed, spinning around for my suitcase. A scream almost tore from my mouth as I caught Alex in the doorway. I’d never heard him approach and I had been listening with all of my power. Apparently, Caleb didn’t either.

“Jesus,” I burst out. “You scared the shit out of me.”

Caleb, looked over his shoulder and his face turned hard at the sight of Alex’s angry expression.

“I told you to stay in bed.”

Heat flashed over my skin in embarrassment and I tried to control my temper as I glared at him. I knew it was my guilt causing me to react. The statement could have meant anything. But the emotion coming from Alex made it hard to downplay. Besides, he knew I wouldn’t have wanted him to make what we had going on obvious, yet he didn’t seem to care. I couldn’t believe he’d expose us like that in front of Caleb. A detective I was *working* with. I felt betrayed, when in fact, it was my own fault. I’d done this.

“May I speak with you real quick?”

I surged past the detective and Alex, not stopping until I made it to the deck. Alex was right on my heels.

“What do you think you’re doing?” I whispered, angrily. “Are you trying to make it clear that something has happened between the two of us?”

Something resembling pain embedded in his face and the hardness covering his features softened a bit.

“You weren’t supposed to leave the house. I wanted to come back here with you. Something could have happened. Did you see the inside of

your place?”

“I did. And we have everything perfectly under control. Caleb and I know what we’re doing, Alex. We’re trained to protect ourselves. Besides, didn’t you have stuff to take care of?”

There was a flicker behind his stare as his lids lowered even more. “It’s done,” he said, gesturing toward his truck in the distance.

My eyebrows rose in disbelief and a small laugh left me. “Wow. You put a stop to things between us to go pick up your truck? That says a lot. Thank you for putting me in my place.” I took a step back, meeting his stare. “I have to go pack.”

“Erin, you don’t underst—Wait... Pack? Where are you going?”

“Going?” I turned to look at the broken front door, then back to him. “I’m leaving. I can’t stay now that some creature knows where I am.”

The anger was gone within his expression. Alex looked at the deck, bringing his eyes back up to mine. “So you’re leaving for good, then? Or...”

My mouth opened, but words wouldn’t come. If I told him I was staying at Caleb’s, he wouldn’t like it. I felt like I would be starting something where tension already existed. But I couldn’t lie to him, either. I hated lying. It did nothing but cause worse trouble.

“I’ll be staying in Detective Perkin’s guesthouse until I can find lodging.”

Alex went rigid. His head cocked to the side, only to turn slowly toward the door. When his glare came back to me, I tried to act like it wasn’t a big deal. It really wasn’t. It wasn’t as though there was any attraction between Caleb and I. We argued more than anything.

“Stay with me.”

Again I laughed from disbelief.

“I’m serious, Erin. Stay with me. I’m home more than he is. I can protect you better. You can have the bedroom. I’ll sleep on the couch.”

I couldn’t stop shaking my head. I wasn’t sure if he was trying to convince me even more by physically separating us, or what, but it only pushed me away even more. Didn’t he see how this was affecting me? I didn’t want him to distance himself. I wanted *him*!

“Stay,” he said softer. “I want you to stay with me.”

Footsteps approached and I turned, glancing up to Caleb as he neared.

“I checked the house. You’re clear to go in and pack. I can wait out here.”

The men made eye contact, but Alex didn’t keep it long as he stepped closer to me. “Please. If...” he paused, beginning to reach out to me, only to stop himself. “Let me at least call my parents. They can let you stay there. Just, don’t...” His expression turned angry again as his eyes cut over to Caleb, briefly.

“Don’t do that,” I said, lowly. “This arrangement will be fine. I’ll see you tomorrow at your parents.”

I couldn’t look at Caleb as I turned and headed back inside. I wasn’t sure how much he had heard or what he got out of mine and Alex’s conversation. In truth, I really didn’t want to know. This investigation was turning into a disaster. One I wasn’t sure I would escape from unscathed.

# Chapter 18

## Alex

*Damn my wolf!* I was getting in over my head and there was nothing I could do about it. I thought after the full moon that everything would go back to normal. That this fixation with Erin would at least ease enough for me to be with her without wanting to push my bounds on hurting her. I'd had so much hope and it was all for nothing. The deep obsession was still there, so strong that it was like *she* was the pull that controlled my beast. And in a way, she was. All he wanted was her. It didn't matter what form he was in—wolf or human. She was solely what he lived for. What he revolved around. Damn the moon, it didn't hold a candle to the burn she ignited in me. But then there was feelings that came from the man in me...they were just as strong. The two mixed for one hell of a combination. An explosive and unpredictable one.

When she denied to give him the words he wished to hear, he was ready to find any way he could to make her say them. It got worse when she pulled back emotionally and said, wait. She was clearly upset, yet did I stop? No. I kept fucking her with my tongue until he got what **he** wanted. Even then, stopping myself from licking her pussy had almost been impossible. Ravenously, I continued, knowing she was an emotional mess. I could have reveled in her essence for hours. Fucking days, if I didn't gain control when I had. If I would have fucked her, I could have seriously hurt her. Just like I almost had the last time. I was still too revved up with the moon's persuasion.

But leaving had been my biggest mistake.

I thought by picking up the truck, it would give me the time I needed to cool off. To gain composure against the impending shift and try to ease back into a, *me and her*. My mind was searching through everything possible to make this happen. I was truly trying, but she didn't understand my abrupt departures. And now she was leaving to Caleb's. Caleb's! She could have gone anywhere but to his home and I probably could have adjusted. But I wouldn't be getting through this easily. It was going to take a damn miracle for me not to snap and do something stupid.

I glanced back at the smug expression on Caleb's face and headed back inside after her. I didn't give a shit what he thought. One look from her and I knew I should have considered what *she* wanted. I'd fucked up by throwing our business out there for him to know, but I seriously wasn't thinking. My wolf was, and he was beyond pissed. Now here I was, making this worse. For the life of me, though, I couldn't leave her alone.

"I'm begging you to reconsider. Just tell me what I have to do. Do you want me to stay here and you can stay at my place?"

Erin's let out a short, but deep, exhale. "Are you crazy? Of course not."

"I'll sleep in my truck, then."

Her hand paused mid-way from grabbing the brush on the dresser.

"You can't be serious. Alex ... what is going on with you? I know you and Detective Perkins don't get along, but that's no reason to take things to the extreme. I'll be fine in his guest house. I doubt I'll be there for very long anyway. Or here, for that matter."

"*Or here...*" Just like that real pain bombarded me. Not the kind that came from making a mistake while hunting prey. Or from broken bones or transitions during a change. I was experiencing rejection. She was pulling

away from me. Giving up on me? Yes, my chest was melting on the inside, and the pain had nothing to do with my obsession, possession, or lust—the ones I thrived on. No. Now the hurt arose from the truth. Effects that were pure.

It suddenly wasn't about Caleb. It was about Erin and possibly never seeing her again. Being at Caleb's would take her that much further away. And what if she refused to acknowledge me while she finished this investigation? At the cabin, I could have brought her dinner. Or tried something to get back in her good graces. Now it would be that much harder.

I didn't want her to go. My brain comprehended that we didn't know each other well, but the pining in my heart told me that I wanted to. So many questions began to shoot off in my mind—tiny bullets of regret. They were picking me apart, bleeding me out for ruining things before they had even started. Again!

I had to fix this. I *had* to. There was just no way around it.

"If that's what you want. You're still coming to dinner at my parents', right?"

Had I said that? Was I really letting her go with that son of a bitch, Caleb? God, I was, and the repercussions were immediate. My ribs shifted and I breathed through the lifting, trying my best to pretend the sharp pains weren't about to bring me to my knees. Erin seemed to catch my grimace. She paused, studying me before she continued.

"I'm still going. I told your father I would."

A stiff nod was all I could manage as it went back into place.

"Alex...?" She took a step forward, still searching my expression for something. I wondered what she looked for, but she said nothing. Before I could ask, she frowned, turning and pushing the brush into her suitcase.



As she zipped it closed, I battled with whether I should give it one more go. She decided for me when she picked it up and turned back to face me. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

There was no reluctance. She began to walk and I followed her out. Erin and Caleb headed to their cars while I walked to mine. Each step was harder than the next. The new emotions I was going through left me in a fade. There, yet not. In that moment, I wondered if I wished we’d never met. Had she not crashed so close to my home, perhaps I could have gone on with my routine. I would have never smelled her blood and became stuck on the idea of her as my meal. But going over things was pointless. We would have eventually ran into each other during the course of the investigation and I knew she would have captivated me one way or another. We were like magnets, drawn to each other by lust—connected by death

The truck engine roared to life and I sat there waiting as Caleb left and she followed. Even after they were gone, I remained. When I finally put the truck in drive, I found myself headed to the main road. Where I was going, I wasn’t sure. Trees blurred to the sides of me, mixing and becoming nothing more than a mass of nothingness, just like my thoughts. I was on auto-pilot, trying to figure out what I should do and what I shouldn’t.

I found myself turning on an all too familiar road. One I had avoided since I’d run away. A deep sigh left me and I slowed as I caught a glimpse of my parents’ white home peeking through the trees. The truck came to a stop on the side of the road and I put it in park. My mother and father had always been there when I was faced with uncertain decisions. What would they say now if they knew the truth of what my life had turned into? Even as I tried to guess, I wasn’t sure. I would have done anything to hear their words of wisdom concerning a solution to the entire situation.

Light faded, time passed, and darkness soon engulfed the Wisconsin sky. The moon was still bright, tugging into the depths within, calling to my wolf. Headlights from behind broke through the fog in my mind and I blinked, cursing. There was only one home on this road and unless my parents were having visitors, I was busted.

A red glow showed behind the vehicle and I shook my head. What the hell was I doing? One woman comes into my life and suddenly I'm breaking all my rules? Jesus, these were my parents I was putting in danger. It was bad enough that she was my focus. Now to have all three of them?

The truck stopped next to mine and the window rolled down. My dad's interior light illuminated his curious expression. I rolled down my window, not at all sure what to say. My dad didn't give me a chance before he threw me a smile.

"You came for the pie didn't you?"

My head slowly shook. "What?"

"There's no shame, son. Not very many people can withstand the temptation of your momma's apple pie. See." He lifted a tub of ice cream. "She's been baking up a storm since I told her you were coming over. I'm glad you decided to drop by a day early. She's going to be excited to see you."

My mouth opened, an excuse right on the tip of my tongue.

"Come on, let's go." He smiled, taking off before I could say a word. My grip tightened on the steering wheel while I hesitated to put the truck in drive.

*Son of bitch. What are you doing, Alex? Are you fucking stupid?*

I sure felt like it as I headed toward where my father was turning into the driveway. Within seconds of me pulling in behind him, his horn broke through the silent night. My stomach twisted and I turned off the

truck, getting out to join him as he exited his own vehicle. I kept my head angled down, the guilt over what I was doing weighing me through the ground. The front door opened and I took in my mother's confused expression through the glass of my father's truck window. My wolf vision gave me perfect view of her face. I knew the moment she put everything together. Her eyes went from my truck to my father's. There was a wildness in her stare as she searched the area around him. But where I stood, I was hidden. Overpowering emotions left me with no control. I walked forward to come stand at his side, watching the wringing of her hands stop. A ragged breath left her lips and then she was running right for us.

“Oh, God,” she wheezed. “Alex!”

Her weight crashed into me, feeling like nothing with the strength I harbored. For her, the air gushed out, but she didn't seem to mind. Her arms locked around my neck, and apple and cinnamon engulfed me. *Home*. Yes, this was what I remembered. What I had missed more than anything.

“Hey, mom.” The words choked in my throat as I held to her tightly. Tears burned my eyes but I managed to keep them from pouring down my face. Everything was so wrong. So tragically off.

“You don't know how much I've missed you.”

Time passed before she wiped the tears away and let her arms loosen. “Please, come inside.” She locked one of hers around mine as if to say regardless of my answer, she wasn't letting go. Nausea mixed with the fight within and I knew I should never have come. Seeing them after all these years, how could I break their hearts again by disappearing once more?

My steps were slow, forced, as she practically pulled me forward. Alarms were screaming in my head. Flashes of the last time I was here were overpowering me. I'd killed someone for the first time that night. Their

blood had been all over my bedroom walls. All over my bed. The night was such a blur, but I couldn't deny what I knew I had done.

"Wait," I whispered. My feet dug in and the depth of pain my mother kept inside etched into her features. It killed me even more.

"It's okay," she urged.

My dad's palm fitted against the middle of my back, almost nonexistent, but he could have shoved me with the anxiety that registered behind the action. I tensed, breathing through the nerves.

"You don't have to stay long. Just come in and eat a slice of pie. We can go from there."

My dad's calm tone had me magically walking again. The glow from inside was like an enemy all of its own. The closer I got, the more defensive I felt. The moment the side door opened and my mother guided me in, everything I felt disappeared. The once beige walls were now a deep burgundy, giving a more inviting feel. An island stood in the middle of the once closed-in kitchen. The wall that separated it and the living room was gone. The childhood home I knew had vanished and transitioned from a country feel to a more modern home with ceramic tile throughout.

"Whoa..." I scanned the staircase in the back. Even the railing had been replaced.

"Your father has spent years fixing this place up. Nice, huh?"

The question had my attention coming down to my mother. In the light, her brown hair was laced with gray. Time, and no doubt the stress I'd caused, had taken its toll on her, too. All I could do was stare into her green eyes, praying for a forgiveness I wasn't sure I deserved. If she only knew the man in front of her, her son, was an animal—a killer.

"It looks very nice." I forced the statement out as my mom finally let go and my dad led me to a barstool that rested along the island. I sat,

trying to push the uneasiness away. To say I uncomfortable was an understatement. There was an awkwardness that embedded itself within me at every breath we all took. The fact that I was detecting each exhale in the room wasn't a good sign. My wolf was lurking. *Watching*. I tried to ignore his presence as I focused on starting a conversation. "Dad said you were taking accounting classes."

Plates clinked and my mother peeked through her still wet lashes. "Yes. They're very hard, but I'm enjoying the challenge. You meet some interesting people through the online group discussions. And from all over, too. It's amazing, really."

"Sounds like it." I made myself grin and I tried to relax. Being inside wasn't nearly as bad as I thought it would. Especially since what I remembered about my childhood home was different.

"How have you been? Really?" My mom turned, carrying over a plate for me and my father. She handed him the ice cream scooper, barely looking at him as she kept her gaze trained on me.

"I've been okay. I stay busy with odd jobs. Keep to myself mostly."

Something flashed over her face. She did look at my father, then, coming back to me. I could tell something was bothering her and I didn't like it. My mother shouldn't have to worry about anything. Yet, she was, and it revolved around me.

"The investigator woman... Ms. Billings."

"Erin," I said, nodding. "What about her?"

There was a hesitation as she yet again cut her eyes over to my dad.

"What is it?"

My mom took the utensil from my father, placing a perfectly rounded vanilla scoop on top of my slice of pie. She didn't turn her attention back to me until she returned from the sink.

“She told your father about the PTSD, Alex. To stay away for so long when we could have helped you?”

“Maryann.”

“Don’t,” my mom said defensively. “It’s the elephant in the room and I want to get it out and away so I can have my son back. This whole time I feared something worse. I feared the unimaginable. I even blamed myself, questioning if it was something I did that drove him away that morning. I just ... I don’t understand.”

The tears were welling in her eyes again and I didn’t have a clue on how to stop them. The truth hurt, but this wasn’t her fault. It was all mine.

“Oh, mom. Nothing was yours or dad’s fault.” I stood, walking around the island. As I took her in my arms, I couldn’t meet my dad’s stare. And I could feel it on us, so heavily that it left me even more on edge.

“Tell me,” she sobbed. “Tell me what happened with you? I’ve waited for years to hear from you, but nothing. What happened, Alexander? Why did you pull away from us?”

Silence lasted for the seconds it took to get my thoughts together. I dropped my arms, stepping back to look down into her face. Lying came easy enough, I just wished I could have been honest. To explain why I needed to leave and never come back. Instead, I settled for what was safe. For not only them, but me.

“I don’t really remember that morning.” My voice was quiet and I tried blocking out the memory, but the glimpses I kept getting were impossible to dismiss. “It was like I was in the woods all over again. Reliving what I saw. I can’t tell you how terrifying it was, watching everything repeat as if the attack was the first time—and then being here, faced with blood and everything I destroyed. I was oblivious to my episode and that scared me more. Something inside of me went cold in those

moments. All I could think about was something happening to you or dad. What if I would have hurt you? Or worse? I wanted to kill that thing. I wanted to..." My head shook. "It could have worse that morning. You saw the house. I had already lost my friends, I couldn't survive losing both of you too. Especially at my hands."

"You were in shock that morning. You wouldn't have hurt us. You were scared when you came too, and we knew to keep our distance and give you space until you calmed. But you didn't see that. The moment you took in what you'd done, you left. You never came back. We were scared half to death for your safety. We called the police that night. We searched nonstop. It took them a week to find you sleeping in your truck. When we got the word you were okay, we were relieved, but also devastated. I thought you'd come back or call. You never did. I went by your house constantly. You were never home or you wouldn't answer your door. When I managed to see you that one time and you ... you told me if I ever hoped to see you again as my son that I'd honor your wishes and stay away, it killed me. Do you know how much it hurts a mother to lose her son?

"I'm sorry," I said, quietly. I felt such guilt and shame at driving my parents away. "I'm ... sorry. But you don't understand how bad this is. I don't feel comfortable being so close to the two of you. These episodes, they can come at any time—day or night, it makes no difference. You both are not safe around me. I get very..." I paused, trying to scare them enough so they'd understand. "*Violent*, when this happens. It's the reason I can't stay long. And I can't visit as often as I want," I stressed. "I miss you and dad. I do. But please understand what I'm going through. It hurts me just as much as it hurts you. I'm sorry I can't control this. I wish I could. I wish..."

My eyes burning had me stepping back even more. I couldn't do this for much longer. I felt emotionally train wrecked.

“Come when you can,” she rushed out, moving closer. “Just, please, *come*. I have to have you in my life, Alex. I’ll take whatever you’re capable of and I won’t push you, but you have to at least try. Promise me.”

The answer wouldn’t come vocally, but I did manage to nod.

We hugged briefly before she led me back to the stool. My father took over from there, telling me about the goings-on at the shop while my mom made her a slice of pie and sat down across from us. After a few minutes the tension eased and comfort began to sink in. My shoulders relaxed and I genuinely started laughing at the humor concerning the stories. My dad had always been an amazing storyteller. And I enjoyed it. But it didn’t last. My mother excused herself and my dad jumped at the opportunity. Seriousness clouded his face and everything took a terrifying turn. One, I never saw coming.

“I went out to the land this evening.” He said quietly. “I have some interesting pictures on my trap camera out there, Alex. Ones, you might want to see.”

“Your trap camera?”

Heat flashed over my body in waves of panic.

“That’s right. I know you were out there. I also know someone else was, too. Why don’t you tell me what’s really going on?”



# Wolf

Family came in many forms. Some held to the belief that it was rooted strictly from DNA, where others embraced the ties made through emotional bonds. I happened to sway more toward the latter. My maker wasn't my family, nor was the weak relatives I claimed as kin. If I had to attach myself to anyone, it'd be the wolves. They were the loyal ones. The dependent ones. I couldn't say that for anyone else.

I'd seen the love of those connected to me and it wasn't even comparable to the animals at my side. I was all but avoided unless I was needed. To everyone, I should have been the one dead. Maybe they knew what I had become, maybe they were only deluding themselves. Regardless, I didn't care anymore. They were going to die soon anyway. It wasn't like I had a choice in my cravings. Or, in my behavior.

I snarled, letting out a grunt as I broke to the left. The heat was rising, burning into my throat as I took deep inhales. The call for more blood was strong. I needed to kill, again. I knew the wolves would join me on my hunt. After all, we'd done this before—gone down this same winding path through the trees. My mind told me we had, even if I didn't know exactly where I was going.

As we came to a fork, I didn't force the answers. I took a left, waiting, knowing the way would present itself. It always did. That gave me comfort as a few seconds passed and a scent registered. Tiny pieces began to filter through. Sweetness—the investigator. Her pretty face flashed before me and immediately I growled, suddenly impatient to have her. When I got within distance to a cabin, I slowed.

Yes, this was where she lived. I narrowed my eyes, exposing my teeth as I tested the energy. Something was different. *Off*. I scanned the area, coming out of my crouch to stand at full height.

Her car was gone.

With my wolf eyes I took in everything. Two other scents drifted into me. One I'd picked up numerous times ... Alex. Yes. It was his, but someone else's, too.

I blinked through the foggy haze that held my mind. Everything was starting to return, but slowly. Blonde hair, tall. Yes ... the detective—Caleb Perkins.

Slowly, I hunched forward, walking and scanning the area even though I knew I was alone. When my palm slammed into the wooden door, it flew from the hinges, crashing inside. The woman's scent engulfed me and I moaned as more memories of the last few weeks rushed back. The euphoric sensation didn't last as my lids fluttered opened. The destroyed room processed and my blood began to heat even more in my veins.

She was gone. Due to the condition of the home, my wolf knew she wasn't coming back. That only meant one thing—I had to find her and finish this before she was gone for good.

# Chapter 19

## Erin

I looked around the small guest house, not even sure where to start. What I was in wasn't an actual house, but a small one room structure. There was no bathroom, no kitchen, or living area. The twin size bed barely fit the length and aside from the three feet on each side, that was it. My suitcase and files filled up one entire length, leaving me a three by seven foot path to pace. Which I was doing continuously as the phone rang.

"Hey Chan, this is Investigator Billings."

"Ah, Investigator. Any luck up there, yet?"

I bit my bottom lip for a moment before turning and taking steps to the opposite length of the room.

"Possibly."

He paused. "Go on."

Even now as I fought to figure out what to say, my mind told me I was crazy. That I'd somehow invented the whole thing.

"I saw something. I'm hesitant on what to call it. I ... really don't know."

His exhale was followed by the sound of a chair creaking. "Let's start from what you're certain of. What stands out the most when your mind goes back to memory?"

My legs grew still and I was taken back to the dark night. Back to that face that stared at me, changing everything.

"It had a muzzle."

"Alright. Can you make an estimate on the length?"

My eyes closed as I tried to calculate to the best of my ability. The creature had been so big. Even from a distance I could see that. It dwarfed the wolves at its side.

“Five inches, give or take an inch. But ... the muzzle was wide. Almost flat in the front.”

“Five inches and flat? What is your estimated height of this animal?”

This was where I knew I couldn’t continue to guess. “I don’t know. It was crouched and it was dark outside. I caught it in my flashlight for only a few seconds before I was forced to run.”

“What else do you remember around it?”

“Well, it had a lot of hair. Black, a somewhat long coat. But I could see its skin in places ... if that makes sense.”

He hesitated. “Continue.”

“Big eyes. Huge, sharp teeth. Big hands—”

“Paws,” he corrected.

“No. I’m ... pretty sure they looked like hands to me. But slightly different, with claws. I can’t really remember exactly if it had four fingers or five. It all happened so fast.”

“I’m sorry, you’re sure you saw this?”

The sound of an engine revving in the distance outside gave me pause, but I continued. “I did. I saw it.”

“And what was it doing?”

I cringed through the flashback. “Eating the intestines from a little boy’s stomach.”

“Shit,” he breathed out. “I’m sorry, please excuse my language.”

“Don’t apologize. It’s something I never wish to see again.”

The engine in the background grew louder and my eyebrows drew in at the sound. I knew it was still a bit away, but it so loud. So much like... No. I pushed the thought away. Alex wouldn't dare come over here.

"Can I ask you a question, Dr. Chan?"

"Please. Ask me as many as you want. I'm searching now for something that may fit your description. Maybe it will help."

"Alright. Do different species of animals usually hunt together? Share their food? This ... thing. It was feeding from that boy with two wolves at its side. I swear, for a moment, I could have bet my life they were communicating. The creature grunted and the next thing I knew, those wolves came at me with every intention of ending my life."

"Fascinating. Absolutely astonishing."

"Is it?"

Paper rustled in the background and I wondered if he was looking something up or writing something down. I waited before he spoke again.

"Yes. Give me a few days and I'll get back to you with what I can find. If you remember anything in the meantime, please, call me."

"I will. Thank you."

I hung up, only able to reflect on my conversation for a moment before the sound of a horn broke through. Whoever it was, they appeared either upset or pissed. I grabbed my jacket, sliding it on before I headed outside. Voices were already shouting as I shut the door behind me and came to the edge of Caleb's home.

"I know it was you! I saw the pictures. What did you think you were doing?" Alex's voice roared loudly, while he pointed his finger at Caleb.

"What are you talking about? What did I supposedly do?"

"You followed me onto my dad's land. Then you shot me with that fucking dart!"

Caleb's head cocked to the side and he crossed his arms over his chest. "And you have proof of that?"

Alex shoved pieces of paper just above Caleb's forearms, hard. Although Caleb seemed composed, I watched him swallow hard as he grabbed them, beginning to scan each one.

"This one just shows me standing." He dropped the picture to the ground. "Okay, I'm walking." The next floated down. "Here is my back and I'm holding something. But you can't see what it is."

"Don't you bullshit me. You shot me and left me there. I know it was you. What you did... *What you could have done*," he yelled.

Silence had me walking all the way around the corner. I wasn't sure what was going on, but I *wanted* to know. Especially if Alex was telling the truth.

"Detective?"

Both men turned toward me and Alex glared back at Caleb. "I know it was you. Your motive behind it... I can only guess. What I do know is that you and I are going to have a heart to heart real fucking soon. Alone," he snapped, glancing at me before turning to stalk to his truck. I didn't try to stop him. Not when he obviously didn't want me to know.

The driver's side door slammed and he reversed it hard, peeling through gravel as he did so. Rocks flew, showering the unmarked car before he switched gears and tore down the snow covered path that led to the main road a good mile away.

"Caleb?" I repeated. "What's going on? Did you shoot Alex with a dart?"

"Don't be absurd. The guy's clearly lost his mind."

There was an underline to his tone. One that stirred my suspicions even more as he turned and walked away from me to go back inside. I

couldn't trust him. He was lying and hiding something.

The door slammed shut and I stared at the red tail lights in the distance. Slowly, I reached down, picking up the pictures to glance through them. A huge part of me begged to go after Alex. To figure out what had happened. I somehow knew he wouldn't confide in me which only told me one thing—he obviously had secrets, too. Ones he didn't care to share. It pissed me off how much he held back from me. He confessed how much he wanted me. How he couldn't think about anything but me. How he wasn't sure he could leave me alone. But he wouldn't work with me. He wouldn't open up and let me see the real him.

Tires squealed in the distance and his truck disappeared onto the main road. I turned back to the guest house, stopping mid-way as my vision landed on my car. Damn the temptation. It ate at me. I knew it had nothing to do with the dispute and everything to do with what we shared. The need to try to get him to open to me was there. I wanted to ease the pain he harbored. Why I wanted to keep trying, I didn't know.

I sighed and turned back to the cabin. If I continued to think about what I wanted over what was right, I was going to end up in a bigger mess than I was already in. But was it right to stay here knowing that Detective Perkins was possibly abusing his authority? If what Alex said was true, he followed him onto private land and shot him with a dart. I could only think of one kind of dart and the possibility that he tranquilized Alex was shocking. Downright terrifying actually. Caleb was certain Alex was a werewolf and I knew that's what it had to stem from. My only reassurance was that he obviously hadn't found out what he wanted or else I would know all about it.

I placed the pictures down and grabbed my suitcase, pulling it to rest on the bed. I had nowhere close to go. And I couldn't just show up at

Alex's. The timing wasn't right and the last thing I wanted was to make the situation worse. Truth was, I was screwed. I had to sleep here for one more night. Tomorrow, I'd disassociate myself with Caleb until I knew the entire story. I was going to Alex's parents. If it happened on his father's land, maybe Mr. Villani would shed light on what he had seen.

I unzipped my bag, pulling out my light gray pajamas. They were the warmest I had. With only a small electrical heater, I wasn't sure how well it'd keep me warm. So far it was okay, but there was still a slight chill to the air. And it was almost dark. It'd be colder, then. From the increasing wind outside, I knew more snow was coming. It was all Caleb had talked about for the last few hours.

Just imagining it had me shuddering. I grabbed my night essentials, dreading having to use Caleb's guest bathroom. Luckily, it was right through the side entrance. There would be no disturbing him or having to ask permission.

I tiptoed over the threshold, staying as quiet as possible as I shut the door behind me and locked myself inside the bathroom. I removed my clothes, turning on the shower. Steam quickly filled the small space and I got in, speeding through my routine. Just as I turned off the water, something triggered my awareness. I wasn't sure what it was, but I kept quiet, listening, as I grabbed a towel and began to dress.

Nothing unusual stood out. No sounds or talking. Maybe that's what it was. The atmosphere was too quiet.

I tried ignoring my unease as I brushed my teeth. Everything was fine. I was just on guard because of the entire situation. It was bad enough dealing with the horrific circumstances of the case. Now that something was going on between Alex and Caleb, it just intensified everything.



I collected my things, sliding my jacket back over my pajamas. My arms were full as I entered the dark hallway. The living room light had been on before, but now the interior was almost pitch black. Even the outside light had to be off. There was no glow coming through the far window.

My pulse increased and I tried to get control of the sudden fear I felt. Caleb just turned it off. It was no big deal. So .... Why were my instincts firing like live ammunition?

I hurried for the door, only one thing on my mind—my gun. I wanted it so I could feel safe. The moment I came to face the glass screen door, my body locked in terror. A large, dark shadow stood erect, so tall that it was bending its head down to look inside.

I jerked back and threw my weight into the wooden door, locking it and scrambling away. “Caleb!” I was already spinning around and running for the gun cabinet that rested in the living room. A light flipping on had me nearly screaming out again.

“What?” He was rushing toward me from what I knew to be his room. He was only wearing a pair of pajama pants and had a shirt held up against his chest. What I saw along his hip was enough to have my feet stumbling. But I didn’t stop in throwing open the intricately decorated glass door to grab one of the rifles.

“It’s outside. That ... thing. It’s—”

The image replaying in my mind had me jerking a shotgun free.

“This is fucking empty! Caleb, ammo!”

He stood staring between the door and me, as if he didn’t understand what was going on. “You’re sure? Did you hear something?”

“I fucking saw it! Ammo, now!”

I bent for the drawer at the bottom, throwing it open and grabbing the shotgun shells. My hands were trembling as I pushed the ammunition in

and locked the first shot into place. For seconds, I waited for it to try to break in.

*Nothing.*

Caleb jerked the shirt over his head and rushed to grab a gun, beginning to load it. “Do you think maybe the light was playing tricks on you? I don’t hear anything. I just can’t imagine something being out there without it trying to tear through the place.”

“I know what I saw. And there *was* no light,” I snapped. “Only shadows.”

Caleb frowned and walked toward the side door. I followed, holding to the gun like it would save me. After seeing what I had, I wasn’t so sure it was enough. That thing had been huge, standing erect. It had to have at least been seven feet tall. Maybe a little more.

“Wait,” I breathed out. “Don’t open it yet.”

“How are we going to know if something’s there unless we look?” He eased open the barrier, peering into the darkness before he flipped on the outside light. “I don’t see anything.” Minutes dragged out and I saw his tense frame relax. “I don’t know, Erin. Maybe it left? I don’t see anything.”

I felt like a child who was afraid of the dark. Like I’d imagined it all. But I hadn’t.

“I swear. It was right there, peering through the glass door. Whether the light was off or on, I know what I saw, and I’m positive it saw me.” My clothes and overnight bag were lying on the floor. I scooped them up, still holding the shotgun. Caleb seemed to battle with what to do. He’d yet to see it and I wondered if he believed me at all. Sure, he saw the damage to the cabin. And the wolves, they had tried to attack me, but they were just wolves. Not the creature I was catching glimpses of. My only saving grace was that he wanted to believe so badly that they existed. For all he knew, I

could have destroyed the cabin, myself. I could have been the bad one and I seriously think he would have believed anything I said. As long as it pointed to Alex.

Caleb locked the door and an array of emotions shone on his face. He was thinking something. And it looked to be very deep. Almost as if what he was thinking was something he wasn't comfortable with. Or didn't want.

"You can have my room. I'll take the couch."

"I can't stay in here. If I can just keep the shotgun."

"Don't be ridiculous. You can't go outside if that thing is out there. It'll tear that guest house to shreds within seconds. At least in here, I can be prepared to help if it tries to get in."

I clenched my jaw at the anger of my situation. Leaving town was starting to sound like my only option. "I'll take the loveseat. I can't sleep in your bed. I doubt I'll be doing much sleeping anyway. We can take turns with shifts. Come morning, we have to get the townsfolk together for a meeting. We have to put a stop to this."

# Chapter 20

## Alex

I smelled her fear before I sensed it. Even enclosed within walls, the hint of the sweet scent drew me closer. Another threatening fragrance mingled within and the concern pushed me through the woods faster. I was already running, being driven to her side by my selfish, obsessive needs, but now it was more than that. The wolf within was more protector than predator at the moment and I didn't fight his desire to eliminate what was lurking ahead.

I cut through the trees, whipping and weaving through them as Erin's voice tore through the night. The hair on my arms stood up on end and my heart nearly stopped at the loud explosion that erupted. I knew it was a shotgun, but I also knew it wasn't going to kill what she was up against.

My wolf detonated like a bomb within my skin, forcing my body to adjust to the form that wanted to come. By sheer will I managed to hold off the change. Pain was zinging through my limbs at a crimpling rate and I could feel myself slow and stumble. Another shot pierced the air and a howl followed. It wasn't of my race, but of an actual wolf. I gripped to my side, pushing forward.

The line of trees ahead had me lowering as I got closer. My steps were determined, but calculated. I kept nearly silent as I came to a stop and crouched. The pack was surrounding the house, testing the boundaries. Two lay dead not feet from what appeared to be a slightly broken window.

Through the darkness I could see Erin pointing the barrel of the gun through the hole resting at the bottom corner. She was afraid, as well she should be. The wolves weren't backing down and they seemed determined to get in.

I scanned the yard, looking for what I knew had to be hiding in the vicinity. I could smell him not far away. The foul stench gave off an odor of blood mixed with rotted flesh. He'd killed tonight, but nothing human.

Another shot blasted, but not from Erin's gun. My browed furrowed. It had to be Caleb from another part of the house. Shit. In human form I couldn't do anything to help. If I tried to run off the wolves by projecting the alpha within, I'd bring out the real wolf. And if I did that, they'd see there was more than one.

My hand gripped to the tree beside me as I tried to figure out what to do. I couldn't just hide here and let this continue. I couldn't. My wolf refused to back down.

"Do you see it? I don't see it!" Erin's yell echoed over the distance and Caleb's voice followed.

"Just the fucking wolves. I keep thinking I see a shadow in the woods, but I'm not sure. It's pretty far in there."

*BOOM! BOOM!*

Erin's gun kicked back against her shoulder at the force of the shot and a gray wolf slid to a stop just feet from the window, followed by darker one. Her fear was peaking as panic set in. They were getting braver. Trying new things. And me... I was moving along the tree line before I even realized it. I took in everything, from the smell of the earth, to every heartbeat within distance. Heat singed my eyes, making my vision so much clearer. In jerky movements I tore through the forest with my gaze, hunting the one thing I'd longed to take out now for years. The consequences I'd considered only moments ago were gone, lost with the majority of my

humanity. I was seconds away from changing. Without fighting the transition, the pain was nearly nonexistent. My bones slid into place fluidly and between strides I went from man to beast. My hands connected with the dirt and my claws tore into the earth at my speed. I continued to run on all fours, eating through distance twice as fast. Scent overpowered everything. The difference was night and day compared to my human sensitivity. The killer within came to life, snapping my attention to my target like light breaking through the darkness.

Within seconds he was in my sights. Teeth bared as his head swung in my direction. The shock of what I was seeing was enough to almost stop me, but the wolf in me refused. This creature wasn't my maker. He wasn't the one I'd caught scent of throughout the years. This monster was new to me. Maybe even somewhat new to being a werewolf. A year or two old?

Large, sharp teeth became even more exposed as his jaw widened and he pushed from his feet, right at me. My own sound of dominance broke free and we collided in a mass of claws and snapping jaws. Where he was quick, catching me across the neck with his nails, I was stronger. We hit the ground and I sent him flying right through the trees into the opening of Caleb's property.

*BOOM! BOOM!*

"Oh, shit! Erin, I think got it!"

Caleb's voice had my ears perking. The distraction almost sidetracked me completely. If it wasn't for the loud growl that left my new enemy, I would have gone after Caleb, instead.

Blood oozed from the beast's side as he scrambled back to his hands and feet and began rushing me again. I stayed focused, letting him make the mistake of fighting too wildly. His need for survival had his claws and teeth coming at me in hard, swift attacks. I stayed just out of distance, circling

around fast. I knew the moment before he sprung. I ducked low, countering his leap toward me. My nails raked down his face and I sent him flying off to the side. Where I expected him to come back at me for more, he didn't. Foliage flew in my direction as he darted right for the tree line.

***Mine.***

It was the only thing that registered as I chased after him toward Caleb's house.

Light flashed in my peripheral as I exploded from the trees. The air divided into multiple high pitched sounds and I heard the pellets in the shell split off in all directions even as the blast still resonated around me. None of that mattered as I fixated on the wolf only a few feet away.

"Fucking shit!" Caleb yelled. "Erin, get ready! There's two! They're coming your way!"

Growling from the wolves grew louder as we closed in. Faster, I forced myself, but the creature sprung to the left, dodging the shot aimed for it. The second one came right on top of the next, but he was already launching himself right for the window. Glass shattered as he perched in the opening. The seconds it took me to get there felt like forever. I tore into his back, throwing him as hard as I could away. Deep pants left me as my wolf's stare connected with Erin's bloody body. She lay on her back, gazing up at me with wide eyes. Something flickered in with the terror. I wanted to go to her. To check to see if she was the one injured ... *by him.*

Sounds coming from inside had me backing off and my head whipping around to the other werewolf. I barely caught his staggering figure disappear into the woods. Caleb was coming. Getting closer, from the sounds of it. I took off running in the werewolf's direction, determined to catch up with him. Wolves caught up to me as I dove into the tree line. They were nipping toward me, but not threateningly. They were confused.

Looking for direction. I wasn't sure how to communicate with them like he did. I understood their language, but getting them to follow me? To do my bidding? That went beyond my knowledge. In truth, I wasn't even sure I wanted to tap into something like that. These wolves needed to be their own pack. Only problem was, they'd had a taste of a real alpha. They'd never be the same again.

The scent of blood got stronger as I broke to the right. The werewolf was nowhere in sight, but I could smell him. I stayed on his trail letting it take me deeper into the woods. The wolves kept to my side while I tracked every drop of crimson staining the earth. When I approached the river, it all disappeared. The rush of cold water pulled at me from the current and I managed to cross, searching to pick up the area that he'd gotten out at, but there was no more blood. No more clues to his location.

My pulse stayed in a steady thud while I scoured the edge of the bank, going for what seemed like miles trying to locate where he'd come out at.

*Nothing.*

For hours I strained to listen for Erin or anymore gunshots. Silence. With the wolves being with me, I wasn't fearing for her safety, but I knew I needed to get back to her. I had to make sure she hadn't gotten any of his blood in her mouth or eyes, or... Fuck. She'd been covered in the red substance. I couldn't imagine what this meant. I was too afraid to find out.



# Chapter 21

## Erin

I knew. Whether I wanted to admit it to myself or not—I knew.

Steam rose from the coffee mug I was bent over and I let it heat my face while I inhaled the strong scent, deeply. The blanket around my shoulders did nothing to warm my bones. I was ice to my core and I couldn't shake the chill no matter what I did.

My head came up and I took in the single laceration on my wrist for the millionth time. And I knew—the symptoms had been almost immediate. I was injured by a werewolf, and now I was sick. I was becoming one of them. A monster that fed from children and innocent people.

A tear splashed against my forearm not inches from the cut and I brought my gaze back to where Caleb was sleeping on the recliner. He didn't know yet. Or maybe he did. Fuck, I wasn't sure what to believe anymore.

Heavy knocking brought my shoulders up. I stood, making my way to the door on shaky legs. Caleb let out a groan behind me, but he was still sleeping. How, I wasn't sure. Even had I not been scratched, I probably wouldn't have been able to drift off after what I'd seen. *After what I knew.*

Just as I went to open the door, the knocking impatiently sounded again. I cut it off, swinging the barrier just far enough for me to fit through the opening. It was still dark and the time didn't register until I was staring into Alex's face. *Into those eyes.*

“Little early for house calls, don't you think?”

“I had to come.” He swallowed hard, trying to peer around me and the door.

“Caleb is sleeping. Did you come back to fight with him some more? I doubt he’ll be up for it after the night we had. But you know all about it, don’t you?”

A frown surfaced and I could see him shifting nervously. It only confirmed my suspicions. “We should talk in the guest house.” I took off walking, not bothering to wait for his reaction. The snow crunched under my feet and it was still falling. He didn’t speak until he was shutting the door behind us. I sat on the bed, looking between the coffee and my cut. I was numb to emotions. There was no other word for it. I should have been terrified, but I wasn’t.

“Did you come to give me the low-down? To prepare me what I have to look forward to?”

“What?” He kneeled before me, going to reach for the coffee before his hand came up short. “What is that?” He grabbed the cup, placing it on the ground before lifting my wrist into his grasp.

“Don’t sound so surprised, Alex. We both know exactly what that is. I’m ... infected.”

Fear shone in his eyes and he shook his head. “No.”

“Yes,” I nearly yelled. “Are you so surprised? It was only a matter of time, I guess. I mean, with me being completely fucking clueless and all. *Werewolves*? Real fucking werewolves, Alex? And one in my bed? Jesus!”

“Erin, please. You don’t understand.”

“You’re right. I don’t. I obviously don’t know anything.”

Tears trailed down my cheeks and I turned away as he squeezed and kissed my hand. I could feel it lifted as he inspected my wrist some more, but I couldn’t watch. I couldn’t stop how much I felt betrayed and sickened

by the reality of it all. I knew this creature existed, but two of them? Alex being one? Real humans turning and transitioning into monsters? I wasn't sure what to think about that. I still couldn't barely believe it.

"How many of you are there?"

My arm was rotated and his tongue licked over the wound.

"Three, I guess."

"Three?" I came back to meet his stare. "So, you, Caleb, and our mystery man?"

Alex's head cocked to the side. "What do you mean, Caleb? I was talking about my maker."

"Your maker?" I blinked, confused. So there were four? Or...?

I was ripped to my feet as Alex stood. The rage he projected had my heart pounding. "Why do you think Caleb is one?"

"He has the scratches too," I whispered. "On his hip. I assumed... I mean, I don't know for sure. It looked like the same kind, but he was blocking the majority of his chest and stomach with his shirt."

Cold blasted me as the door swung open and Alex pulled me in the direction of the house. His energy was downright terrifying. I could barely keep on my feet as he dragged me inside. Caleb was sitting in the chair, awake and watching us as we walked in. He looked ready, as if he expected us.

"You?" The question roared from Alex as he brought us to a stop not feet away. "It was *you*? The one who attacked us that day? You killed them, but not me? Is that right?"

Caleb slowly stood. I couldn't breathe as he cut his eyes from me to Alex. Seconds drug out and I could tell by his expression that he was thinking very hard about what to say.

“Don’t fear her knowing. It’s too late,” Alex snapped, pulling my arm up to expose my wrist. “Now tell me the truth. Was it you? Is that why you have this hatred toward me, because of what you did?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Don’t bullshit me! Take off your shirt. Let me see for myself.”

“I’m not going to fight with you, Alex.”

*“I want to know.”*

Caleb gave a stiff shake of his head. “It’s not the time.”

“Now is the perfect time! Stop worrying about her and just tell me. Was it you who killed my friends? Your own brother?”

Caleb let out what sounded like a threatening warning. I could see his battle as he stared between me and Alex. He wanted to talk, but he was holding back.

“Tell me right now. Did you kill them? Did you kill Kevin? Say it!”

“It was an accident!”

A rugged breath left Alex as multiple expressions crossed his face.

“I was still young,” Caleb continued. “Only a year out. I never meant to hurt anyone. Especially my own brother!”

“How could not say something after all of these years? Fuck, Caleb. How could you...?”

“You don’t think I tried? I gave you what you wanted! I left you alone, just like you told me to.”

“That was years ago! What sort of excuse is that anyway? I deserved to know. After what you did to all of us, you owed it to me!”

Caleb’s finger rose and he point, clenching his jaw. “No one is owed more than me. I lost my brother at my own hand. He was my life! Do you not think I suffer because of my actions? What you feel is nothing to what I do.”

“Maybe you’re right,” Alex said, nodding. “But what about your responsibility as my maker? What about what you’ve done, trying to pin these murders on me? You knew what I was, what I was fighting against, and you still came after me. You still grilled me and put me through the fucking ringer, harassing me, nonstop. You could have helped me! We could have helped each other!”

Caleb’s gaze turned hard as he stepped closer. “What you did you have to be responsible for. It is not up to *me* to control your wolf. And I didn’t need your help, nor do I. I mourn for my brother every day, just as you do. We do just fine on our own. As for me trying to frame you. I could have pinned your ass to the wall a long time ago if I wanted. What I’ve done has been for your own good, have you not learned? Do you not see that?”

“I can’t believe what I’m hearing.” Alex shook his head, a sound of disbelief falling from his lips. “What about the dart incident? What’s your reason behind that? *Another lesson*? I could have fucking killed someone!”

“But did you?”

Alex lunged forward and I put all of my strength into pulling him back. “Don’t do it,” I rushed out. “It’s not worth it. Let’s go.”

“I had to see for myself,” Caleb broke in. “I wasn’t certain it wasn’t you.”

“I never did anything to you, Caleb. I don’t understand how you could hate me so much.”

“You think I hate you? *I made you!* There is no bond stronger than that. Everything that has happened since has been your own fault. You understand nothing! The only reason you’re alive right now is because of me!”

“Alex, let’s go,” I yelled.

“Go?” Caleb side-stepped, closer to me. Alex immediately pushed me behind him and put distance between us.

“Oh, we’re going. You should feel lucky that she’s here and sick or so help me, this wouldn’t be ending this way. From now on, stay the fuck away, just like you have all of these years. Me and Erin knowing what you are doesn’t make a difference. It changes nothing. It’s that simple.”

“Nothing is simple here in Wolf River. That’s what you fail to see. She may or may not be infected. For all I know, she could have been cut by glass when I pulled her back. She was covered in it. It was all over the floor. Her knowing now puts *me* at risk. If she’s not one of us, do you really think she’s going to keep her mouth shut about what she’s discovered? *I don’t.*”

Alex reached around, pulling me into his body as I tried to keep straight from the sudden vertigo.

“I know Erin. She won’t say a word.”

“Such faith in someone you don’t *really* know.”

“*I do* know her. She won’t say anything,” Alex stressed.

“Then, as your maker, I’m going to take your word. But she has to promise right here and now that she isn’t going to expose any of this. Because if she does and you don’t kill her, by God, I will. And I don’t care if I have to go to Des Moines to do it.”

A growl tore through the room. Tighter, my nails pushed into Alex’s side. His temper scared me and all I wanted to do was leave before there was a fight between the two of them. I wasn’t in any condition to defend anyone, not even myself, and I wasn’t stupid enough to think I could, even if I was healthy.

“I won’t.” I cleared my throat through the thickness. “I won’t say anything about you or Alex. That doesn’t mean I’m stopping my search for

the other werewolf. He needs to pay for what he did to James and those boys. He needs to be stopped before he kills again.”

Caleb opened his mouth to say something, but shut it just as quickly. “Ms. Billings—Erin,” he said, an unreadable smile tugging at his lips. “You’re so afraid of what you’re surrounded by right now, yet you stand here holding to one of us like he’s going to save you. You have no idea, nor does he, what you’re up against. And you tell me, you’re still going to try to solve this mystery?” He laughed. “You’re in so deep that you don’t even see that you’re drowning. But you are. Your air is running out and when that full moon rises, the Erin you know may already be dead. A new Erin might arise. Doesn’t that scare you enough to make you want to forget about this case? Maybe focus on yourself instead? Your days may be numbered.”

“No. Absolutely not. I will not stop until I find this killer.”

One of Caleb’s eyebrows rose while he studied me. Whatever he was thinking, I wasn’t sure I wanted to know. He turned his attention to Alex, his expression once again stoic. “Don’t let her leave town. I’m not finished with her yet.”

“Yeah you are. Erin is my responsibility now. If you need something you can come to me.” Alex breathed heavily as silence stretched out. “So that’s it? Ten years of my life I’ve waited for this moment and this is what I get. There’s nothing you want to tell me? No apology, no advice ... nothing?”

When Caleb didn’t speak, I broke away from Alex, edging to the counter to grab my purse. Alex was still standing there, still waiting. I tugged against his shirt and rage was present as he broke his stare. We started to walk to the side door when Caleb’s voice had us pausing.

“I never hated you. But I *will* do what’s best for you. You’d be smart to remember that.”

Alex's arm tightened around me and he didn't say anything as he led me out of the door. My adrenaline was so intense that my legs nearly gave out. "Easy. Everything's going to be okay." He led me down the path until we got inside. Luckily, my stuff was packed away and all he had to do was lift the suitcase. I grabbed my stack of files, going back so he could hold me steady as we headed for our vehicles.

"Are you okay to drive?"

I opened the back door, placing the manila envelopes on the floor board and reaching over to grab my suit case.

"I'm good. I can make it."

"You sure?"

The moment I turned from putting the bag on the seat, his hand was pressing into my forehead.

"You're burning up. Shit. Do you think what Caleb said was true? Could it have been the glass that cut you? Do you know if you got any of the wolf's blood in your eyes or mouth? Maybe in the cut?"

"I don't know. I don't think so, but I'm not positive."

My voice was shaky as I tried not to think of it. I'd already been through too much tonight. If I let the possibly sink back in, there was no telling how I would take it.

"If you start feeling the slightest bit incapable, you pull off. No being stubborn here tonight. If you can't drive or focus, be safe and pull over. Got it?"

"Yeah."

"Okay, I'll follow behind you."

I nodded, grabbing the keys from my purse. I was trembling as I started the car and cranked up the heater. Exhaustion was sinking in and I had to hurry and get to Alex's. As I put the vehicle in reverse, I took peeks



toward Caleb's front door, almost expecting to see him rush out and change his mind. He had every intention of killing me if I told their secrets, plain and simple. And I wouldn't forget it.

Lights quickly settled behind me as I turned and began heading down the long driveway that led to the house. Snow covered the entire area and I used Alex's tracks to lead me to the main road. I kept a safe, steady pace once I hit the highway, relying on the music humming in the background to keep me going. Each mile seemed to take forever and the newly added warmth to the interior was making the drowsiness worse. I quickly reached, turning it down.

I yawned, blinking rapidly as I approached Alex's turn. I was beginning to veer. I knew that. The closer I got to approaching his home, the worse I was beginning to feel. Over and over I replayed the memory of the werewolf jumping into the window, trying to grab me. I waited to see if I recalled his scratch. The answer to my condition didn't come. Had he got me with his nail, or was I merely getting sick—worn out and reacting to the situation, susceptible to illness? The question was one that plagued me all the way to Alex's front door.

# Chapter 22

## Alex

For two days Erin went in and out of consciousness. She awoke long enough to take a drink of water and was out before she barely even swallowed. Worry had me glued to her side. Her fever went up the first night and stayed high through the remainder of the second. It was day three and only hours ago I noticed sweat beginning to glisten her brow. It increased until she was tossing and turning and completely soaked. The moment I had tried to change her and the blankets, she awoke crying out to be covered again. Her body was shaking so badly, she was nearly convulsing. I wasn't sure what to do, or even if I should take her in to the hospital. There was only one person I knew to call and I wouldn't allow her over here in case Erin's sickness was contagious.

"You've been giving her fluids?"

"Yes, mom. Every time she wakes up."

I paced the length of the bed, staring at Erin's small frame curled into the fetal position. Her face was barely visible with the way she'd tightened the blankets around her.

"If her fever's breaking, she should be feeling better hopefully tomorrow. If you notice the fever go up again, or something just doesn't feel right, trust your instincts and take her in."

"That's it?"

My mother laughed. "It sounds like the flu, honey. There's not much anyone can do about that. It just has to run its course. As long as she

breathing okay and she's not vomiting, I think she'll be fine. Just pump her with as much fluids as you can."

I frowned. "Alright. Are you sure there's nothing else I can do?"

"Make her some soup and try to get her to eat. Homemade chicken noodle. I'll have your father drop off the ingredients."

"At the front door. I don't want either of you to catch this. It's really bad."

"I'll let him know. Now get her some water and he'll be over shortly."

"Thanks, mom."

She paused. "No, thank you for calling. It means so much to know you came to me for advice. I love you."

My stomach twisted as my emotions stirred. "I love you, too."

Was I ever going to get used to having my parents in my life, again? I wasn't sure, but I couldn't go back now. Just like I couldn't with Erin. They were all in my life and I just had to figure out how to deal with it. Erin knew what I was. She could lock me up during the full moon. *This could work.*

I reached over, grabbing the glass of water and sitting on the edge of the bed. There was a paleness to her face, now, yet her cheeks were still slighted tinted pink. She looked so weak. So ... sick. I wasn't sure if this was the transition, and I wouldn't know for sure until the first full moon. It had me going over my previous assumption that she could lock me away. Would we both be locked away?

"Erin." I cupped her cheek, taking in the warmth. She was still coming down. It wouldn't be much longer now. "Erin, sweetie, wake up and drink some of this for me."

My fingers pushed into her damp hair and she stirred, snuggling more into the mattress. It lasted for only a moment before her eyes fluttered open.

“It’s okay,” I tried to say soothingly. “You’ve been sick. I need you to try to drink some of this water.”

“Sick?”

She cleared her throat, lifting her head and reaching for the glass. Her hands were shaking as she took it and began to sip.

“Yes. Three days now. Your fever got really high. It only recently broke.”

She held out the glass and I took it, placing it back on the bedside table.

“Caleb?”

My teeth bit against each other through the anger. “You don’t worry about him. He’ll stay away from you.”

“I’m so tired. I can barely stay awake.”

“I know. It should pass soon. Here, lay back down. Let me cover you up.”

A yawn came from her mouth and she pulled back the covers, struggling to a sitting position. I steadied her as she began to sway.

“Where you going? Are you going to be sick?”

Her head shook and she held to my arm as I helped her stand.

“Bathroom.”

“Right.”

I was so bad at this. I should have known.

Erin leaned into my side and wrapped her arms around my waist while she took slow steps. I wanted to carry her so she wouldn’t have to walk, but I knew she needed to get stronger too.

We entered the bathroom and she reached for the counter.

“You okay?”

“Yeah. I can take it from here.”

“Let me know if you need me.” I moved into the threshold, pulling the door shut as I gave her space. Worry was still present and I walked back and forth, pausing at times to make sure she wasn’t in trouble. After a couple of minutes the door opened and she reached for me again. The trip back to the bed was just as slow. Her eyes were closed through the majority of the steps. It had the worry coming back. My only reassurance was that she’d woken to begin with.

“Here, drink some more water.”

I eased her into the bed, grabbing the glass. The sips she took were light. Her hand was still trembling due to the weakness. Walking had been too much for her, too soon. It had exhausted her.

“Here, lie back down.” I eased her to the mattress, covering her up. When she threw me a grin, I couldn’t stop the butterflies.

“I don’t think I’ve ever been so sick in my life.” She yawned.

“Thank you for taking care of me.”

Words jumbled in my mind and I wasn’t sure what to say. Of course I would take care of her. Didn’t she see? Wasn’t it obvious that I’d do whatever I could to make sure she was okay? If she hadn’t before, she knew my secret now. She would understand why I had distanced myself. She had to.

I leaned down, pressing my lips into her forehead. When I rose, Erin’s eyes were already closed. It didn’t take long before I heard her breaths slow. She was already deep asleep. As I studied her face, I thought over the last three days I’d taken care of her. Of what I’d done in that time—*this*. I’d memorized each line of her features. Every expression she made

in her sleep. They were burned deep into my brain and I'd clung to each one. It was no secret how much I had fought the need to have her for myself. Even from the beginning. Did I have her now? Was she mine to keep? When we left Caleb's I'd pretty much slipped into that state of mind. But would Erin consider staying once she got better? Would she even be human and have a choice? There were too many questions. Too many things I wanted out of this. It was wrong to wish she'd be infected, too. She didn't deserve the hell I lived with, but my wolf took to the idea. He wanted her in any form. If she was a wolf, she couldn't leave. She'd have to stay ... she'd want to.

No. It wasn't me thinking that. *He* was controlling my thoughts at the moment. He was greedy for her. Desperate.

Knocking had me rushing for the door—rushing from the war going on within my mind. I came to a stop, waiting for my dad's truck to drive off before I opened it.

The bags were sitting on the snow in front of my door. I reached out and grabbed the plastic bag full of ingredients. As I headed for the kitchen, I pulled out the note that was sticking from the top. It was directions on the different steps I needed to take. The heart at the bottom paired with **Mom** , made me break out in a smile. In this moment, I had everything—parents, someone who caused my heart to race. *It looked like I might have a life again...*

I paused in removing the ingredients and glanced toward the bedroom. Yes. I wanted to keep her, and I only had a few weeks to convince her to stay. Erin might possibly want to leave after the next full moon if she didn't change, but I couldn't let her. Not without giving it everything I had. And not just for me, but for her. She seemed more than content when she was with me. Our chemistry was out of this world. That had to mean

something. She deserved to be cherished. I could do that for her. I could do that for us.

*Us.* I tested it in my thoughts as I went through the motions of making the soup. I imagined different scenarios. I went over what I knew of her and her personality, and wondered if she'd change when I got to know her. And if she did, would I still want this?

We had a lot to learn about each other. Now that there wasn't anything for me to hide, I could do that. I could tell her everything. And she could tell me more about herself. This could really happen if she came to develop feelings for me. But that was the catch. I'd seen her reaction to what I was. She had been horrified. Repulsed even. If she remained human ... it might be a deal breaker, regardless of how she felt.

Sadness etched in but I tried not to dwell on the emotion. Instead I focused on what Erin and I had shared so far. What we *could* share if everything worked in our favor. A smell I once associated with home drifted around me. I grasped to it while time flew by. I stirred the soup, letting myself focus on what I was doing—providing. And it wasn't just for myself. I was taking care of her. She'd see, and then she would choose me.

Shifting in the bed had me grabbing a bowl. Perfect timing.

As I poured the soup and headed for the room, her yawn in the distance made me grin even bigger. *She was awake.*

Quietly, I headed in. Her eyes were blinking slowly, still heavy with sleep, and she was hugging and slightly curled around my pillow. The sight had me coming to a stop, in awe. Even with her hair disheveled and haloed around her slightly flushed face, she was beautiful.

"Alex." Erin lifted her head and it took me a few seconds to snap into reality.

“I made you some of my mom’s homemade chicken noodle soup. She thinks it’ll make you feel better.”

“You’re talking to your parents again?”

A grin came to her face as she fought to sit up. My steps were fast as I placed the soup on the bedside table and helped her.

“Yes. I went to visit them a few days ago. It was nice. I have you to thank for that. I have you thank for a lot more than you know.” I lifted my eyes to meet hers. They were so bright that I felt my grip tighten around her ribs. It took everything I had to break away and step back. “Anyway, they look forward to our dinner when you’re better.”

“Oh. Right.” Erin pushed the hair out of her face, almost looking confused. “I’ve been really sick. Am I...?” She swallowed hard, looking down at the bandage I’d placed over her wrist. “Was it the wolf? Am I like you now?”

The fear was so clearly visible in her eyes.

“I’m not sure. We won’t really know until the full moon.”

A silence took over the room as she nodded and stared blankly ahead. After a few seconds she blinked rapidly. “Did my eyes change? Mr. Morrison said while you were at the hospital, the nurse noticed in the midst of your fever that your eyes had changed. Did mine?”

I picked up the soup, coming to sit along the edge of the bed. “I don’t know. You really didn’t wake the first two days. If they changed, I didn’t see. Here, try to eat this. It’ll make you feel better.”

Erin went to reach for the bowl but stopped when she saw me lift the spoon. There was a moment I questioned whether I should be taking control or allowing her to lead. The answer was immediate. I wanted this—to feed her, to play this role. Her hand withdrawing had been a clear sign.



Instinctually, she wanted this, too, and I wasn't going to pull back now. Not when it was what I longed for.

I blew against the broth until I was sure it wouldn't burn her. When Erin came forward and placed her lips around the spoon, there was a completeness in that. A power and purpose that sent every part of my being soaring.

"So good," she whispered, moving closer.

*Good?* Yes. So many things about this moment were *perfect*.

I cooled the next bite, lifting it to her waiting lips. A moan filled the room and over and over she awaited my direction. She only moved forward when I indicated it was time. My mind ran with possibilities I shouldn't have been considering in the moment, but I couldn't help how the dominance in me was pushing through. I was testing her, dreaming up other ways to have her submitting to me.

"You seem to be feeling better." I scooped another spoonful as Erin nodded.

"I am. Amazingly so, actually. I almost feel back to normal. I'm still a little shaky and weak, but nowhere near as bad as I was."

Her eyes were trained on the spoon and I tried not to smile as I brought it to her lips.

"Then we'll get you showered after this."

"We'll?"

I did smile then. "That's right. I have to make sure you don't have an accident." She peered up at me as I slid the last of the soup into her mouth. When I placed the bowl down and scooped her into my arms, she didn't argue.

"Did I thank you?" she asked, quietly. "I'm not sure what I would have done if you hadn't looked after me. And that night...*you saved me*."

Caleb would have let that thing kill me if it meant keeping his secret. You risked your life to make sure I was safe.”

“I’m not finished. He may have gotten away, but he won’t escape me the next time. And there *will be* a next time, Erin. We don’t work the same as humans. We...” I hesitated, relieved I could finally talk about this with her. “We tend to get obsessed with what we want. It’s like our brains refuse to believe or give up on what drives us. His motives right now are all he’s focusing on. They may ease over the next few weeks, but they’ll come back stronger than ever. He’ll return for you, and I’ll be waiting.”

I entered the bathroom and stood her up, turning on the water. Erin’s body was shaking as I began to undress her, and then myself.

Steam began to fill the small room and I led her into the standup shower, pulling her close against me as I placed us both into the warm stream.

“Are you afraid of me?”

Her eyes darted up to mine. “Should I be?” Her stare was a like a stab through the heart. I wanted to lie, but it was impossible with how intently she was watching. There was trust there, one I couldn’t betray. Not anymore. This was a clean slate. This was our beginning.

“I’m not sure. I used to think I was the worst thing for you. That I was the one who would end up taking your life. At first, I wanted to. But it all changed, seeing you threatened ... hurting you was the last thing on my mind. I had to protect you. It was all I knew. The consequences that came with that were irrelevant when you were in danger.”

Erin’s features drew in as she began to think. “Do you think it will pass? Will next full moon be the same, or the one after that? When will I go from mate to meal?”

“Mate?” My head reared back and I realized that’s exactly what I wanted her as. I called her mine, even dreamed about the future, but never once did I think of titles.

Her mouth opened and slammed shut. “I’m sorry, I just thought... I don’t know what I’m thinking, I guess.” Her confusion was laced with pain. As if I’d rejected her when that was the last thing I wanted to do. As I began to speak, she spoke over me, pushing me away. “Not saying that we would ever be exclusive like that. Even if I do end up turning, I’d never expect you to drop the life you have going on to take care of or watch out for me. I’ll figure something out. I mean ... maybe the sheriff needs more people.” Her lip curled. “Then I’d be forced to work with Caleb, but aren’t two detectives better than one? Then I can get back on track and really find this killer.”

She continued rambling, staring off to the side as she went on and on about a life that I didn’t seem a part of. She kept talking of finding her way in this town and what she would do if she was a wolf. I cursed my inability to respond quickly enough to her comment about being a mate.

“Erin.” I turned her face to look at me. “Enough of this. You’re not going anywhere. You’re staying here with me and that’s the end of it. You’re mine.”

Her mouth twisted and she threw me a look that told me she didn’t quite believe me.

“Hey.” I said, sternly. “Did you hear what I said? Mine.” My hands came up cup her cheeks and I moved in, pressing my lips into hers. One minute she was lightly kissing me back, the next, she was wrapping her arms around my neck, pulling me forward, as she thrust her breasts against my chest. There was such need in her kiss. Such passion. Her legs buckled and I wrapped my arm around her, holding her steady.

“You’re still a little weak.”

“Just weak for you,” she breathed out, moving her hand to hold securely to the back of my neck.

A smile came to my face and I couldn’t stop myself from kissing her again. Fuck, I was so hard for her. I wanted badly, regardless that I knew she was still sick. But I wouldn’t do that. Even if she did seem suddenly stronger.

As if something clicked in her mind, Erin blinked repeatedly, loosening her grip.

“What is it?”

“What? Oh ... nothing. I think maybe I should go lie back down soon. I guess I’m weaker than I thought.”

But she wasn’t. Erin’s voice didn’t sound winded anymore, and her arms were lowering to cross over her chest. It only curbed my suspicions. She didn’t even need my support anymore, and her silence told me she was back in thought. It wasn’t long before she went right back to where she’d left off before. The police department—Caleb. It was as though she was looking to stay, but I just wasn’t sure what she was getting at. She was dazed. Rambling, again. Was her blood starting to force her mind to accept what it already knew? *Was she like me now?*

# Chapter 23

## Erin

I walked from one window to the next, pacing the living room as I took peeks through the curtains. Aside from the wind blowing softly against the trees, nothing stirred, not even the lone wolf that sat at the border of Alex's yard as still as a statue. It put me on edge and even though Alex had assured me numerous times that the werewolf couldn't come back until a week before or after a full moon, my mind was on alert. I constantly felt wired and anxious and I wasn't sure why. *Nerves?* What I had gone through since I'd been here was more than most people could take, but my fears over becoming one of them made it even worse. I was analyzing every mood, every thought that ran through my head. If my pulse jumped, I wondered if it was at an irregular pace. My head turned at every sound and I questioned if I were more sensitive to them or not. In short, I was driving myself fucking insane. Insomnia was at an all-time high and although I was constantly in a state of go, I was exhausted.

The curtain fell as I let go and headed to the other window. I wasn't halfway there before Alex's voice made me jump.

"Erin, what are you doing?"

I turned to him, glancing from where my covers were on the sofa, to where he was standing at the beginning of the hallway. The pajama pants rested low on his hips and the hard muscles of his stomach had me shifting as I tried to turn my attention to his question.

“There’s a lone wolf out there. Do you think he’s watching me again? Is he going to report my location to the werewolf?”

Alex frowned and rubbed his eyes as he walked toward the window and glanced out. A few seconds went by before he stepped back. “He’s not here for you, he’s here for me. The pack is unstable now that I fought their Alpha. They’re confused.”

“They’re coming to you to lead them?”

His brow drew in and he quickly shook his head. “I know nothing about leading wolves, nor do I care to learn. They need to figure this out on their own. They’ll have to, once I kill the son of bitch who’s after you.”

I hugged my chest, fighting off the chill in the air. It’d been almost a week since I had been sick and although I felt fine, I couldn’t deny how easily the cold affected me.

“I’m sorry if I woke you, again. I’m hoping to hear something from Mrs. Castle tomorrow on a rental house she may have becoming available.”

Alex threw me a hard look. “We’ve talked about this. You’re staying here. At least until I find the wolf who’s after you.”

“And I told you that I’d stay here with you during the two weeks he’s likely to strike. I don’t see the issue? I mean, look at you? It’s almost three in the morning and this is the fourth consecutive night that I’ve woken you up. You can’t be alright with that.”

“It’s not a problem, Erin. You’re upset. If you’re upset, I want to be here to help you go through that. Now why don’t you come to bed and you can tell me about it.”

Tighter, I hugged to myself. Alex just mentioning the bed brought my body alive in ways I couldn’t deal with. I wanted him. I wanted him so much that it was driving me just as crazy as these sleepless nights. Maybe that’s what it was. Despite his cool reaction to my presumption about being

his mate, I wanted to give myself to him, but I still had questions that were making me uncomfortable. Questions that stemmed from us being together before, and in the future.

“Erin.” His eyebrow rose and I quickly shook my head.

“I already told you, I can’t.”

“You can’t get in bed with me so we can talk?”

“Talking isn’t all we’ll be doing if we get into bed with each other. We both know that. We found out very quickly the second night after I was feeling better how fast things can escalate between us.”

“And that frightens you? You can’t catch what I have while I’m in human form, Erin. You’re safe with me.”

“How do you know?”

“Ah .... Now we’re getting somewhere.” He came forward. “We slept together before the full moon. You didn’t turn then, did you?”

“Well ... no.”

“Nor will you. I wouldn’t put you at risk if I wasn’t positive. It’s only transmittable when I completely turn into a werewolf. Only then are you at risk of getting infected.”

Pain stung at me biting my bottom lip. God, I wanted to go. I wanted to feel his arms around me and his cock buried deep inside of me.

His hand came out and when I didn’t immediately step forward, he crooked his finger and motioned me forward. “You want me—I’m fucking dying to have you. Stop denying what we both want and come let me taste you.”

A moan left my mouth and my foot lifted, only to pause.

“I can smell your arousal, Erin. Don’t make me come for you.”

“But...”

Alex lunged and had me lifted and locked in his arms before I could think of what I was going to say. Suction tugged at the side of my neck and I pushed my fingers into his hair, holding tight as I wrapped my legs around his waist.

“It’s more than what you are,” I managed in an uneven voice.

“You want this,” he said, breaking away.

“*Too much.*” My answer was rushed. It had him spinning for the room at a fast pace.

“Even better.”

I bounced on the mattress as his weight pinned me down. His lips traveling over my neck erased everything for the first time since I’d gotten better. I couldn’t think. Couldn’t speculate on what I should do or what was wrong. He lifted, grinding his hard cock on my stomach and I drifted away even more.

“You can battle your needs all you want, Erin, but never deny yourself this. Never refuse these cravings when we both know it’s *me* you want. Because I want you, too. Mine, remember?”

I gasped as his teeth tugged at the junction of my neck. It was so animalistic, so terrifying, yet thrilling now that I knew what he was. The combination was polar opposites and yet my trust that he wouldn’t physically hurt me was the only thing keeping from me fearing for my life.

Fingers grasped onto the lining of my pajama bottoms and I lifted the smallest amount, allowing him to rip them down. His quickly followed. Heat poured from his skin, warming me even more as he rubbed the underside of his thick length against my slit. My shirt was the next thing to go. The moment we were free of all clothing, both of us impatiently wrapped around each other. My legs tightened around his waist and I crushed my breasts into his chest as my arms tried to draw him closer.



“This is what I want for us, every night and every day. This makes me happy.” Alex’s tongue pushed into my mouth and I moaned as his fingers dug into my back. I broke away, sucking in air at the blaze he’d created down my side. The scratches didn’t break the skin, but they held enough bite to ignite the masochist I’d spent the last few years trying to forget. And somehow I knew he picked up on my reaction to the pain. Just like he must have done when we were together before. He could smell the lust and no doubt it was intensifying to epic proportions by his actions.

“Do you see how perfect we are for each other? I know what you need, baby. Me, no one else.”

*Yes. Just him.* He was right. I knew that. Something within told me it was true. Something ... more than instinct. My mind started racing while I tried to figure out whether or not he’d pull away from me again. Would he now that I knew what he was? That his problems weren’t PTSD, but his wolf?

“Alright. Enough with your mind. Your energy is all over the place. No wonder you can’t sleep.” Alex lifted, trailing his fingers between my cleavage as he worked his way down. “Don’t worry. After I finish, you’ll be lucky to move, more or less, think.”

He gripped behind my knees, spreading my legs wide. As he began to lower, I took in everything—his expression, how focused he was on my pussy, the way he licked his lips as he neared what he wanted. The hunger behind what I saw made me impatient to have him.

Breath brushed against one of my inner thighs, and then moved to the next. He took his time, making me wait for contact. With each second that ticked by, I could feel myself getting wetter. Just as thoughts pushed into my head, a nip had me crying out. It came more from shock, than pain, but it worked.

“And you were doing so well.”

Scruff from his cheek had me closing my lids and basking in the sensation. Not thinking, but feeling. Combined with the tingling from where his teeth had scraped, Alex quickly became my sole focus. The light swirl of his tongue over the tender area increased the awareness of where he'd bitten. When he glided lower, I gripped to the comforter, waiting to see what he'd do next. Another nip was followed by him rubbing his lips back and forth over the top of my slit. My head lifted and I couldn't stop myself from rocking against him. My clit pulsed repeatedly, and I nearly screamed when finally teased me with the tip of his tongue.

“Yes,” I whispered. “More.”

Alex's thumb positioned at the top of my folds and he applied pressure, pulling back as he flicked back and forth over the sensitive nub. When I reached for his head to pull him in, he grabbed my wrist, trapping it underneath my ass.

“You're begging, already?” He ran his tongue over my entrance, moaning as he went up to suck over my clit. “Answer me,” he said, going back to add more suction.

I fought to form words, too busy trying to will oxygen to come. “Yes, I'm begging. Keep going. Oh, God, please keep going.”

A chuckle left him as he rubbed the roughness of his cheek back over my inner thigh.

“No, no,” I pleaded. “Go back.”

“To what, your pussy? Or maybe you want my tongue teasing that tight little ass.”

“Wait ... what?”

I could barely register the vivid picture in my mind before I was being flipped over and pulled up to my knees. My hands scrambled to lift

my chest, but his palm was already pushing the top of my body back to the bed.

“Relax, baby. You’ll like this.”

I didn’t have a chance to debate his statement. Alex’s tongue flattened over my pussy and moved up, circling around my back entrance. Tightly, I gripped to the blankets, bracing myself for the unknown. Thoughts, insecurities, they bombarded me in a title wave of overwhelming uncertainties. Alex’s hand spanking my ass drew me to the warmth he’d ignited. I could feel where his hand had connected and instead of wanting to escape the pleasure he was evoking, I felt myself swaying back into him. My actions had him gripping into my flesh and moving his tongue into me deeper.

“That’s it. Feel.” He dipped back to my pussy, long enough to suck along the outside, before he came up to tease my ass again. Over and over, he took turns. My whole body was vibrating from our moans. When he slid his finger into my channel, I almost had an orgasm on the spot. If it wasn’t for the spanking, I wouldn’t have been able to hold off.

“On my cock this time, baby.”

“Right now?” I picked up my head and looked back. Alex was already on his knees behind me, positioning himself.

“Back down.” Nails scratched the length of my back and ignited a need like none other. “Ooh, you like that. *A lot*. Fuck, if you only knew how delicious you smell right now.”

His cock inched inside of me and his hands came up. Nails dragged down both sides, multiplying the ecstasy. I gasped through the sensations, trying to ignore how I didn’t feel as though I was keeping my thoughts to myself anymore. I almost felt like I was splitting into two—sharing my

insight into what was going on with someone else. For a second, I was scared by the confusion, but it didn't last.

"Nope." Fingers twisted around my hair, tugging for me to get on all fours. When the pressure of his other hand pushed on the small of my back and I arched, he surged forward. My orgasm was automatic. There was no stopping it or controlling when it happened. "Fuck baby, that's it." His cock withdrew and he took his time going slow and deep as the spasms shook me.

My cries pierced the room and the moment I came down, he began rubbing over my clit all over again. The constant stimulation had me building while he tortured me with his leisurely pace. Tighter, he held to my hair, using his other hand to trail his fingers up and down my back. The dominance gave me a view into his wolf. I knew that's who he was in moments like this. It was the one who took the lead. The one who made the rules and expected them to be followed. He was showing authority, yet he was still caressing me gently. There was deep care in the action. *Love.*

"I want to see your face. I have to see..." He turned me to my back, lifting one of my legs to fit over his shoulder. His cock drove in deep as he hovered above. He kept the slow pace, teasing my nipples as he took in my expressions. The intensity he held sent off a power of its own. It came at first as a flicker of awareness, until it grew into an invisible blanket that cloaked over my skin. Where I should have been uncomfortable, I wasn't. I wanted to pull it around me tighter. To have him so in tune with me that there was no separation between us.

My hand reached toward his chest and Alex lowered, sucking and biting at the tip of my finger. Still, he watched. And still, I relished in the physical force of his passion. Of his need of me.

“You’re getting close.” He lowered my leg, pushing deep as he settled his weight over me. Our lips met and I wrapped around him, holding tight as I urged him faster.

“Come with me,” I begged. “Come *in* me.”

A growl tore from Alex and he dove down sucking and biting against my neck. His hands were pushing under my back, gripping and raking down my skin as he thrust with pounding force. *I was his*. Gone from bliss thanks to the beast he harbored inside. And in the moment, I was more than okay with that.

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

# Chapter 24

## Alex

Giggling brought a bigger smile to my face as I watched Erin and my mother carry a conversation from across the kitchen. They were both working on getting dinner ready and their actions were so in sync that they were flawless together. They never went into an uneasy silence. It was as if they'd know each other forever.

My dad was looking too, smiling just as big while we sat, content to just watch them. There were moments we'd slip into a topic, but happiness came from the women we adored. And I did adore Erin. Two weeks she'd lived in my home and although the first few days were rocky, the morning after she came back to my bed, we had picked up like nothing had ever driven a space between us to begin with. I knew she had gone through a lot with the attack and learning the truth. It was a scary fact to face, but now... Life couldn't have been any more perfect.

"So you really grow these here on your land?" Erin picked up a carrot, placing it on the cutting board as she began to chop away.

"Oh yeah, we have a greenhouse in the back. It's so much more convenient than driving to the grocery store half an hour away, and better for you too. It's really the best option if you're putting down roots in a remote location. Alex," she paused, "Alexander, I should say, does the hunting for meat and between the two of us, we rarely have to make trips for food. We have everything we need here."

Erin grabbed another carrot and I could see from her expression that she was thinking. “Is it hard to start a garden?”

“Not at all. Not when you got Alex. He knows everything there is about gardening. Isn’t that right, honey?”

My mother and Erin glanced back at me and I gave a nod. “I do, but first we need a greenhouse. Not much will survive the winters without some sort of protection from the elements and animals.”

“Oh.” Erin’s brow drew in and her smile fell as she turned back to the cutting board.

“I actually have been thinking of starting one for a while. We’ll take a trip in the morning and grab some lumber, what do you say?”

My pulse jumped as her face lit up and she flashed me an amazing smile. “I’d love that. It sounds fun. So you’ll teach me, then?”

“Of course.”

Hell, I’d carry the wood all the way home on my back if she continued to look at me like that.

“There we go.” My mom beamed. “Now you and Alex can have your own garden.” Her voice wavered at the end. It was enough to draw both mine and Erin’s attention. My mom paused, shifting as she began cutting the onion. “I mean... How long do you plan on staying? Will it be long enough for you to see your hard work come to fruition?”

Erin and I looked at each other and she quickly turned back to the carrots. “I’ll be staying until I solve this case. However long that may be.”

“At Alex’s?”

She glanced up, then, but only briefly. There was no emotion on her face as she scooped the carrots she had together and placed them in the bowl. “We’ve actually been talking about that, too.” She paused. “Mrs. Castle had a rental house become available just this morning.”

My stomach dropped. I didn't know she'd gotten a call. It must have been when I was outside chopping more firewood.

Erin, grabbed a potato. "I turned down her offer. I think I'll stay as long as he doesn't mind me being there."

My mother smiled, looking over her shoulder at me. "Good. I think you're safer that way. Not saying you can't take care of yourself, it's just these woods ... well, you know. My Alex will watch over you and make sure nothing happens."

"That's right." I stood and walked over to them. I was dying to wrap my arms around Erin and kiss her for her decision, but I didn't think she would feel comfortable. And there was no way in hell I was going to mess this up.

I took a carrot from the bowl, popping the piece into my mouth as I leaned against the counter closest to Erin. The expression she wore as she glanced at me was genuine. She had been so happy lately that it didn't take me long at all to decipher when she was in a good mood or when she was pretending.

An engine humming in the distance had me turning to pull back the blinds. Multiple headlights left me confused. "Are you expecting company?"

"Company?" My mom, repeated. "Well, no. Not that—" She stopped abruptly, cursing under her breath. "I did mention earlier to your Aunt Jessa that you were coming over for dinner with Erin. She got pretty excited and brought up having a potluck at some point, but I thought she meant for another day."

"Aunt Jessa?" I nearly groaned. It had been so long since the last time I'd seen that side of my mom's family. Or my cousins, Justin and Randy. It had to have been a good year before my accident. They were the



same age as me, so that put them in their mid-thirties now. Surely they had families of their own.

Just the thought that they didn't, combined with the big, fancy truck that was leading the way, had me moving in closer to Erin.

"You okay?"

My dad's voice brought my head up. I blinked past the boiling jealousy that had blossomed. "Yes. I was just trying to remember how long it been since I last saw them. How are they? Did Randy or Justin every get married? Have families?"

"Justin married," my mom, cut in. "Randy ... he dates, but I don't think he's found anyone serious to settle down with."

Great. Just what I needed. Hopefully he wasn't coming, or if he was, he'd somehow miraculously turned out uglier than the last time I'd seen him. Back then there wasn't a girl who didn't swoon in his presence.

"Aunt Jessa, is that your sister?" Erin's voice distracted me and I watched while my mother listed the members of the family. Before she could finish, a knock sounded at the door. My dad raised one of his eyebrows at me and headed for the sound. Were he and Uncle Clayton still on bad terms? Shit, too much time had gone by. I felt lost.

The wooden door opened and I cringed at my aunt's high pitched voice. "Alexander!" She rushed forward, and I forced a smile as she came up and threw her arms around me. "Look at you. My goodness, you sure did grow up. Clayton!"

She spun around and weight crashed into me before I could brace myself. Uncle Clayton was built like a bear. He was heavier, but it was all muscle. Or had been, last I recalled. Not really anymore.

"Good to see you, boy. How you been?"

“Great. Good. I...” My voice faded out as I caught sight of Randy and a blonde woman coming forward. His eyes were trained on Erin and I tried to calm my wolf as it stirred. The blonde, in turn, had her eyes all over me. “Randy, that can’t be you,” I said, changing the subject.

Blue eyes turned my way and his dark hair was cut shorter than mine. Where my beard was coming in, his face was cleanly shaven. He still looked like the pretty boy I remembered.

“Alex,” he said, nodding. “How you been?”

Fear and something altogether unknown perfumed the room. I smiled at the fact that I made him uneasy, but the victory didn’t last as I caught Erin almost glaring at the blonde. It was so out of her character that my jealousy over Randy faded, quickly. “I’m doing great. Better than ever. Let me introduce you all to Erin. Erin, this is my aunt and uncle. And that’s Randy,” I said, gesturing.

Erin smiled, shaking hands with them. When she got to Randy and the blonde, she gave him a wave and stopped on the woman.

“Oh, this is Mimi,” Randy said, hugging her to him, awkwardly. Erin reached out her hand and the blonde smiled, glancing between her and then stopping on me as they shook.

“Ow!” Her gaze jerked back to Erin.

“I’m sorry,” Erin rushed out. “Sometimes I don’t know my own strength. Hazards of the trade, I’m afraid.”

Confusion flashed on Mimi’s face.

“She’s an investigator,” I offered. “And she was a detective and cop for a while.”

Erin shrugged and smiled sweetly, immediately taking up residence with my mother next to the stove. Although I was a little surprised at her behavior, I couldn’t help but feel elated over what I had picked up. And

scents never lied. The whole time I had been worried over Randy, but there was no need. Erin's jealousy over the blonde clearly indicated where she stood concerning him... *and me.*

I led my aunt and uncle back toward the island while Randy and Mimi followed. Erin kept taking peeks in our direction. Each time she looked over, I was sure to meet her gaze as assurance that she had nothing to worry about. A smile soon surfaced back on her face, but I could sense something was still bothering her. She wasn't acting like her usual confident self.

"I hear you're logging some of your land. You own a good amount if I remember hearing correctly. How much do you have now?" My uncle took up lead in the conversation while I sat down next to my dad.

"Close to eighty acres."

"Eighty? Wow, nice. You do any hunting on your land?"

*Silence.* I knew everyone associated hunting with my accident, which led to the suspicions, but I brushed it off like it wasn't a big deal.

"Sometimes, although I haven't been in a few months. You thinking of doing some?"

He shrugged, glancing over to Randy. "We did some duck hunting last week up north. We don't do much here around Wolf River."

"Probably a good thing," I said, grabbing my glass of tea.

"Although, if you do decide to hit the bow and want to do some good deer hunting, you might want to check out Marathon. I was up there last year. Good hunting that way."

"Marathon. I've heard some good things about that place. I was thinking Waupaca, but I might check into both."

"Waupaca is good, too. You'll likely get something if you go to either one."

My uncle grinned, almost relieved that I wasn't uncomfortable. But I was. I didn't hunt there like they did. Not even close. And I didn't go last year, more like four years ago. That was a close call. One I didn't care to repeat. People weren't as scarce as they were here. Especially after dark.

"Do I smell roast, here, too?" I pointed to the pot they'd placed on the island and threw a charming smile to my aunt, who beamed.

"Sure do. Your momma mentioned making one tonight and I thought I'd bring over my own recipe. I also went ahead and brought over a little something special for you."

My head cocked to the side as my smile grew. "You didn't." I grabbed the small plastic container, pulling off the lid, and my Aunt Jessa laughed.

"You used to love my fudge. I thought I'd surprise you with your own batch."

I grabbed a piece, moaning as it melted on my tongue. "Seriously." I swallowed, grabbing another piece. "This is the best ever. Erin," I said, waving her over. "You have to try this."

The expression she held made it appear she was having a good time, but I knew what I was looking at. It was fake. Staged for their benefit, just like my behavior. Something was definitely going on in that mind of hers. The distracting thoughts were constant since she'd come to stay with me and it triggered my suspicions even more, but I couldn't be for sure.

"Oh, let me see," Erin said, dazzling them with her smile. Where I thought she'd take the fudge from my fingertips, she grasped my wrist tightly and bent down, taking a bite so big that her bottom lip brushed my thumb. My eyes widened as my body roared to life. "Mmm," she said, closing her eyes.

My aunt clapped a little, elated that I wasn't the only one praising her cooking.

"Wow," Erin went on, in a quieter tone. "That is really good."

I reach in with shaky fingers, pulling out another. Her hand came back to mine with less pressure. As she glided up my forearm to stop at my wrist, again, our eyes held. Slowly, she moved in, seeming to catch herself at the last minute. She took a quick bite stepping back and casting them another smile. There was a slight blush to her cheeks and I could feel her embarrassment.

"I'm going to have to get that recipe," she said, still edging back to my mother.

"If you're here for Christmas, we can make a batch together." My aunt turned to my mom. "We're still doing Christmas here, right?"

My dad threw me a look and I laughed under my breath. It wasn't so bad, really. Not like I had feared when I first realized they were here. In truth, I was enjoying their presence for the most part. The socialization and interaction was something I had missed. And the normality... It was heaven to be in again.

"It's still the same. We had Thanksgiving at your place. Christmas will be here."

"Will it be like old times?" Randy butted in. "Like before Alex left?"

Silence once again took over and we all turned to look at him.

"The hunt," he went on. "Us guys go hunting while the women cook. It was always like that. I was just wondering if we'd be doing it that way again. Like as if nothing ever happened."

"Randy," Aunt Jessa hissed.

“What? It’s a valid question. I don’t want to go into these woods and get mauled by something.”

My mother glanced at me and I could see her pain as she rushed from the kitchen.

“You don’t have to worry about that,” I ground out. “There will be no hunt. Excuse me.” I headed for my mother, easing my hand up to Erin who was already headed her way too.

What needed to be done had to be private. A moment between mother and son. A bonding and healing that I knew needed to happen.

I raced through the living room, pausing at the stairs. Sweat began to line my skin as I forced myself forward. When I reached the top, everything was the same but the color of the walls. It was like stepping back in time. Vertigo had me placing my palm against the wall and I could so clearly see the pictures broken on the floor and the holes along the wall. Fuck, I’d gone crazy that morning.

“Mom?” My steps were slow as nausea left me swallowing compulsively. As I neared my open bedroom door, I breathed through the panic that was surfacing. “Mom?”

“In here, Alex.”

Fuck. She was in my old room. My love for her was the only thing leading me toward her voice. I grabbed to the door frame as I stared into a nightmare I remembered all too vividly. Blood was smeared across my sheet and strewn blanket. My crimson handprints were trailed along the walls, evidence of my first murder. Of my first victim. The man’s screams echoed in my head. He’d been begging for his life.

“Alex, come here.”

I barely recalled moving forward to collapse at her feet. I was quickly becoming drenched in sweat. The flashes blinded me and I rested

my head on her lap, closing my eyes, wishing to forget. But I'd never get rid of these visions, and trying to convince myself that having Erin would change my path was the biggest lie I'd ever conceived.

"I'm sorry," I managed. "I never meant to hurt you and dad like I did. I thought you were better off without me."

Fingers stroked through my hair, calming the storm brewing within.

"You're our son, Alex. You're our life. We'd never be better without you. All those years you were gone, there was an emptiness nothing in this world could fill. We mourned the loss of your presence every single second of the day."

"But you also stayed safe. You stayed alive."

Her fingers paused and she grew quiet for a few seconds. "You really feel as though you would have hurt us had you remained here, don't you?"

"I know I would have." I lifted, then, meeting her eyes for only a moment before dropping my head. Her hands cupped my cheeks, bringing me back up.

"I know the stories. I know the secrets of this town. And I don't care. You are my son. *No matter what.* You will *always* be my son." My lids closed while her lips pressed into my forehead. My eyes were on fire as emotions stirred. Energy behind me had me turning to see my father in the doorway.

Slowly, he walked forward, and I stood, not sure what to expect.

"Your mother and I had a long talk shortly after you left home. We went over every possibility. Every scenario and outcome." He glanced between us, ultimately nodding. "She's right. You're our son and we love you. Nothing could ever change that."

“Dad?” My head shook, confused by how unfathomable the acceptance seemed. Did they mean what I thought they did? Did they know?

“Sometimes terrible things are bestowed upon good people. What happened to you wasn’t your fault, Alex. You’ve dealt with this how you felt was best, but you’ve protected and looked out for everyone except yourself. It’s time to let go of any fears you have. I assure you we considered *every* possibility of your accident and we love you too much to want to lose you again.”

“Even if...?”

I couldn’t continue. The words were impossible to force out.

“No matter what,” my dad said sternly. “Now let’s go finish this meal before your Uncle Clayton wipes out my whisky and I end up kicking him out again.”

I laughed, but it was filled with sadness and laced with disbelief. My mind was spinning.

I wrapped my arm around my mother as she stood from the bed. A weird sense of something resembling peace sunk in. It stroked the embers within, sparking the tiniest flame. I’d come to help my mother heal, but the assurance from my parents worked its own magic to the broken pieces inside of me. Maybe I was wrong thinking that Erin couldn’t save me. Contentment was growing. Between what was blossoming with Erin, and what I was getting from my mom and dad, I stood a real chance of becoming someone I never thought I’d be. To having something I never dreamed was possible. Man was winning over the beast and there was a power behind that, but I knew it was only temporary. The real test would come the week before and after the full moon. Erin was with me now every



second of the day, and that changed things. During my most susceptible time, all bets were off.

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

# Chapter 25

## Erin

Watching Alex's family leave his parents' home was the biggest relief I could have asked for in the moment. My behavior at the beginning was uncalled for and I was repulsed by my actions toward Mimi. Jealousy was something I had never dealt with before. Where it had come from wasn't something I wanted to think about. My only saving grace for the night was the fact that I got it under control earlier, rather than later in the evening.

"What a great dinner," I said, sipping my wine. "I've had a wonderful time."

"Agreed." Alex's mom said, smiling. She and Alexander sat on the sofa across from mine and Alex's loveseat. And they were staring, happily, at us. "We're going to have to do it again sometime soon."

"Dad mentioned you were going to be setting up the Christmas tree in the next few days. Why don't Erin and I plan to come back over, then? We can cook for you and dad and then we can all decorate the tree afterward. It'll be like old times."

Alex wrapped his arm around me as I watched their happiness grow to unbelievable heights. My heart swelled until I almost couldn't breathe. It was beautiful to watch them all bond. Alex, too. He was everything I'd ever wanted, and the one thing I never thought I'd have.

"That sounds like a fantastic idea," his mom exclaimed.

“It’s a date, then. We can even come over a little early so I can help dad hang the lights.”

Alexander gave a big nod. “I like the sound of that.”

“Perfect.” Alex scooted more to the front and I took his hint. We all stood and I walked the glass of wine to the sink, grabbing my purse as everyone headed for the door.

“I’m so glad the two of you decided to come.” His mom hugged me and I couldn’t deny how good it felt. It’d been so long since my own parents’ passing that I had forgotten what it was like to have family. Although they weren’t technically mine, it was good to feel as though they thought of me as someone who belonged.

Alex’s hand settled on my lower back and I let go, letting him help me put my jacket on. As we said our goodbyes and headed for his truck, I couldn’t keep from smiling. It really had been a wonderful night, despite my slip of jealousy at the beginning.

*“I hope she stays. I like her.”*

My steps faltered as Alex’s mother’s voice registered. I looked across the yard, noticing they weren’t outside.

“You okay?”

Alex opened the passenger side door of the truck and I glanced over the forty or so feet separating us from the house. Had she really said that? Did it travel through the walls at her volume?

“I ... yeah,” I said, nodding. “I just thought I heard something.”

“Nothing you should be worried about.” Alex practically lifted me in the truck. “The only thing within distance are a few critters in the woods, but I think I can fend them off,” he said, kissing my cheek.

I laughed, turning to catch his lips with mine as he moved back in. Our connection was light, increasing as he deepened this kiss.

*“Oh, Alexander, they’re perfect for each other. How sweet.”*

*“Joan, get away from that window before they see you.”*

Alex laughed the exact moment I stiffened and tore my gaze to the window. Fingers turned my face and the smile Alex had melted as he studied my face. “Erin, you didn’t hear that ... did you?”

“Hear what? I’m ready to go home,” I rushed out. “It’s cold.”

My shaking had nothing to do with the cold and everything to do with my biggest fears coming true. I shouldn’t have heard them. Or felt the need to rip Mimi to shreds for checking out the man I was quickly falling for, but I couldn’t help it. I was losing myself. Each day brought something new. Something I couldn’t control.

Alex kissed my cheek once more before shutting the door. It didn’t take but a few minutes to get home and even then, I couldn’t make myself speak. My mind was going wild and I found myself lost in the possibilities of my future.

“Let’s take this off.” Alex unzipped my jacket and I let him take it to the closet. When he came back to me, I realized I was standing in the same location. He was holding a cup of hot chocolate and I hadn’t even realized he’d been gone long enough to make it. My heart was starting to race and there was an odd sense to run. To just start running and not stop until I was in a location where no one knew who I was ... or what I might be. But there was no running. Not from this.

“I’m scared,” I whispered, taking the cup. “I don’t think I’m okay.”

Concern masked his features and Alex led me to the sofa, taking the mug to set it on the coffee table.

“Talk to me. What are you afraid of? Why do you think you’re not okay?”

Did I tell him? What if the full moon came and nothing happened? I'd look ridiculous with my suspicions.

"Erin, please. I can't help you if I don't know."

"It's probably nothing. I've always overanalyzed everything."

Alex lowered his head until he was in my line of vision. I brought my face up, nodding. "Fine. It's probably nothing, but I'll tell you." I took a deep breath. "Food is starting to taste different. Bland, I guess you could say. That could easily be explained away as anything, I guess. "I ... my mind. I'm so preoccupied. I find myself wanting to argue with my own thoughts." My eyes shut at how absurd I sounded. "This is stupid," I laughed, pushing to my feet. "I'm just a nervous wreck. I'm sure this has happened before, it just never registered because it isn't a big deal."

"You need to calm. Come back over here. Sit on my lap and let me hold you."

"Alex..."

"Come." The order had me obeying. I crawled into his lap, curling to put my head on his chest. Fingers brushed back my hair and I felt myself begin to relax. "There," he said, lowly. "Better?"

I nodded, but stayed quiet while he continued. Minutes went by before he spoke again.

"My parents really like you. I knew they would."

"I like them, too. Your mother." I glanced up. "She's so inviting. I liked her the moment I saw her. It's her energy. It's so calm and loving. I almost feel like I could tell her anything and she'd understand. I rarely get the feeling from people."

Alex's smiled, hugging me into him even more. "She does have that kind of energy. I find it fascinating that we can both feel the same thing, yet, you're not a wolf. Not in the true sense, anyway."

“What do you mean?” I wiggled on his lap and he sat me up so I could face him.

“Well, let’s say you were infected. I think you’d get a glimpse of how it is, but not to the extent I do. Your wolf is in a simmering process. Your blood is altering. Gearing up for the full moon. In truth, your wolf isn’t born yet. Don’t mistake what I’m saying though. She’s there, listening, watching, but you won’t necessarily have to deal with her until she takes you over for the first time.” He frowned. “Once she comes, though, things will never be the same for you. She’ll never go away.”

“She? So is she not me?”

“It’s hard to explain. I put her in a third person because she’ll have a personality of her own. It’s like you’ll be two people. The Erin you know, and a darker part of yourself you never knew existed.”

I clutched my hands in fear.

“Let’s not think of that, now. You still have time. There’s no point in worrying just yet. Besides, you’d tell me if there was something really wrong. Wouldn’t you?”

Wrong—like hearing his parents conversation in the house?

“Alex?”

“Erin?”

He was waiting for my answer. One I didn’t think I could give just yet. It could have been ...no. It couldn’t have been a hallucination or my mind creating something that didn’t exist. What was I going to do?

“If I do turn, you promise you won’t let me hurt anyone?”

“You have my word.”

I took a deep breath, resting my head back against him. How could life just be starting to get good for me, yet end up like this? Alex talked as though we shared something special. As if we’d have an amazing

relationship together. I didn't doubt his passion for us, I felt it too. It was like a fairytale to the heartbroken woman I had become. The only problem with our fairytale were the monsters that existed within it. They were real. *They were us.*

Alex adjusted me in his arms, leaning me further back so he could look into my face. "Hey." His finger traced over my lips. "I have an idea."

"What's that?"

There was hesitation in my question. It had him laughing as he lifted me and stood.

"Why don't you and I draw up the greenhouse? You can tell me how you want it and then we can pick a location."

Happiness fluttered back in, giving me hope. I wanted this. If I was going to be doomed anyway, why shouldn't I be happy with him? What if it wasn't as bad as I was making it out to be? What if I wasn't even a fucking wolf? Alex and I ... *the future* ... it had me dreaming up so many things.

"Okay," I said, smiling. "Let's do this."

"The greenhouse?" His eyebrow rose. "Or are we talking about something else?"

I giggled. "I'm talking about the greenhouse, of course. Unless you have something else in mind? Shall I try to guess what it is? I have a knack for figuring out mysteries."

"I could think of a lot of things we could do, Mrs. Investigator."

"Hey now," I laughed. "I'm not Mrs., yet. It's Ms. Investigator. I'm single and unattached at the moment."

Alex let out a growl. "Like hell you are. We're building a greenhouse together. That's roots, baby."

My eyes studied his as I began to smile. "You want set up roots with me?"

“Will you run if I say yes?”

My pulse was pounding as I brought my hands up to rest against his rough cheeks. God, he was ruggedly beautiful. So much so that it took me a moment to respond. “Will you stop me if I try?”

“The fact that the thought of me stopping you turns you on, has me saying yes to that question.”

My eyes widened and I laughed, wiggling in his arms. “That’s not fair.”

Alex spun me to straddle his waist. His hands squeezed against my ass and I gripped the back of his neck, moaning.

“I happen to like the advantage I have.”

I lowered, pressing my lips to his. The pressure of his fingers pushed over my opening and I deepened the kiss as I rocked against him.

“Tell me more about these roots,” I mumbled against his mouth. “Not just that I’m yours for the moment. You really want a future with me?”

Alex slid one of his hands up the back of my sweater, bringing the top half of me closer. “I do. I want to make this official. I want you to be mine for real,” he said more seriously. “Officially. Do you think you’re ready for that? Can you belong to only me? There’s a lot that comes with this commitment. You don’t live here in reality, Erin, but I want you to. I want you to stay and be with me.”

Committing myself to him was the simple part. I couldn’t imagine coming anywhere close to feeling something like this for another person. Not even with Martin. Alex was all I truly wanted. Getting my stuff packed up and moved here was something entirely different. I’d be putting roots here for real. *For good*. I wasn’t a quitter. When things got tough, I gave it everything I had. But could I trust Alex to do that? I was risking a lot for someone who had run from me before. I knew his reasons now, though, and



everything within me said to go with this. I wanted him, and wasn't that what mattered—our happiness?

“Do you know how to pack?”

A smile stretched across Alex's face. “I do.”

“Can you drive a moving truck? They're pretty big.”

He laughed, bouncing me a little through his excitement. “I can.”

“Last question, and this one is important.” I took a deep breath.

“You know my field of work. Can you handle allowing me to continue with this investigation, because I'm far from finished? And there could be cases in the future, or I may get back on at a department and—”

Lips crushed into mine and I met Alex's tongue with every ounce of need and relief I felt.

“We're going to make this work,” he said, breaking away. “You won't regret this.”

As we kept our eyes transfixed on each other, I sure hoped not. The full moon wasn't too far away. That could mean anything. It could spell disaster for our new relationship.

Would he change over that period and show me a new side of him that I didn't like, or would it be me who caused ripples in our newly found relationship?

# Wolf

*Colors were melting before my distorted vision—blood shades. Crimson red. The dark rusty brown of old blood. They wavered, rippling the branches above until they appeared to drip through the atmosphere like scorching candle wax.*

*I stared, mesmerized through the slow motion descent. The globs of fluid grew closer, pooling and changing shape as gravity thinned them out. Just before the one above splashed against my face, a twinge had me seizing though the agony on my side. I curled, pulled from my delusion as water dripped against my cheek from one of the wolves’.*

*The fire against my skin had me looking at my bare skin. The gunshot wound was infected. It wasn’t healing like it should. Somehow I knew I’d been pierced with silver the night I’d gone after the investigator, but I thought I’d be okay. Days had gone by. A week? Two? It went straight through my side...or so I had figured at the time. I wasn’t sure anymore. Was there a pellet still in me? Was that why I felt as though I were liquefying on the inside?*

*I couldn’t think through the high fever that had taken me over. And I was taken over. My already scattered thoughts were worse. I couldn’t focus. I was going to die if I didn’t get back home. How long had I been wondering around? Where was I?*

*Recollections wouldn’t come. I wasn’t even sure how I got out here. Hadn’t I been in my bed only moments ago?*

*Vomit shot out of my mouth unexpectedly and I managed to get on all-fours as my limbs locked through the tremors.*

*“God. Fuck.” I pushed to my feet, holding to my side, as I staggered forward. My eyelids were drooping and becoming harder to hold open. A house in the distance seemed oddly familiar, but I couldn’t place it.*

*Adrenaline rushed and I managed to straighten a little as my survival instincts kicked in. This person would help me. They’d...*

*The closer I got, flashes began to appear. But only of one person—her.*

*I fell halfway through the yard, scrambling back to my feet as I hurried my pace to the door. Before I could get there, the barrier flew open and a blond haired man stepped out, narrowing his eyes at me. I knew him...if only I could remember.*

*“Well, well. What do we have here?”*

*I tried to process words in my mind and get them to come out of my mouth clear. “I’m looking...f-for...the invest-igator woman.”*

*He took a step forward, beginning to circle around me. My wolf flared, but I tried to hold control.*

*“You’re looking for Investigator Billings? Interesting. Tell me... how’d you get that nasty wound on your side? Do you know what day it is?”*

*“Investigator...woman. G-give her t-to me.”*

*At the shake of his head, I growled loudly, swiping my stiff fingers toward him. The strength I used threw me off balance and I crumbled to the ground. The colors were coming back. The sky was melting, again, just like I was.*

# Chapter 26

## Alex

*“Victim one appears to have been first attacked from behind. The rip at the bottom of his jeans indicate that he may have tried to run when the wolves bit into his legs.”* Erin paused. *“There are two bite wounds with lacerations. One on the lower calf and another just above the underside of his right knee. There’s also tears to the flesh along his side. It’s unclear whether this wound happened before victim one’s stomach contents were removed. My guess is before.”*

At the convulsive swallowing, I fought not to go in and disturb her. She was going to be sick if she continued to associate the crimes scene photos of those boys to what we were. Or what *I* was, anyway. I still wasn’t sure if Erin was a werewolf or not. It was hard to say. There were moments where I was sure, and others that made me question everything.

*Victim two and three had various lacerations, the only major one being to victim two’s face. None were the cause of death. Those came from a broken neck. I believe silence was the reason for their quick deaths. Whether they were meant to be meals or not is unknown.*

*It takes me back to what I saw that night.*

There was a long pause and I heard the tape recorder click off, only to click back on.

*I’ve come to see the werewolves come in different colors, just like the wolves, themselves. Their eyes are also distinct. The one I witnessed was dark. Black coat, black eyes. I estimate he was around seven and a half*

*feet tall when standing. His eating habits ... another swallow ... he crouched like a man and ate with his hands as we would ...* deep breaths were followed by the click of the button. I stood, listening as footsteps rushed across the floor and the bathroom door slammed shut. I rubbed my hands over my eyes and began pacing. Hearing her becoming sick had me turning for the sink to get her a glass of water. By the time I got to the bathroom, she was finishing up brushing her teeth.

“You okay?”

The door opened and she quickly wiped the tears from her eyes. “Yeah. It’s just hard, you know? They brought me here for their daughter, and their son died on my watch. And I *found* him like that—getting eaten. Jesus, of all things. It’s almost like... It’s like...

Erin rushed forward as she seemed to be on to something. I clenched my teeth at the crime scene photos strewn across the bed. It wasn’t the blood or my wolf forcing through, it was me seeing James’s massacred body. *James*. I had been over at Toby’s house when Mr. Morrison and Kitty brought the infant home from the hospital. I was sickened that something like that could happen to such a small boy. That *I* could have done that if not better controlled.

“Why don’t you come take a break? We’ll go for a walk or a drive.”

“Just a moment,” Erin said under her breath.

I tried to look away as I placed the water down on the dresser. For the life of me, my eyes kept going back.

“There’s just something that keeps bugging me. What are the odds that 3 children from the same family gets killed by a werewolf? And that the one attacked out of those three boys was James Morrison? His neck wasn’t broken. He was eaten alive.”

The question wasn't directed at me, but I found myself walking closer, focused on the pictures.

"That is strange," I said, moving in beside her.

"Is there anyone who has a grudge against the Morrisons? Maybe someone Gregory Morrison upset at some point, or had a dispute with?"

My head shook. "Not that I'm aware of. He's always kept to himself, and he's genuinely a good guy. Very understanding about things. I don't know who would want to hurt him or Kitty in terms of killing off their kids."

Erin's fist came to her mouth, tapping along her lip as she stared ahead. "Something's not right. It's too coincidental. If Caleb is responsible for Toby's death, perhaps the death of the other two children were triggered from an event that happened after the accident. Or maybe..." Her features drew in from her deep thoughts. I scanned over the pictures, not seeing anything but the brutality of what I knew all too well.

"I can't rule out Gregory or anyone in their family. I hate that we don't know who's a werewolf around here. Or even more about the creatures. I need a tree."

"A what?"

"A timeline," she corrected. "I call them trees. Don't ask. I don't know why."

I followed her as she pulled a paper and pen from her bag and leaned over to the bedside table. Her eyes were scanning over the paper in quick movements and I knew her mind was going just as fast.

"I'll begin with your incident," she said, writing in names. "Caleb admitted he was at fault, and we both know what he is. If I remember correctly, the next incident was almost a month later. A tourist, by the name of ... Gates. Timothy Gates." She paused looking over at me. "Alex, I need

you to be truthful with me. That was the one killed when you left your parents.”

Everything in me wanted to lie. I’d done it for so long that my survival instinct was hell to push away. “He was camping out in the woods, awaiting his rafting trip. My first.”

Pain flashed on her face as she stared at me. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be. It happened and there was nothing I could do to stop it. Feel sorry for Timothy. He never knew what hit him.”

Erin’s eyes closed for the briefest moment before she squeezed my hand and let go. “Alright,” she whispered, drawing a line down from me and my friends, to Timothy’s name, where she tagged me the attacker. No ... the murder. Fuck, this wasn’t going to go well. I could feel it in my gut.

Erin brought the line down a little more, turning and grabbing a file. “Around two months later there was an attack on some livestock on the outskirts of town. Mr. Quait’s cattle.” Again, she turned to me. Jesus, I didn’t want to do this.

“Mine.”

The scribbling of my name grated my ears. She flipped through the folder, reaching for another one when she didn’t find what she was looking for in there.

“Less than a year later we have two missing tourists. They were assumed to have fallen overboard on their raft. Their bodies were never recovered. You know anything about that?”

I cringed, lowering my head. “That ... may have possibly been me.”

“May have been?”

Fogginess in my mind made it impossible for me to decipher one face from another.

“You don’t understand. When you’re a young werewolf, you’re susceptible to the change days before the full moon. Remembering being in that form at any time is hard enough to do now. All those years ago, Erin, it was damn near impossible. Everything’s a haze once your body transitions. You get flashes of time, of ... things ... but you never know the complete story of what happens. You don’t physically see things like we do right now.”

“So, maybe?”

“Yeah.”

She leaned down again, drawing a question mark next to my name. The line down from that came afterward. She went back to the folder and I braced myself.

“Eight months later, another tourist gets killed while taking a hike through the trails.”

“Time? Day or night?”

Her eyes scanned the paper. “ETA ... around eleven AM.”

I shook my head. “Not me. My wolf prefers evening or night.”

“Alright, I’ll leave this one blank.” She turned to face me and for the first time, it was hard to meet her eyes. Shame. It was engulfing me and there was nothing I could do about it.

“You say prefer. Are you telling me you’re programmed to be pulled toward a certain time of day for when you need to eat?”

I shrugged. “I am. I’m not sure about others, but I can see it being a possibility.”

“Interesting,” she mumbled, exchanging folders.

“If you say so. Erin, do we have to do this now? I really just...” At the look she threw me, I raised my hands. “Fine. Let’s just get this over with.”



“Thank you,” she said, softly, turning to write down another name. “More livestock. This time some sheep, a chicken coup was destroyed, as was the door to a barn. It says it was ripped from its hinges. Horses were attacked. Two were killed.”

“Not me. I didn’t hurt any horses or sheep for crying out loud. That’s just ... wrong.” I was going to say fucked up, but she’d never understand where I was coming from. My voice died off and I twisted my mouth, looking away.

“Please explain, Mr. Villani.”

“Don’t *Mr. Villani*, me. We’re talking horses and sheep. Have you ever ate a horse or sheep? It’s not like it’s steak, Erin.”

She gasped. “You eat their insides, not their *steak*.” Her fingers came up in quotations as she said the word. “And I’ve eaten lamb, before. But you don’t see me eating humans.”

“Yet,” I growled. “Yet.”

A flicker of emotions played across her face, the last being horror. I felt my anger dissipate. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have said that.”

“I’m the one that’s sorry. It was my fault.”

She went to walk around me when I stepped in her path. “Erin, please. I’m sorry. Don’t walk off, mad. If you do that, it’ll be hours before you talk to me again. I know this routine. Let’s talk it out now.”

“Please move. I just need some air. I’ve been going over this for hours. I need a break. I’m getting very snappy.”

Yeah she was, but that had been going on for two days now. Two days of pure hormonal hell and she’d still not started her period. That told me one of two things. Neither of which I wanted to consider at the moment. She was on birth control like I assumed, but that wasn’t a hundred percent. The other reason...

I stepped out of the way, keeping my distance as I followed. When Erin made it to the front door, she left it open, walking out a few feet to face the forest. The wolves still remained close, but only one stayed within sight. And it was only a few feet from her.

“Ask them who he is. Ask them to take us to where he lives.” Erin spun to face me, her expression serious.

“What? I’m not the Wolf Whisperer, Erin. I can’t just ask them.”

“Why not? *He* can obviously talk to them. If he can, surely you can, too.”

I let out a groan. “It’s not that simple. Besides, my wolf is sleeping and I prefer to keep him that way.”

Erin wouldn’t look at me as she walked past and grabbed her heavy jacket from the closet.

“What are you doing?”

She slid it on, heading back outside. “What does it look like I’m doing? I’m going to see if I can get him to lead me to the wolf.”

I laughed. “He’s not going to know what the hell you’re going on about. With the way you are right now, he might feel threatened and try to bite you. Then I’m going to be the one who steps in and I don’t want to fight with a wolf pack right now.”

“He won’t bite me. I’m going to ask nicely.”

“Did you forget that these are the same wolves who have been trying to kill you? The ones that ate from James?”

The energy flared around her like a raging bull and I moved in closer. This was going to be bad. I could feel it. Whether with the wolves or me and her, I wasn’t sure.

“You do not have to remind me of that. I know who these wolves are. I also know they’re not entirely at fault for following the orders they

were given. Yes, they kill. And yes, they're shady and manipulated as hell, but I happen to think they're looking for someone to follow, just like you said. If that's the case, why would they hurt me? They wouldn't want to piss you off. They're waiting for you."

Erin returned to her location and began taking slow steps toward the grey wolf who stood exposed. His eyes stayed trained on her and he moved left, then right, nervous at her intentions.

"You're afraid of me? Now that's new," she said, lowly, moving a few inches closer.

The wolf looked at me, but turned his attention back to Erin. I could see his lip twitching as he tried to decide whether she was a threat. My head shook as more of a reflex than anything, but it drew the wolf's attention enough for her to get within a two foot range.

"Don't get afraid now," I snapped. "He can smell your emotions, remember?"

"You try having your face feet away from a wolf," she whispered, loudly. "Now let me try."

Damn stubborn woman. She was going to get bitten. That's what was going to happen.

"Shh," she said, raising her palm up next to her face. "I'm not going to hurt you. I need your help." Her voice was low. Calmer than I expected. She stayed quiet for seconds. Then, minutes. I stared in fascination as she and the wolf kept their gazes locked. The energy was low. Almost nonexistent.

Slowly, Erin's hand began to move. The wolf blinked, cutting its eyes over, but keeping still.

"Will you help me?"

Her hand paused halfway and the wolf leaned forward, sniffing along her fingers and palm. My eyes widened in shock. What in the hell had happened during the silence? Had it needed to just get used to her? I wasn't sure, but the curiosity stirred my wolf, bringing him into full protective mode at the scene. The explosion within had the gray wolf's head jerking up and him taking a few steps back.

"No, no," Erin whispered. "Please come back." She turned to me, frowning. Like a blur the wolf darted forward, nudging her cheek and throwing her off balance. A roar poured from my mouth as I lunged and caught her, hugging her into my body.

"Watch it," I yelled at him. "You are not allowed to get close to her like that."

Erin rubbed her cheek, staring between us.

"What was that about?"

"I don't know, but you're lucky he was trying to get your attention and not shredding your face open. Son of a bitch." I put my hand over my racing heart, pissed that I wasn't more on guard. And it was only increasing by the second. My wolf was seething. Not only at the gray wolf, but at me. As if I wasn't good enough to watch over Erin compared to him.

I took a few steps back, still eyeing his actions. He was pacing back and forth, occasionally rearing his head and clawing his paw into the earth. One by one, wolves began to appear from within the trees.

"He doesn't want us to leave." Erin broke away, moving a few feet forward before collapsing back down to her knees.

"Dammit, woman. Look up. He's not alone. Not even close."

Her hand paused in lifting and her fear filled the air so thick it was mouthwatering. I grabbed her arm, pulling her to her feet as they stalked

toward us with their heads low to the ground. Yelping came from the gray wolf and Erin added resistance as I pulled us back toward the cabin.

“I really think he’s trying to tell us something, Alex. Look at him. He doesn’t appear threatening.”

I was looking and I didn’t like the vibes I was getting. They were off and unreadable. He wasn’t threatening at the moment, but anything could happen.

“I’m not taking any chances and neither are you. Their behavior can change at the drop of a dime. What seems welcoming now can be an invitation to death. You’re not to get around any of them. Not today, *or ever*. If you want to find this werewolf, we will continue to look. But not through them.”

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

# Chapter 27

## Erin

The last day had been stressful between Alex and me. With the full moon only a week away, I could see the difference in his behavior. He was stressed and constantly hovering over me. My every move was watched. My every toss and turn in bed had him waking up and pulling me into him so he could wrap his arms and legs around me like a cage. There were no bounds to his protectiveness. Even sitting in the cabin, his eyes and ears took in everything. I was fascinated to watch just how focused he was, but it also scared me. Especially when it combined with my own fears of changing. And I *would* change. I knew it in my gut. I knew ... because *she* had finally made herself known.

I sipped my coffee, trying to ignore the conflicting thoughts in my mind. They were growing louder each day. The prominent voice was my own. I'd question what I was doing or what I wanted to do and out of nowhere, an argument would ensue, just like before. But it was no longer the tone of my voice talking back. This one was similar, but darker and meaner. There was no question anymore. She was my wolf.

I was splitting, just like I'd got the impression before. There was no other word for it. My personality was being ripped right down the middle and I was becoming two people. The good me, and the bad. The conversations and arguments left me in a daze for far too long. Numerous times I caught Alex looking at me strangely, just as he was now, but dismissing what was happening wasn't working. *She* wouldn't let it go.

*“He knows. He knows I’m here. His wolf can sense me.”*

*“Shut up,”* I said mindlessly, taking another sip of my coffee.

*Go to him. I want his wolf again. That’s who came to me this morning. God, he fucked me so good. Did you feel how rough he was? How dominant? That was for me, not you.*

“Erin, are you okay?”

“What?” I blinked, shaking my head. “Oh, yeah, I’m good. Just thinking.”

“About what?”

I paused, not daring to tell him what was really happening within my head. “Do you want to go get the wood today for the greenhouse?”

“We already talked about that.” He narrowed his eyes. “We agreed we’d pick it up after we moved in your stuff.”

“Oh ... right.”

I frowned, recalling I still had a few weeks before I needed to pick up my things. Since I’d already paid for the month, I was in no rush. But Alex was. He had wanted to move me in right away. I thought the time would give me the chance to make sure my decision was the right one. Now I wished I would have just gotten it over with. I wasn’t going anywhere. Even if Alex and I didn’t work out, I was stuck in this town forever. Not because I was afraid to leave, but because I didn’t want to. This was my home now, with or without Alex. My heart said with, but my wolf seemed to go back and forth. And it wasn’t by the day, but by the minute that she changed her mind.

“Shit,” I pulled at my sweater, suddenly realizing that I was becoming drenched in sweat. Air grew thicker and I was more irritable than ever. “How many logs did you throw on the fire? It’s so hot in here.” Again I jerked at my collar.

“Hot? Erin, it has to be in the low sixties. I’m actually quite comfortable.”

I stood, not wanting to believe his words. I was usually freezing with how cool he kept it. “Well, I’m not. Look at me. My hair is even starting to get wet. That’s not sixty degrees, Alex. It has to be warmer than that.”

Slowly, he rose, placing his hand against my forehead.

*Tell him to stop touching me.*

I ignored the voice as he looked down at me curiously.

*Tell him if he isn’t going to touch me right, I want him to stop. Tell him. Tell him. Tell him.* Heat increased until I was sure my skin was going to start melting. Anxiety was at an all-time high as I went over my condition. Alex’s hand moved to my cheek and then my neck. His wolf eyes took in everything making me even more skittish. My pulse was getting faster. Harder, with each beat. God, was I going to have a heart attack?

*Tell him. Tell him! Tell him!*

“Stop it!” My voice exploded through the room and I immediately slammed my hands over my ears. Tears raced down my face and I tried to catch my breath as I slowly lowered my arms. My chest was aching and I felt like I was going to be sick. It only increased as I brought my stare slowly up to Alex’s enraged face.

“You’re hearing something, aren’t you? How long?” With each step I took away from him, he matched it. “You were supposed to tell me if anything changed. Now how long have you heard her?”

My mouth opened to answer, but I couldn’t even think.

*He’s too close. Tell him to stay away. I don’t like him right now.*

“I don’t know.” My cries were getting heavier. “A few days, I guess? I thought it was just me at first. But ... she started talking back and



arguing with me this morning. I can't stop it. She won't shut up."

I let Alex pull me into his arms as I gripped to his shirt in desperation. The ache in my chest was moving to my brain as I tried to block out the humming of her voice. But there was no stopping it. Now that he was touching me, the fire inside of me was getting worse. *She* was getting worse.

"You need to calm. What you're feeling right now—the sweat, the anxiety, she's causing it. It happens when they're not happy. Their moods trigger your health. You have to tell me what set her off."

My breaths were ragged as I tried to slow the sobs. How was I going to tell him that he was the cause? That my wolf wasn't sure whether she liked him or not? I ... loved him. God, I did. I fucking loved him more than anything and now she was going to come in and push him away.

"Erin, talk to me, baby." He angled the chair out, taking a seat, and pulling me on his lap. Pain sliced through my side and I screamed and jerked in his arms. "Jesus." He growled. "I need you to breathe. Shh, breathe." The soothing tone did nothing to stop the havoc on my insides.

"Something's happening to me."

"She wants to change you, but she can't. Not yet."

Harder I cried as he held me.

"What can I do?" He brushed back my hair as she pushed against me crazily. My legs kicked out and my stomach twisted, sickeningly.

"It's you," I managed. "She ... doesn't want..."

Alex's hand stilled and the look on his face broke my heart.

"She doesn't like me?"

I grabbed tighter to his shirt, burying my face into his chest. His distinct smell called to me and ignited a mix of emotions. It was enough to distract her. The agony began to ease as the different scents began to

register and categorizing. My mind didn't understand it, even if my brain did.

"She likes your wolf," I whispered. "But..."

"She doesn't like me," he finished.

"Not when we argue."

I sat up, wrapping my arms around my waist. The room tilted and I reached out through the shift.

"Don't push yourself." Alex wrapped his hand around the far side of my neck, drawing my face to his. "I knew I needed to watch myself. I knew the chances were high with how you were acting, but I didn't expect her to show so soon. She's—"

"Mean," I broke in. "I don't like her."

He pulled back enough to meet my eyes. "She'll become more controllable over time. In the meantime, you have to communicate with me. I need to know what makes her happy. If I can't win her over..." He trailed off and the sadness etched back in. "I want this. I want us."

"I do, too."

Lips pressed into mine, pulling away, slowly.

"Tell me everything you know about her so far."

A twinge to my side had me jerking and breathing through the pain. "She liked how you were this morning. She said it was your wolf ... fucking her. Not me. She likes your dominance and how rough you are. But not when we argue. That's when she completely changes her mind."

"Does she tell you to leave me?" Fear was back in his tone. It ignited my own worst nightmare. Would she run me away from him? It was a scary thought.

"Not exactly. She just doesn't want you to touch me. When I didn't listen to her is when the pains began."

“Okay. How is she right now?”

Even though I didn’t want to, I felt inside for her. It was so distinct, suddenly. Like a separate person living within. Searching her out was easy enough. She *was* part of me. I could almost imagine her waiting impatiently for her time until she could tear herself free of my body. It frightened the hell out of me. But it was my new reality. That’s exactly what she would be doing.

“She’s waiting. She’s watching you.” I paused as I tried to escape her presence. “I don’t like this,” I rushed out. “I want it out of me.” I knew I sounded ridiculous, but the truth was suddenly too much. A claustrophobic feeling surrounded me that I couldn’t escape. The need to claw into my skin to try to remove the sensation was terrifying. It was like the multiple PCP cases I’d been a part of in my earlier years. I felt like a junkie fighting invisible hallucinations. But mine were real.

“Come here.” Alex drew me in as he began rocking us. “I know what you’re feeling, but I promise this stage will fade. Your wolf will become part of you and you’ll soon forget what it’s like to not have her with you. Keep that to heart and know that no matter how hard this is for you, I’ll be with you through it all.”

“And if she doesn’t want that?” Tears blinded me at the thought.

“I *will* win her over. I just need you to give me time. She may have the urge to run, Erin. Promise me no matter how you feel, you won’t let her control you that way.”

Would I have a choice? Would she threaten to break free from me if I didn’t give her the distance she needed? And what would that mean if she did? Would I kill, then? Possibly try to kill Alex? There were so many questions.

“Erin.” Alex’s voice turned deep as he made me look at him. “I know you’re scared right now, but you have to trust me. Things are going to get worse before they get better. She’s going to test her limits. You’re the only one who can stop her from ruling your actions. You’re strong. I sensed that from the beginning. You can do this.”

I nodded, breathing through the stirring inside of me. This was day one. Two more weeks and hopefully she’d back off like Alex’s wolf.

“I’ll try my hardest.”

“Good.” He kissed my forehead and the need to snarl had me gritting my teeth. She didn’t seem to like sweet, or the fact that he was giving me advice concerning her.

Alex helped me to my feet and I glanced at the clock dreading the time.

“How much longer do you have?”

“I have to meet Mr. Morrison in an hour. He wants to go over what I’ve learned from my conversations with Dr. Chan.” I paused, feeling even sicker at the mess I’d created. “I’m sure he’ll want to talk about this new plan he’s come up with on catching the werewolf, too. It’s going to be so hard trying to convince him that what he’s looking for doesn’t exist. He knows, Alex. He’s not stupid. He saw my fear that night. I can say *bear* all I want, but he’s not going to believe me. Not after how in shock I was.”

“Did you come out and say werewolf?”

My head shook. “No. We didn’t talk about what I’d seen. He was given the news and that’s when he and the parents speculated and we headed into the forest for the search. The sheriff told me that night that he’d take care of speaking with him.”

“He has no proof, then. Just stick to the story. It’s all we can do.”

Easier said than done. I'd already told Dr. Chan what I had seen. Now he was planning on flying out any day and there was no way I could hide that from Alex. Guilt had my stomach cramping and I pushed my palm into the area, trying to get it to stop.

"I think you should cancel your appointment with Gregory. You're not well."

My head snapped up. "I can't cancel, I already did that the day before yesterday. I need to get this over with. Each day is going to get worse. You said so yourself. If I prolong this another two weeks, he's going to know something is wrong."

"Then I'm going."

"Alex, this is my work. What will Mr. Morrison think if I bring you? I'm sure word is already getting around about us dating. He already suspects something may be going on with you. If we show up together, it's not going to look good."

An invisible pressure rocked the room and my wolf roared inside of me, pushing to the front. Whether she was ready to fight or enjoyed the power display, I wasn't sure. It was all so startling that it took me a minute to process what had happened.

"I don't like it. He can suspect me all he wants, but what happens if he turns on you? What if thinks you've been infected? I *need* to be there."

Gold flickered in his eyes, growing brighter the heavier he breathed. I bit the inside of my bottom lip as arousal sparked. Yes, my wolf liked when this part of him was triggered. I could almost see and feel her purring and rolling around seductively as she begged for more of his attention. *His possession.*

"There she is," he whispered in fascination. "Her scent is still weak, but fuck, I have it now. God, yes."

Alex's eyes were narrowed as he slowly stalked toward me. Rarely did he let his wolf rule, but I knew who was in charge at the moment. His eyes were too bright and his face...he looked like he wanted to eat me alive. When his hand locked around my throat and he pushed me against the wall, I was shocked, but I couldn't help but moan through the pulsing of my clit.

"Do you feel that, baby? Do you feel her quieting?" He leaned in, licking over my lips while he stayed close.

"Yes."

"She wants me right now, doesn't she?"

His teeth pulled at my lower lip and I tried not to shift on my feet as the lust became uncontrollable. "She does. She's waiting."

"And what about you? Are you waiting, too?" He jerked down my pajama bottoms, placing his fingertips over the top of my folds. In slow circles he began to tease my clit.

"You know I am."

"Kick off those fucking pants and spread your legs." The grip grew firmer, hindering my air supply the slightest amount. I paused, but obeyed, stepping out of the material and opening my legs wide for him. A deep inhale sounded and he let out a pleasurable sound as he went back to touching me.

"So wet. So ready to be fucked. You want your cock?" He got closer, angling my face to the side with his palm against my cheek. He kept it there, pinning my head to the wall.

"Give it to me," I moaned.

His touch left my pussy and nails dug into my inner thigh, squeezing until his digits became still. "You will not order me. Say it nicer. Ask."

"Can I have your cock? Please."

“Your cock,” he corrected. “You are mine, and I am yours. Your pussy is mine, and my cock is yours. Now say it right.”

An impatient whimper slipped free as his fingers let go and he began to move them higher.

“Please let me have my cock. I don’t have much time. Please.”

Alex moved me back to face him. “Are you trying to rush me?”

“Please,” I begged. My hips arched as his touch glided over my slit and began to tease my wet entrance. In dips, he’d breach just within my channel, only to rub along the outside. I gripped to his wrist tightly with both of my hands as he lowered his placement on my throat.

“After I fuck you, I’m going to let you leave for your meeting. But I’m going to follow you to Mr. Morrison’s. You’re not going to see me. You’re not going to know where I am. But I’ll be close. I’m *always* going to be close.”

I was turned to face the wall and I dug my nails into the wood as his fingers pushed into my pussy. I could feel him pulling down his pants and the wait was killing me. *Killing her*. She was so happy at his behavior. Excited that it was *him*.

Alex withdrew and pressure eased against my opening, stretching me wide with his size. I screamed as he plunged into me. The depth brought ecstasy. He was buried so deep that I gasped through the shock.

“Is this what you both need?” His arm wrapped around my waist, lifting until I couldn’t reach. My legs flailed and I pushed my palms harder into the wall while he forced thrust hard, once.

“Oh ... God. Yes. Fuck me. Fuck—”

I let out a loud sound. He began to thrust, again, moving his free hand back and forth over the top of my slit. A growl rumbled between us making my wolf flutter in excitement. Faster, he slammed into me, building

me up and pleasuring me in ways I hadn't known. He'd been rough before, but this was different. He teetered on my limits. I wasn't sure I could take this sort of force if he continued

"Wait," I breathed out. "You have to slow down. You—"

Teeth sunk into the junction of the neck, locking my entire body through the pain. My orgasm tore free and I screamed through the massive spasms that jolted me wildly. But Alex wasn't done. Nails raked along my side while he sucked on my neck, breaking through my flesh like tiny blades as my body betrayed what my mind was clearly rejecting. Before I could suck in air to scream again, weighed crashed into me, trapping me even more as he drove into me mercilessly. Tears streamed down my face from the pain and fear.

*More. Beg for more!*

My head tried to shake, denying what my wolf wanted. I couldn't disagree that through the pain, there was pleasure. I'd always enjoyed the combination of the two, but I wasn't okay with this. Even if she was.

Alex's cock thickened inside of me as his brutal thrusts slowed. I was suddenly falling, just like I was in my mind. When my feet hit the ground, they weren't prepared to catch my weight. I went down, only stopping when fingers weaved through my hair, jerking me to a stop. The intense stinging matched with his treatment had a sob immediately following. Emotions pinged, breaking me down even more.

"Open."

And I did. The order sent my wolf reacting before I even knew what he'd meant. My lips separated and our combined scent drew me forward like I'd been waiting for this all along. Maybe she had...

Warmth shot over my lips and began covering my tongue as he moaned and pushed his length into my mouth. The taste of him, of us, sated



the monster within like nothing I could have imagined. She was content. Blissful, even. For the first time where Alex was concerned... I wasn't.

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

# Chapter 28

## Alex

“Oh ... God.” My heart dropped to the floor just as Erin had, the moment I let her go. She was crying so hard that there was no doubt in my mind that I’d hurt her. And badly.

“Baby, please. I’m ... sorry. I’m so sorry.”

There was no word to describe the agony that lanced my heart as she flinched and tried to skitter away from me. I couldn’t move. Couldn’t speak another word through the disgust that began to filter through at my actions. It was the blood from her bite. It triggered my wolf like nothing ever had. I hadn’t meant to bite her that hard, but her scent and energy, *it egged me on*. It made me feel like there was something I had to prove. I’d only meant to dominate her wolf by doing what mine thought was right. But it wasn’t *right*. This was Erin. My Erin. And her becoming a wolf didn’t mean I had to treat her like some sort of animal.

I lowered, slowly reaching to put my hand on her shoulder. “Please. You know I’d never hurt you.”

“You just did!”

I cringed at the rage, but I couldn’t let her just lie there, crying on the floor.

“Let me hold you.”

“No.” She shook her head as the sobs continued, but she didn’t fight when I lifted her into my arms. It wasn’t until I was a few steps into

walking us to the bathroom that she began to slam her fists into me. My arms rolled her, pinning her as I spun through the bathroom door.

“Stop. I have to make sure you’re okay.”

She was in full fighting mode and I had to witness it firsthand as I stared at our reflection and the blood dotted scratches along her side—as I stared at the end of us.

There was no coming back from this. No making things better by apologizing. Erin wouldn’t stay with me after this. She wouldn’t ever be able to trust me again, and fuck if I didn’t blame her. I wasn’t sure I could trust myself anymore. How could I have been so stupid as to believe my wolf was tame enough to be around her now? He’d wanted nothing more than to eat her at the beginning. The moment he had tasted a tinge of her blood, his true sadistic colors had shown. Her wolf may have enjoyed it, I knew she did, but that wasn’t what this was about. This was about me and Erin. *Our future*. Not our wolves’. And now it could be history.

My wolf thrashed inside of me at the glimpse I was blinded by from my fears. Had I thought my life was doomed? That I couldn’t hate my existence any more? I was wrong. Meeting Erin was my biggest curse of all. She represented what I longed for, but should never have. Love. Obsession. God, help us both. I had fallen madly in love with her and like my wolf, I knew I wasn’t going to be able to have complete control over my actions. She’d leave ... and I’d follow. I’d fucking follow her everywhere. I couldn’t lose her.

“I love you,” I whispered. “I do. I swear I do.”

A tear slid down my cheek while I felt my world truly falling apart. Erin stilled, but her crying continued. Only worse this time.

Letting go of her was almost impossible. I sat her on the counter, lifting her hair so I could see the other damage I’d done. Some of the

indents were perfect teeth marks, others torn from my movement. The amount of bruising that was beginning to surface was sickening. I couldn't stomach what I'd done. And she'd have to see it ... for days. At least until the full moon. She wouldn't start healing like a wolf until after.

What the fuck had I been thinking? I couldn't fathom how I lost myself so completely. Her wolf ... it triggered me. It fed me a false sense of her wellbeing. That had to have been it because I never caught her distress. Even when she told me to slow, it was as though she was screaming for more.

"Don't hate me. I don't think I could take it if you did."

The hazel was bright as she lifted her swollen eyes to face me.

"I could never hate you, Alex. But—" My fingertips pressed against her mouth as I lowered my forehead to hers. My palm completely fit the back of her head and even just holding her to me, I feared I'd somehow hurt her again.

"Don't say it. Please. We can figure something out. I'll push him away as much as I can. I won't let him near you. I'll do anything."

Another tear. And another. I almost couldn't believe how much I was breaking for her.

"I have a meeting to go to." Her words were mumbled against my hand, but I understood them. And they were devoid of emotion, where I was anything but.

She sniffled and slid free of me as I eased back. As she disappeared through the door, I was faced with my biggest enemy—myself. And I hated him. I hated everything about his life and what he'd become. Was there anything I wouldn't destroy?

The closet door sounded and I braced my hands on the bathroom counter, holding on tightly so I wouldn't do something worse, like not let

her leave.

“Will you be coming back after your meeting? Erin?” I lifted my head to peer through the door and found myself zeroing in on the welts down her side. Tiny dots of blood were still surfacing. She couldn’t leave here without me at least cleaning it up and bandaging it. What kind of an asshole would I be if I didn’t tend to her wounds after I’d hurt her? *Excuses*. “Erin. Please, just look at me. Please ... just talk to me.”

Slowly, she turned, giving me nothing to go off of. It drove me forward to collapse at her feet. Even hugging her body into mine was like holding to a statue. Her scent was off. Her energy, flat. She was like a zombie. The only detection that registered was the blood staining her side, and her wolf, who pulled at my own longingly. They’d had a moment. A beautiful, twisted, fucked up moment. One that would forever taint my beast. For in the demise of love, he had found his own. For a split second, I had been whole again. And now, the two of us—man and monster, would be forced to face a life without the one person who made us happy. And so the curse continued.

My arms dropped and Erin stepped back, quickly turning away. She was still crying silently as she got dressed. It may have been quiet, but she kept wiping the tears away. Each one was like another lash to my heart. Not once did I move from the floor. It was the only show of submission I had left. All I knew to do to prove how destroyed I was over this.

“I have to go.” She sniffled, wiping at her nose. “I’ll be back later.”

She started to walk from the room and I was already following. Already gaining ground. My arm wrapped around her upper back and I spun Erin into me, crushing my lips into hers. If it was going to be our last kiss, I was going to put every ounce of my soul into not just the action, but into her. She could have the fucking thing. I was nothing without her.

*Nothing.* She could take the love and leave me with the killer because that's what I would surely become if she wasn't in my life anymore.

Erin's hand pressed to the side of my face, trying to push me away. For a man who knew he had screwed up, you would have I thought I would have learned from my mistakes. I should have broken away and let her go, but I couldn't. I sucked her bottom lip into my mouth, tangling my fingers into her hair. Seconds went by, and then a minute. Finally her body softened enough for me to really kiss her. The taste of my tongue sweeping over hers was enough to calm the rapid raging of my wolf. Only then did I break away, but it wasn't because of him. It was her. She'd given in and kissed me back, even if it was to make me stop.

"What I've done is inexcusable. Even with the kiss. I know that. I also know that I have never in my life loved anyone as much as I love you. I'm willing to do whatever I can to prove it. Just ... before you walk out of that door, ask yourself how deep your feelings run for me. Is what we have worth saving to you, because to me it is."

Erin searched my eyes, ultimately lowering her head. Her hesitation gave me hope. Hope I knew I shouldn't have grasped to.

"I do love you, Alex. That's what hurts so much. I never thought you would do something like that. I trusted you not to go too far."

"I know," I breathed out. "I fucked up. My wolf was more focused on yours that I neglected to put you first. It will never happen again. I swear to you, I'll keep him as far from you as I possibly can."

Her head lifted and the glare was full of challenge. "You want to prove yourself to me; you want me to be with you—stay. Do not follow me. We'll see how much control over your wolf you really have."

# Chapter 29

## Erin

I'd never been so conflicted on something in my entire life. I used to question how battered women could stay in an abusive relationship when their husband's beat them. It never made sense. Couldn't they see their worth? They could probably easily find another man who would treat them so much better than their abuser. It took me falling in love with Martin to understand where they had been coming from. It was my dirty little secret. One no one ever knew, and one that died in the grave with him.

Alex was nothing like Martin. He didn't hit me. He didn't verbally place me through walls I thought were finally tough enough to keep the hurtful words out. Alex loved me. What happened with our wolves was something I didn't understand, but I wasn't naïve enough to think it was okay. It wasn't. I had trusted Alex to keep me safe from what he held inside, and in this case, he dropped the ball. Maybe when I actually turned into a wolf things would be different on that account, but that was yet to seen. If it even would be seen. I still wasn't sure the best route to take concerning him. Love, it was just as twisted as the infinity sign that symbolized forever. It had both of us circling through the never-ending loops of this tragic life. And it'd never stop, just like the emotions I held toward him. Our love was real—our monsters, forever.

I pulled into the Morrisons' driveway, pissed to see Caleb's unmarked car already parked next to two other unfamiliar ones. I wasn't in the mood to put up with him or anyone else. I knew he was keeping an eye

on me to make sure I didn't let anything slip, but I didn't want to deal him right now. I didn't trust him, or anything revolved around him. Plus, I was hurting from the neck down. I felt agitated again, and that part was coming from *her*. She hadn't wanted to leave Alex, and she sure as hell didn't like seeing him so upset. It was a transition within me concerning her. She knew if I let him go, she'd lose the part of him she actually did like. This was my fault. That's what she'd said. *Idiot wolf*.

My door slammed behind my push and I tugged at the black turtleneck as I held tightly to my purse. Mr. Morrison opened the door just as I was coming up the porch. I forced a small grin as I stepped inside. It quickly faded as I was noticed Caleb, the sheriff, and two off-duty deputies standing in the back of the living room. One I remembered from my accident. He was the first to arrive on scene.

"Good afternoon," I said, walking toward them.

"Is it good?" The sheriff glanced at Caleb.

"Not for me." The detective's eyebrow rose as his stare pierced into me. Their energy slowed my steps more than their demeanor did. Something wasn't right. My wolf didn't want to be here.

"I'm sorry, you know what, I forgot my folder in the car. I'll just be a few seconds." I turned to leave when another deputy appear from the kitchen, cutting off my path.

"No need for folders. Just a meeting of sorts. We thought we'd attend in case you came across any new evidence on little James."

My breathing increased and I tried to slow both it and my pulse, but I didn't like being trapped, and that's exactly what was happening.

"I would have reported it to Detective Perkins. He knows that."

"So you found nothing new?" Gregory came forward, sadness on his face. I pressed my lips together, pushing back the guilt as I shook my head.



“I’m sorry, Mr. Morrison. I’m afraid not. I’ve gone over my findings and recollections that night a thousand times. I’m afraid the Sheriff’s Department did well in their assessment of what they believe it may have been. Not that I’m—”

“You can’t mean that,” he rushed out. “You saw it. You know what it is.”

“You didn’t let me finish. I was going to say, not that I’m going to give up my search. When I look back on that night, yes, I saw something ... different. But the more I think on it, and the more I imagine what it looked like, it very well could have been a bear. I’ve talked with my expert about this multiple times and—”

Dr. Chan stepped from the hallway and I couldn’t finish. The words wouldn’t come.

“Erin, good to see you.”

My stare moved from him to the men who were here to end this. Caleb had made it clear their secret wouldn’t get out and now I very well may have exposed more than I could talk myself out of.

“Where were we? Sorry, had to take a quick bathroom break.” Chan walked in my direction and it took everything I had to tear my stare off the officers.

“I was just telling Mr. Morrison on how I believe I may have made a mistake. I believe what I saw was a bear. The more I think back on that night, the more obvious it is. I was also telling him that I wasn’t going to stop looking for what did this. I think that’s the most important part.”

“I don’t need an investigator for a fucking bear,” Gregory snapped. “I could take care of one of those myself. We’re talking werewolves here! Finishing telling the officers what Investigator Billings told you, Doctor. Tell them what she saw!”

He was facing Dr. Chan, but the sheriff's loud laugh drew in all of our attention. My heart was racing. I was busted and I knew this wasn't going to end well.

"I don't care what anyone says. There ain't no werewolves, Gregory. We've gone over this time and time again. Now, I think you need to just let this go and mourn your family. Focus on what you have left. These stories have you so distracted that you've lost sight of what matters the most here.

"Don't you tell me what to focus on, Pete. My family, *my* business."

"Not when they're gallivanting through the woods getting attacked by animals it's not."

"That thing isn't an animal, it's a Goddamn demon beast from hell! And I'm going to kill it. You watch and see," he said, pointing his finger. "I'm going to—"

Blood oozed from the middle of Gregory's forehead and his knees buckled just before he fell forward. Dr. Chan's collapse was almost simultaneous. The shots had been so silent that I didn't understand what was happening until I saw Caleb lower the gun with the silencer.

"That's enough of that. Now we continue our hunt for Morton." Caleb glared toward the sheriff. "The idiot kid has caused us enough problems—eating off his family like they were a goddamn buffet. Bad blood will do that to you."

Caleb turned his attention back to me and I battled whether to run. Was he going to kill me, too?

"When I first heard Gregory Morrison mention he was bringing in an investigator to look into his daughter's death, I wondered, why not his son, too? Toby had been a good kid. Good friend to my brother anyway. It was odd to me that Mr. Morrison didn't measure the two deaths on the same scale of importance as I did. But then again, why would he? Toby wasn't

his biological kid.” He shook his head. “Odd to me how people think that way. How they’ll raise a child from infant size until they’re grown, but then when the shit gets real .... poof. Their emotions cut off and their true colors show.”

My head shook, confused. “I don’t understand.”

He inhaled deeply, closing his eyes and smiling. “It’s different with us wolves. Sometimes we make mistakes. It’s known to happen. Take Alex for example. Take you,” he said, gesturing. “When we create someone, we might not have given birth to them, but the bond is the same. We harbor a deep connection, us wolves. Generally, it’s one we don’t even understand, but we’re usually honorable enough not to break it. Tonight ... well, it saddens me that I’m going to have to do just that.”

“Morton?” My voice was low as I took another step back.

“Oh, Morton wasn’t mine. He belongs to the sheriff. Like I said, bad blood.”

“What’d I tell you about that,” the sheriff snapped. “I don’t have bad blood.”

A nearly silent laugh followed Caleb as he came forward. “Oh, he does, he just doesn’t want to admit it. You see, Sheriff has a tendency to attack, but not always kill. Every person he’s turned ends up going crazy. Four we’ve had to kill so far. It’ll be five, counting poor Morton. Guy never stood a chance. He came to me this morning, looking for you, Erin. He was a mess, still injured from our shots, talking in circles about needing to find you. I could barely understand his slurred words. That’s when I knew—we’re a week away from a full moon. And here he was, so deranged from his bad blood that he was more wolf than human. Everything in that moment made sense. Our good ol’ sheriff struck again. I should have *never* trusted him to pick up Morton. Damn bonds. Where’s he now, sheriff?”

My head lowered as my mind swirled. The sheriff began arguing in the background, but I heard none of it. If Morton had bad blood and he was the one who attacked me, then...

"You catch on quickly. You're a smart woman. I knew that from the first moment we spoke. But you don't have to worry. I'm going to do for you what our poor sheriff was too kind-hearted to do for that young man."

Faster, I moved back, bumping right into the deputy who I'd forgotten was standing behind me. His hands locked on my arms, holding me as I thrashed against his hold.

"But what if I don't have bad blood? What if you're wrong?"

Caleb glanced to the other cops. "This needs to happen. It's for the best." He paused. "Take her deep into the woods so her blood doesn't mix in with the evidence we're going to stage. I don't want her accident a part of this scene."

"No." The grip tightened as I was dragged to the door. "Detective Perkins, please! You're making a mistake."

"The only mistake I made was not finishing you off the night I barreled into your car. If Alex hadn't shown up when he did, you would have been another statistic I could have easily swept under the rug." He waved his hand. "Get her out of here."

"No!" I thrashed, fighting with everything I had as the door was jerked open and I was pulled out. The moment our feet stepped off the stairs, what felt like a freight train slammed the deputy's hold clean off of me. Razor sharp nails shredded down his stomach before his body slid to a stop.

My eyes darted to the front door and I pulled out my keys, racing for my car.

"Let's go!"

I threw open my door, diving in, and pausing as Alex was nowhere to be seen. Maybe he had already begun to run home? I didn't know, but I had to get the hell out of here. Caleb had every intention of seeing me dead and if I didn't hurry, that's exactly what was going happen.

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

# Chapter 30

## Alex

*There were many things I'd do for love—lie, steal, protect .... kill. What I would not do is risk it all over something I could prevent. Keeping Erin safe was my number one priority. If that meant I'd lose her over while making sure she still held breath, so help me, I'd live a miserable life following and pining after her, but at least she'd still be alive.*

That had been my thoughts as I raced through the forest to Gregory Morrison's house. From what I thought was going to be a normal meeting for her and Gregory changed when I broke through the trees and saw the multiple cars. I recognized each one of them and I knew. My wolf surged to the front and there was no stopping the change that tore its way through my body. The threat my wolf felt for what was his had been all it took. I stayed hidden, lurking and waiting. I could hear their conversation. Erin's fear was a live grenade in the pit of my stomach, waiting to explode. And it had, the moment I saw her fighting to get free.

At the first chance I had to save her, I took it, launching myself from around the house and tearing through the deputy's stomach until the contents leaked through his skin. But it wasn't enough. It wouldn't kill him and I had known that.

Erin began to run and I took the chance, throwing him around the house and leaping on top of his body, twisting and jerking his head free with the strength of my jaw. I could feel the cracking and tearing under my teeth. To my wolf, it was glorious. He took to the violence like a murderer

who'd been locked behind bars for far too long. And that's exactly what he was, but did I care anymore? No. Not if I could use him to save the one person I would have done anything for.

The engine of Erin's car hummed as it got further away. A sense of peace tingled within, but didn't last as footsteps pounded across the small porch and stairs.

"What the fuck just happened?" The sheriff's voice was filled with anger and confusion. "Surely Wes didn't take her car? I thought we talked about ditching it."

"No," Caleb whispered. "Look at the snow over there. Blood." There was a pause. "Alex. Come out, I know you're there."

My wolf growled, faced with the threat.

"Come on, Alex. You know how this works."

Warmth ran from my chin as I kept low on all-fours, snaking around the corner. The sheriff and other two deputies watched my every move. I knew only from their admission that they were wolves. I had known them my entire life and I would have never expected it.

A smile tugged at Caleb's mouth. "See," he said, glancing at the sheriff. "*This* is a wolf. This is what it's all about. I made that. Not happily at first, I'll admit. But you can't deny what a beautiful sight it is when you see him in all of his glory. Especially in the daylight." Caleb took another step toward me and I began walking wide, keeping my distance.

"He's bigger than I've seen before," Logan said lowly to the other deputy.

"Not too much taller, but definitely wider." Zach responded.

Caleb's eyes flickered while he cocked his head. "Why don't you go ahead and turn back so we can talk. I think we're in need of a good

conversation. It's time we put our past behind us. Bury the hatchet, so to speak."

I bared my teeth and he rolled his eyes. "Alex, really, you're being overdramatic. You of all people understand the importance of protecting what we are. So you're a little upset over Erin. You've known her for what, two months, give or take? You don't need her. You won't even be able to control her."

The need to argue, to use words, was almost overpowering.

"Okay." He sighed. A few seconds went by as he crossed his arms over his chest. Just as he went to speak, the sheriff's voice caught my attention.

"Let's hurry it up. We're running out of time. Roland will be here any minute with Kitty, and he don't know. It's one thing setting up the scene and killing her, but I ain't losing another deputy because of him seeing a wolf."

"Come on, Alex. Game over. Let's negotiate." After a few seconds of me not changing over, I could see Caleb's anger spark. "I'll tell you what. You turn around and disappear back to your little cottage in the woods and keep your damn mouth shut about what you saw here, and we'll talk about your girl later. I'm in no rush. I know she's not going anywhere ... *being a wolf and all.*"

"Caleb," the sheriff growled.

Caleb threw the sheriff a look. "What's it going to be, Alex? Are you going to pretend none of this ever happened or am I going to have to take you out and then head over there and kill her?" He pulled his Glock free, letting it dangle at his side. "Silver bullets. They're in all of our guns. Your call. "



Movement from the men had me calculating my odds. I could attempt to attack them, but if I failed, they'd get to Erin. *And they would kill her.* Now wasn't the time.

I edged back, not daring to turn my back to them. Four werewolves. *Four.* And if I was right, there were more. A world within this town that I wasn't even aware of.

The house was at my side and I spun, racing for the woods not far away. I had no idea what was going to happen now, or if Erin would even be at home when I returned, but I had to figure out a way to keep her safe. To keep both of us safe. For so long my isolation had kept me under the radar, but things were different now. She and I were both targets and there was only one way I knew to handle a threat to my existence.

I blurred through the trees, putting everything I had into making up time. It didn't take long to approach my place. Erin was there. Her wolf's scent was stronger than ever, but that wasn't a good thing. Her defensiveness kept me in form and I slowed as I approached the tree line. Her car was parked next to my truck and she was inside the cabin. Just as I was about to change, the front door flew open and she rushed out, holding a gun in each hand. She made it two feet out and froze, searching the surroundings.

"Alex?" Panic had her rushing more into the yard. "Alex? Is that you?"

Cracking sounded in my ears and I flexed my jaw through the change. My form shifted and I stood erect, walking closer so that she could see me.

"Alex! God, I was so afraid. I was about to try to find you."

I continued forward, taking in every flicker of fear that flashed over her face. Although they stood out, only one thing matter the most to me and

that was the relief she had upon seeing me. Tears were welling in her eyes and she broke into a run, throwing herself in my arms.

“I was so scared,” she sobbed. “I thought you had come home but you weren’t here.”

I held her, tight, still heading for the front door. My lips pressed into hers, my own release to the distress that was leaving my mind spinning.

“We have to leave. We have to get out of this town while we still can.”

Our eyes connected as I shut the door and she let out a small cry as I put her down. She knew her words were for nothing. We couldn’t leave. Not so close to the full moon. We were prisoners of circumstance. Not only by morality, but by the pull of this land. Our wolves could leave on short trips, but the hold was unescapable. Wolf River was our home and it always would be.

“You know that’s impossible. I need to get dressed.”

I didn’t have to tell her to follow. Erin was on my heels as I stalked to the room and pulled out a pair of jeans and a long sleeve shirt. While I put on my clothes, she paced, holding tightly to the guns.

“That won’t kill them,” I said, glancing over. “Not unless you have silver bullets.”

She looked down, letting out an aggravated sound. Her anger had her wolf flaring. Now that I knew the scent, I was so much more in tune with that part of her.

“Where the hell am I going to get silver bullets on such short notice?”

I threw her a smile. “My shed.”

“You mean you have some?”

“I do. Let’s play this smart, though. Caleb’s going to come back. If not tonight, definitely before the full moon. We have to come up with a plan.” I frowned. “I’m not so sure we should kill him. If we do, we’ll have to kill them all. You were a detective. That’s too many deaths. Too much suspicion being brought to us. We’re talking about nearly the entire police force. It’s asking for trouble, especially since we don’t know who else is a werewolf, too. Maybe we can negotiate something. There has to be a way around this.”

Erin’s eyes went wide. “I don’t think so. He wants to kill me! Caleb, he.... says I have bad blood. Alex,” her eyes searched mine. “What does that mean? What’s going to happen to me?”

My arms outstretched and she rushed into them while my hand stroked down her hair. “I don’t know, baby. Whatever it means, you don’t have to be afraid. I’m going to be right there with you through everything. You’re going to be okay and no one is going to hurt you. I promise.”

# Chapter 31

## Erin

Caleb didn't come by that night, or the next. Or even the following night. For days Alex and I stayed on full guard. Every little sound or change in energy had us ready to attack. Now it was the night of the full moon and on top of worrying about my change, I had to worry about the real wolves of Wolf River coming after us. And they would. The question was, when? Tonight could possibly be a blood bath and there was nothing I could do about it. Especially from behind the bars of the cage I was in. Alex sat on the other side, free from the prison that had been his safe haven for all of these years. Now, he was risking the ultimate sacrifice just to keep me safe. I didn't understand why we couldn't be in here together. His reason—*me*.

Inside this cage I was protected from not only harming others, but harming him. He wasn't sure how his wolf would react if it were attacked, even by mine. It made sense. Especially with how unstable we were in wolf form. The cell was the best plan we could come up with. My only fear was, if Caleb and the men returned, I'd be a sitting target. One who couldn't escape a silver bullet to the heart or head if that was the route they planned to take. To make things worse, I knew Alex would fight to protect me. But who was going to protect him?

"How are you feeling?"

Sweat poured down my face despite that it was in the teens outside. The moon was pulling at my wolf and I knew it wouldn't be long. "Not feeling so good. How are you?"

Alex's hair was slightly wet from his own battle. Both of our breathing was getting heavier. I could see the rise and fall of his chest pause from time to time as he gritted his teeth through the tremors we were both having.

"Probably the same as you, but I'm used to this." He grimaced, pausing. "I worry about you. The first change hurts the most. Just remember that as you're going through the pain. This one will be the worst. I'll hold off as long as I can, but you're not going to be so lucky. You'll transform first. Mine will come at some point, but if I can turn back, I will. I'm going to be here for you. Tonight. Next month. Every full moon from here on after."

I moved to my knees, gripping the bars. Alex rose to meet me and I reached through while we laced out fingers through each other's.

"I love you." His voice wavered just the slightest bit and I tightened my hold, pulling one of his hands through the bar so I could push my lips into his skin.

"I love you, too. I'm scared."

"I know, baby, but I'm right here. You have nothing to fear."

My head nodded, but I couldn't stop shaking. The pains and the nausea were getting worse. My stomach was twisting and wringing as my insides began to warp. My hands broke away, jerking to my mouth as the need to gag overpowered me.

"Shh, it's okay. It's beginning. Just breathe through the process. Don't try to fight it. The effects will only be worse."

What felt like bugs crawled over my arm as the skin lifted and waved along the muscle. A horrified cry tore from my mouth. Instinct had me wanting to slap my palm over the sensation, but it was too late. A crack

along my side had my upper body jerking back from the sheer agony. I fell to the ground, holding to my stomach as I was frozen from the pain.

“Breathe,” Alex yelled.

His hands were gripped to the bars so tightly that I could see how white they were through the glow of the lantern.

Multiple cracks raced the length of my ribs, cutting off the oxygen I was trying to take in. As fast as the bones broke, they readjusted and I screamed through the process. My ragged pants mirrored his and just as I took a deep breath, they made a sickening cadence as they snapped again. Only this time, it was on both sides. I inhaled deeply through the shock, feeling my back bow as my spine moved on its own accord. It was growing, getting longer while the bones in my limbs lengthened. The tears and scorching sensations had the room going black, but coming back in flashes.

Deep cries left me and I jerked to my side, raking my nails along the ground with everything I had. Alex’s voice sounded in the background, but the tone was so far away that all I could pick up was an unrecognizable echo. I held to it, trying my best to convince myself that what was happening wasn’t real.

Crunching crackled in my ears and the pain was so shattering in my face that I did gag, then. I gagged, repeatedly, feeling my features pushed out and my cheek and jaw bone widened to unimaginable portions. In and out, the bones replaced, almost as if they weren’t sure they wanted to stay. With each adjustment, I relived the hell of my new life, and there were no words for the amount that I hated it.

A piercing scream blended with the mass of noises in my ears and it took me a minute to realize that it wasn’t me. It was *her*. My heart was racing, making itself known for the first time since I’d began my change. It stretched, growing, and bringing an unbearable ache with it. And just when

I thought it couldn't get any worse, it did. Like someone detonated a bomb, I felt the unsteady bones and growth explode from the inside out, locking everything into place. Locking *her* into place.

And then the agony was gone, replaced with a different kind—a hunger so intense that it rumbled through my stomach and drove me springing to my feet. Strength like I never felt before drove me into the bars, once. Twice. I saw nothing but the trap door above me and I had to find a way to try to get out of it.

“Jesus. Erin, look at me, baby. It's Alex.”

The voice had my head jerking down and my arms shooting through the bars as I tried to grab at the meal I could so clearly see before me.

“No,” he said, staying still. “You can't have me like that. Look who you're trying to get. Really look into my face. See me.”

His words made no sense. I didn't care to look, I wanted to taste.

A growl poured from my throat as I turned, trying to push myself even more through the bars. At the threatening roar that followed, I felt my hand still. The man was breathing out in heavy bouts, shaking as he glared at me.

“Look at me! Look into my eyes!” His hand grasped my wrist with incredible strength. I swiped at him with my other hand, trying to use my claws to catch on to any part of him that I could so I could bring him closer, but he grabbed the other wrist too, managing to draw my attention to his face. “That's it,” he said, tensed as I fought to wrestle free. “Look what you're doing. You dare to hurt me? *Me?* The one you love!”

The yell had me blinking as I searched the bright gold of his eyes. Something else was sinking in with his delicious smell. Something I couldn't quite figure out. I knew it, but I couldn't place what it was.

My foot wedged on the bar and I jerked myself back making him lose his grip and stumble forward. I lunged with everything I had, snagging his shirt as he dove to the ground and rolled out of the way. Before I could calculate my next move, the scent of blood registered, and I went crazy. I began ramming the bars with everything I had. Sounds poured from my mouth, a mix between snarls and a high pitched whimper. Over and over I crashed into the cage, getting nowhere closer to my prize.

Watchful eyes followed my every move. The man sat against the far wall, his forearms positioned on his knees. There was an emptiness there—an anger. And sadness. I got that, too, I just wasn't trained on it. The anger was a trigger I liked. It provoked me, and I wanted to fight if it got me something to eat.

"I don't know why I thought you'd be more coherent. Why would you be? Our love doesn't control our wolves. We're still killers over everything else. Whether our monsters are mates or not, we'll still need the hunt that's programmed into us. It rules over everything. Even love, in this case. That's heartbreaking. I was hoping... Hell, we can't even share the same cage to battle this thing together."

A big exhale left him and he lowered his head. In circles I paced, scanning over everything. My attention kept getting diverted from my deep concentration to the coughing coming from the corner. The man's scent was intensifying as he sweated profusely. The agitation within heightened and I rammed into the wall again, hitting it so hard that I actually felt my arm lose feeling. Like dead weight it hung at my side for seconds. My glance down had my eyes settling on the ground.

"Don't waste your time," the man said in a deeper voice. "I've dug up the ground so many times it's not even funny. There's bars under there, too."



I cried out in desperation, attacking the bars to try to get to him. Slowly, he rose, throwing off a scent so familiar that it made my legs go weak. A reverberating from deep inside of him was growing louder by the second. Even the tone was somehow ... comforting.

“Erin, I can’t hold this off much longer. I can’t breathe. You have no idea how hard it is for me to stay away from you right now. God, I just want to...” He groaned, doubling over and holding his stomach. It wasn’t long before he lowered to his knees, still holding around his waist. “Even in this form, your scent still calls to me. It’s funny,” he said, laughing. “Here you are, wanting to kill me, and my wolf is just dying to put you in your God damn place. There isn’t anything I wouldn’t do to get in that cage and give you the fight of your life.”

The fabric of his shirt tore and a painful sound left him. What looked like a ripple raced down his spine and he pushed his palms from the ground, slowly rising to his knees. Muscles bulged, turning massive as long hair pushed from his skin. I stared, fascinated. Limbs grew, adjusting at such a speed that within seconds he was monster peering up, glaring up at me. Deep breaths left his mouth and I couldn’t look away from that transfixed look he had. And it was for *me*. The scent that masked the room spoke to me more than his words ever could. The perfume promised possession ... it clearly defined my place—with him.

“*Mine.*”

It was the first word that vocally broke through my mind since my change. I’d had plenty of thoughts, but never once had I heard my own voice.

I stepped closer to the bars, narrowing my eyes as he followed my every move. For minutes he didn’t come forward. He stayed crouched—low. My wolf quickly got irritated. Not at him, but that I was trapped here. I

turned, heading to the other side when the crash against the bars had me spinning around defensively. He stood, holding to them, still staring. My mind began to calculate. To read his actions and what they meant.

I moved deeper back, and then left. He followed. *Right*. He followed. Something fluttered within and I charged at the cage, right for him. The need to attack, to make him prove himself was there. He was so much bigger than I was. But I felt no fear as I reared back. My claws grew the littlest bit and his hand was around my throat and he was squeezing before I could decide where I wanted to strike.

The lack of air set me into pure survival mode. I tore into his flesh, but he only squeezed tighter, holding me still as he stared into my face. It wasn't until my arms grew heavy that he let out a grunt. I met his gold eyes and my whole soul melted and purred. What was looking back at me wasn't trying to kill me. Quite the opposite. And I *knew* him. Something told me that as he eased his grip and brought me closer.

For the first time tonight, I went from lost and confused, to a sense of calm. My eyes closed and I breathed through the unexplainable urges to destroy. To kill. I wasn't getting loose. I knew that. The truth brought a sadness powerful enough to make me want to start going crazy again, but I had *him*. His touch was enough to soothe, and it did bring a familiarity. If I could only remember what that was...

# Chapter 32

## Alex

I had secretly feared the fogginess of my change wouldn't allow me to recognize Erin's new form when I completed into my wolf. And for a few seconds, I hadn't. It was the main reason I had made sure we weren't confined together. It wasn't until her delicious scent registered that I went from having to have her, to understanding the reason why I needed to. I loved her. Even with as we were, my heart was only hers. But where my adoration soared, my worry did too.

She was extremely unstable. Not any more than I expected, but close. She didn't seem to recognize me. Not when I was in human form, and not as a wolf either. The beast she'd become was comforted by me. That was obvious as she let me wrap my hand around the back of her neck and keep her close, but she went through periods of what I assumed were blackouts. She'd stiffen, as if she forgot what was happening or where she was, and it would take her attacking me for me to calm her again. It was violent, and even had become a bit bloody on my behalf. She was getting me good. Not in the sense that she was trying to eat me, but more to test her own dominance. It brought me back to what I'd overheard from Caleb.

*Bad blood.*

Was this how it would be for her? Would she never know anyone but the predator within? It wasn't a good thing, but it wasn't something I couldn't handle. Tonight was only the first night and I was having success, even if it was injuring me. It was more than I could have hoped for when

I'd heard him mention her situation. In truth it scared the shit out of me to not know what to expect with her. But, we were just beginning. Would the next change be this way? Worse? Would she try to kill my wolf, just like she'd wanted to do to my human form? It was possible.

*"Erin."*

Nothing. I'd tried to communicate with her repeatedly over the hours and it was as though she was deaf to communication of our kind. If we could communicate at all ... I wasn't certain. Never once while I was in form had I tried to talk with another werewolf. Our creatures weren't meant to mingle. To socialize or mate. At least, I hadn't thought so. Not before she came along. Now I was more confused than ever about this entire process. I had disassociated myself from everyone for so long, that what I'd seen between Caleb and the other men didn't make sense. They were killers, but they somehow managed to work together. They had their own system, not only to keep them safe, but our kind as well. They appeared as the enemies, but were they? No one had messed with me through my isolation. Caleb hadn't tried to kill me even when he suspected that I was the one committing the murders. He may have thought about it or planned for it to happen, but he couldn't do it himself. He seemed physically unable.

My only issue with them now was their distrust of Erin. Even if I hated it, I did understand their need to keep us safe. That didn't mean I wouldn't kill them if they tried to hurt her.

*"Erin."*

The grunt had her eyes coming up to mine. She blinked repeatedly and I knew what was coming. I'd seen it so many times that I braced myself as she began to attack again. Fuck, how many more times would I see her go through this tonight?

I stepped back, pushing away the hunger that had my stomach in knots. To hunt and be beneath the moonlight was testing my patience. For periods I would forget what I was meant to be doing, but in these moments when she fought, it triggered my instincts. I couldn't stay in this form much longer, but I'd already tried to change once before and it hadn't worked.

My eyes closed and I tried pushing my wolf back. He was so hell-bent on having his way that he put every ounce of his fight into making it impossible. Pain tore into my bicep and I growled, lunging back for the cage. The scent of something in the distance had my head jerking up just in time for her to shred down my cheeks. Bright light burst into my vision and the room wavered through the explosion of rage that associated with the pain. I knew I had Erin pinned to the floor by her throat, but I was listening. Waiting. Someone was above. Or something.

*"Quiet!"*

My command was for nothing. She thrashed under my hold, tearing into my arm. When I gave her a good shake and she realized I wasn't going to let go, she went still.

Footsteps sounded in the distance and I held more to Erin as an anchor, than to control her. My wolf wanted to hunt. It wanted to kill whoever was lurking by my home. What if it was Caleb and the sheriff, back to finish Erin off? I couldn't leave her. Or Morton? I hadn't heard whether they'd found him yet.

Panic had me sliding Erin to the edge of the cage. She was already looking at me. Once again under my control. I looked deeply into her eyes, desperately trying to communicate.

*"Why can't you hear me? Why can't you speak? Erin, baby, I need you to try. Hear me! I think we're in trouble."*

Flickers of emotion drew her features in, but I didn't think she understood me. My heart sank and stirring above had her eyes jerking to the trap door. My other hand slammed over her mouth as she began to growl. Again her gaze went to my eyes. That's when I saw it. Fear. She was detecting that something was wrong. She wouldn't have done that had she not been picking up the threat via the traces of her human self.

*"That's it. There we go. Remember who you are. Remember what's happening. Try to listen to me."*

In wild movements, her stare flicker back and forth from me to the sound of the steps. When her eyes stopped back on mine, my heart nearly stopped.

*"Alex? Alex, I'm scared. Let me out. Let out of here!"*

*"There we go, baby. Keep your thoughts where they are so we don't lose communication. Listen to me, I wish I could let you out. I really do, but I can't. We have no idea who it is. We're safer, here."*

Creaking of the main door to the shed had my wolf flexing his calves, ready to jump up and attack if I had to. Some things were tossed around, banging loudly in the process.

"Nothing. I told you, they're not here. I bet you anything they're out hunting right now. Just like we should be. This is bullshit."

The familiar voice wouldn't register in my clouded thoughts. It wasn't Caleb or the sheriff. One of the deputies? Fuck, I couldn't piece together which one was talking.

"Hurry up, then, and let's go." A pause. "Get out of here! *Damn* wolves. I swear this place creeps me out. What the fuck does he do, feed them to get them to watch over his place?"

Hesitation above was finally followed by the main door being slammed shut. Footsteps faded and I let go of Erin's neck as the car's

engine started and then faded into the distance.

*“Alex, what’s happening to me? I can’t think. I don’t feel good.”*

*“The night is almost over. Just a few hours to go. Here,”* I helped her up to sit and face me. *“Tonight has been very hard for you.”*

*“Did I do that to your cheek?”*

At my silence, she whimpered, putting her head down.

*“Something’s not right with me. I can feel it. My wolf is ... defective. It’s broken or programmed wrong.”*

*“No. I don’t believe that. You’re talking to me, now. You’re learning. It takes time. Fear helped in this case. Now you know what you’re doing.”*

*“I feel like I keep rebooting. I’m fine, and then I’m lost. By the time I remember you and what I am, I disappear again. It’s so disorienting.”*

Sadness brought my hand to hers. *“Sometimes it’s like that for me, too. Let’s take it one day at a time. One full moon at a time. You’ll get better.”*

Erin’s stare told me she wasn’t so sure. Even I wasn’t positive. It was quite possible that all I would ever have were glimpses of the woman I loved during these times. I was afraid that the moment she shut down again, she’d forget this small step. Would her sanity be affected and change in everyday life too? This was only the beginning, and it frightened me more than anything in the world. Her wolf was here for good now, and with it, I could very well lose her in the process.

A loud crash from above had both of our heads snapping up. A growl exploded from Erin’s throat and she lunged to her feet, slamming into the cage before I could so much as stand. I didn’t have to guess why. I could smell the wolf’s scent engulf the small room. Death and rotting flesh had my nostril’s flaring as I turned and pushed my palm against the dirt floor.

Light broke through the entrance and the trap door was torn free. I didn't think as I sprung through the opening with all of my strength. Wild thrashing was immediate from Morton. I crashed into his chest, feeling him hook his claws into my back as we went flying into the shelves that surrounded my shed.

He was sick. The stench from the infection burned into my lungs, but it didn't stop the power he harbored in this form.

We spun, tearing more into each other as bottles and building supplies fell on us. Erin's threatening snarls sunk deep into my conscious and protecting her was all I knew. She was being too loud. It was driving him to fight me even more so he could get to her. My only security was knowing that even if he did kill me, he'd never be able to break through the cage. Not in his wolf form ... but come tomorrow ...

The fear had me biting into his face as I jerked my head back and forth. Claws raked along my sides, shredding my flesh. I managed to wedge my feet between us and send him flying through the side of the shed. Before I could scramble to my feet he was already landing and tearing into the ground to spring forward again. The wildness in his eyes—the nothingness—was all I saw as I righted myself just in time to meet his huge form diving right for me.

Air was nonexistent as he hit and we slid through the entrance. Fire raced down my neck and I howled, using my size to spin us over. The moment I got on top, I reared back giving each strike along his face everything I had. The need to filet him alive was real. I wanted there to be nothing left of him by the time I was finished. He'd never come after Erin again. He'd never try to hurt her if I could prevent it. And I would. He'd die. Right now.



Blood poured free of the wounds, soaking my hands while I dug in. Faster, I went, with more strength. Deep groaning came from what was left of his mouth. I lifted enough to spin him on his stomach, wrapping my arm around his jaw. In a quick twist, I felt his neck break. But I didn't stop. I tugged with all of my strength, going back and forth as I tore through the thick muscle. The gush of hot blood—bad blood—coated into the hair on my forearms and I let his head roll to the ground.

It was over. At least concerning him.

\*\*\*\*\*

The rebooting continued, as did the lack of communication. The only good thing was, it didn't take long for Erin to remember to speak after she came around to remembering me. It was a step. And a good one in my opinion. It could have been worse. So much worse. At the end, it even felt like she was remembering me faster. I prayed that was the case, but I just wasn't sure. She didn't even remember my fight with Morton until I reminded her. Even then, it was too much of a haze for her to recall much.

But I could chalk it to what I assumed it was. Exhaustion. And not just for her, but for both of us. With the sun, came aching and pain to the slight cuts that still remained on me. Even in my human form. Erin was deep asleep as I carried her inside and cradled her in the shower. With every shift of her body, she made painful sounds, but she was past the point of being able to wake. By the time I had us in bed, my lids were so heavy that I barely remembered my head hitting the pillow. It felt like I had only just fallen asleep before something caused me to stir. My eyes opened and I growled at Caleb standing over my bed. My hand immediately shot over to Erin ... but she was gone.

“Where is she?” Panic had me throwing the covers back and lunging for him. A strength even with mine wrestled me as we flipped over the edge of the dresser and rolled to the floor. The scent of blood teased my senses and my fist paused from swinging as it registered whose it was. It didn’t stop Caleb’s fist from connecting with my cheek.

“You temperamental bastard. Calm your ass down.”

“Where’s Erin?” I yelled.

“I could ask you the same question,” Caleb said, pushing his body free of mine as I scrambled to stand.

Fuck, I had to find her. My wolf was panicking and I couldn’t think.

“I see you took care of Morton,” he ground out.

“He came after Erin. Of course I took care of him. As I will with anyone who is trying to hurt what’s mine.”

Caleb threw me a pair of pants. “Don’t threaten me, Alex. If I wanted Erin dead, she would be. I’ve had *plenty* of opportunities. She’s alive for a reason.”

The living room was a blur as I raced through, grabbing my jacket. Caleb was following behind, but he wasn’t my focus. The moment I opened my door, I froze. It was dark. Had I slept so long? When had Erin left? She could be anywhere.

“You need to be aware that I placed the call on Morton. Sheriff wanted to know about Erin. I told him she was out somewhere hunting, that I’d be looking for her. He and his deputies are searching as we speak.”

I spun around, glaring at him. “I thought you said she was alive for a reason. They want her dead! If they touch her, I’ll kill them. I’ll kill every single one of them.”

“And you will die.”

My eyebrows drew in confused while I shook my head. “What do you care? You were ready to let me take the fall for Morton. *Bad blood, and all,*” I snapped. “Now the woman I love is tainted by that same blood—”

“No, she’s not. And I wouldn’t have let you take the fall. You have so much to learn.”

“What?”

A smile pulled at Caleb’s lips. “Morton didn’t turn her, Alex, I did. And everything I did was for a reason. I would have told you this before, but you were too hostile. You weren’t ready. There was still lessons for you to learn.”

My head shook. “That doesn’t make sense. You were in human form when you were with Erin that night.”

“When I cut her? Was I? Did you see me come up from behind her? I know she didn’t. She was too busy staring at the window, terrified at what she had witnessed. Even when I returned to human form and eventually helped her stand, she stayed in a daze, staring for a good ten minutes. She knew it was you. It put her into a shock and I took advantage of that. I would have liked to get it over with a hell of a lot earlier, but you just wouldn’t leave her alone. Not that I expected you to after you ran across her wrecked car. Still, I couldn’t change around you. You would have known and it would have ruined everything.”

My lips separated as I tried to piece everything together.

“I need someone to help me regulate this town. Erin is it. The sheriff is out of control, but I can’t take him and his men out on my own. I need her. And I need you, too.”

“But ... you killed Gregory. You killed that expert. I heard everything, Caleb!”

A hard expression slid into place. “Then you know I needed to say and do what I had to at the time. Did you not think I didn’t know you would be outside of Gregory’s house? That you wouldn’t protect her? You will never understand what it is to step up and take control of a species, Alex. You won’t, because as your maker, I will do that for you. In the meantime, we take care of ourselves. Everyone except the true victims were threats. Gregory wouldn’t have stopped until he exposed what we are. The sheriff and his unstable deputies are liabilities. You, me, and a handful of others are the only ones to be trusted if we’re to survive. Do you want your happy life with Erin?”

“You know I do.”

“Then let’s go find your girl and begin a new era of Wolf River. One our families don’t have to be afraid of. Let’s fade out the nightmare we’ve created and slip back into the legends we were meant to be.”

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

# Chapter 33

## Erin

What had started out as temptation to explore the outside with my new vision, turned into a walk my wolf couldn't resist. The long red nightgown I wore was wet from the snow and torn in places along the bottom from foliage, but I didn't care as I stared up through the trees. There were so many sounds. So many smells. It fascinated me to see the world through a new light. And to see it at all with the way the last few days played out ... there was a gratefulness there.

When I awoke, I expected to be a monster. A killer focused only on creating mayhem against the humans I'd spent my life trying to protect. But I didn't feel like that right now. For the first time since I had realized my fate, I was at peace with the outcome. My wolf lingered just in the background, but she was oddly content at the moment, just happy to be free of the cage that had driven her crazy. My bad blood didn't seem so bad.

Wolves trailed behind me as I circled around to head back home. Their presence was a comfort. I often found myself trailing my fingers down the length of the gray wolf's coat as he stayed the closest. Communicating with them had been automatic. I felt their thoughts. Their energy. It traveled through my mind and blood as if we were one. I didn't even have to put sentences together to express my questions or emotions. Everything just *was*. They read me as good as I read them. The animals I once feared more than anything were no longer a threat. They were a part of me now. It was another piece of the puzzle that fit the new person I was.

For who'd I'd *be* if Alex and I could figure out what to do about Caleb and the other werewolves determined to kill me.

Just the thought brought clarity to what I was doing. I blinked through my slight fog still in my mind. The effects were still here, just not threatening. I took in the woods around me and shook my head. I shouldn't be here. If Alex woke up early, he was going to be so upset with me. I wasn't far from the house, but far enough away that if something happened, I might not make it back in time. Plus, I was with the wolves. He didn't understand them. Or want to, for that matter. I would just have to show him and make him change his mind. They protected me just as much as he did and I liked that. I didn't depend on their presence, but knowing they were with me brought an ease.

My boot sunk through the snow as I stepped in a hole. Coldness embraced up to my knee and I threw my weight forward to trudge on. Four steps forward and I blinked past the strange scent. *She* stirred within, analyzing the smell that made her uncomfortable.

"Come on," I whispered to the gray wolf. I didn't want to know what it was that I was picking up on. It'd only be trouble, whether it was food or foe.

I increased the pace, trying to hold my breath as much as I could. My pulse was hitting into my chest so hard. It only turned harder when the wolves began to slip off to disappear into the dense trees around us. I tried to tune into their energy, but I was so worked up, I couldn't focus. Panic was taking me over and with it, *she* was winning. My wolf didn't want to be afraid. She wanted a fight. She wanted blood, something I'd denied her up until this point.

The lookout rested up ahead and I glanced over my shoulder at the weird energy that was getting closer. Unrecognizable voices were beginning

to hum in the distance. I bit my lip trying to decide whether to wait it out up there or continue on. No. I couldn't stop. I just had to move faster.

The forest cleared and I passed the lookout tree, sliding to a stop at the evil vibes that prickled against my skin. It was a werewolf. The alarms rung in my head like sirens. He'd get me before I made it home. I'd seen how fast those things were. I had felt my own power last night.

I gripped to the ladder, climbing up into the hole that led to the deck. It was covered in a good foot and a half of snow. I placed the tip of my boot on the edge and jumped toward the middle, shoveling the snow in a cubby around me so I could try to get as low as possible. It wouldn't hide me from view if someone came up the ladder, but if they were walking below or if they peeked in, maybe they wouldn't see me? Fuck. They'd see my footprints that led right to the outlook.

Even as I saw my mistake in my head, I felt myself project it to the grey wolf below. I doubted he'd be able to do anything, but I wanted him to know my predicament. If something happened...he'd have to show Alex. *Alex would have to know.*

"Hurry up Logan, you're falling behind. We ain't got all day."

"I'm trying, Sheriff. I had to text my brother. I'm missing dinner for this shit."

The voices had me burrowing down even further. They were still a bit away. How much, I wasn't sure. They weren't my fear, it was the werewolf growing closer at incredible speed. His aura went beyond threatening. He was hunting, and I knew exactly who he was trying to find.

*"Alex. Alex, please."*

The fear had the cold sinking in all the way to my bones. It was conflicting with the heat pouring from my skin. My wolf was getting angrier. Where she saw me as cowardice, I tried to convince her that this

was the smart thing. I wasn't ready to fight. I didn't even know how well I could. Alex didn't seem to have a problem manhandling me last night. He was faster, stronger. I had no doubts this one would be, too.

Birds burst from the trees overhead and I inhaled deeply, holding my breath, while I squeezed my fists, listening for the creature's approach. Snow began to crunch, the growling, much closer. At the heavy pants, I completely froze. He had to be almost right below me. God, he was going to find me. I knew he was.

"What do you got, Zach?" The sheriff's voice was louder. From his words, I knew he was within seeing distance. From the grunt that followed, he was talking to the werewolf.

More crunching went left, and then right. A deep rumble echoed from all around and I tried to imagine what was happening. The wolves? It had to be. There were too many different tones. I wanted to see for myself, but I was too afraid to tap into the energy for fear that the werewolf was too.

"Get out of here!" Logan's voice came through from only a few feet away. I stared into the cloudy sky listening as he continued. "Look what those damn wolves did. I don't even see her tracks anymore. Damn scavengers. They're so bad around these parts. I can't stand being here."

"They're just wolves, Logan. Ignore them."

"They're vultures. I can't even enjoy a meal in peace without one coming in trying to forage my food. I hate those bastards. More so when they're packed like this."

The sheriff laughed. "They guard the girl. Why do you think they're reacting as they are? If they didn't have something to hide, they wouldn't be within twenty feet of Zach. What does that tell you?"



A scream exploded from my throat as a dark brown werewolf jumped to grip the railing and swung himself over. I skittered back, stopping only when the barrier prevented me from going further. My ribs were cracking, hindering me from escaping like I wanted.

**“Alex!”** I put everything into my yell, praying he’d hear me.

“Zach, stop playing with your food. Get her!”

The sheriff’s voice faded from my hearing as my muscles and bones flared and exploded free. I wasn’t trying to fight my change anymore. If I were going to have any chance of surviving, I didn’t have a choice.

Light flickered, as I clawed across the deck. The werewolf was coming closer, his moves slow as he watched me. Material shredded from my body and growls tore from me as I began to push from the wood to stand. Before I could get to my knees, weight slammed into me with so much force that I felt the banister bust to pieces at my side. I was falling, flailing and clawing at the wolf who held his own weapons latched into my sides. We hit the ground and oxygen was nonexistent as I landed with him on top of me. We immediately started rolling. I twisted and turned, pushing at him with my feet.

“That’s it! Get her!”

Drool fell from his mouth, sliding across my cheek while he snapped toward my face. Fear didn’t exist anymore as blood became my main focus. His attack and power pushed my wolf to the brink of her abilities. I kicked and bit, slicing into his shoulder with my sharp teeth. A howl of pain filled the air and he reared back catching me across the face with the back of his hand. The hit left sound wavering and I was rolling from the force. Dizziness took over and my vision was blurred. I blinked rapidly, seeing him flying through the air right for me. My arms and legs shot up, bracing for the impact. For the death I knew that would suddenly

follow. Color blurred from all sides and I watched as wolves flew in from all directions, knocking him off to the side.

Yelling erupted from behind and an all too familiar roar had me turning just in time to see two werewolves leaping for the sheriff and Logan. Blood and screams penetrated the air as Alex tore into the sheriff's throat, pulling and shredding him to pieces. The brutality stirred my own wolf, making her pull even more for her mate. A shot rang through the air and Logan's arm was ripped free of his body while the other werewolf bit down into his head even more.

I scrambled to my feet, flying face-down as teeth embedded into my shoulder. My scream came out deep and agony jolted me to the side in time to see Zach widening his jaw to strike at me again. Wolves were still jumping on him, locking their canines into his body as they shook their heads back and forth, dislodging his tough skin in chunks. Blood poured onto my face and dripped into my mouth as I inhaled heavily through my own attack. I was clawing and gripping into his neck, holding it up with all of my strength as he tried to force his way down. My hips rocked back and forth while I did anything I could to break myself free. One minute he was gaining ground, the next, Alex was connecting with his weight and they were gone, crashing through the trees next to us. The wolves were all over them, still going after Zach as Alex tugged and twisted at his head.

*"Don't you dare attack me."*

The voice pushed into my head as clear as day and I knew exactly who it was. I turned, seeing the other werewolf coming up behind me.

*"How did you do that? Talk to me like this?"* I could barely recall how hard it was for me and Alex.

*"I made you. Of course I can talk to you."*

*"You? But ... I thought?"*

*“Come on, Ms. Billings. You’re supposed to be a detective. Surely you can figure this out. You were bound to find out Alex’s past. Who better to hear it from than the one who turned him? Than the one who made you believe he was innocent to begin with?”*

*“You were saying he was ... guilty.” I paused as pieces of my human self filtered in. “You played us both. Your suspicions of Alex—that was overkill. You made me feel sorry for him.”*

*“I did. If you thought I was too emotionally invested, you’d turn on me, and you’d be more inclined to see him as the good guy. And you did. You took to Alex almost immediately.*

*“But ... the dart... Why?”*

*“All Alex has ever done is hide from what he is. I needed him stronger. Like he is now. If he didn’t have a reason to fight off his need to kill you, he wouldn’t have gotten better at controlling his wolf. I knew he had feelings for you. Hell, he hasn’t left your side since I ran you off the road. Even then, I knew he’d find you. I knew I could make this work for me. And it did. Luckily for the both of you, it worked just as well.”*

*“You sacrificed me because of some ... what, some hunch that you could bring us all together to...” My gaze went to the sheriff and his deputies. “Stop the bad blood.” I whispered in my mind.*

*“That’s right, Erin. Bad blood isn’t good for our kind. It’ll ruin everything if we can’t get it under control. And trust me, Alex killing Morton wasn’t the end of this. He’s not the only one. That’s why I need you. Why I turned you. Your past. Your history. You’re one hell of a detective, who is completely alone. You’ve had so much loss within your life. You needed us as much as we need you.”*

*My head was spinning as I watched Alex head back in our direction. My brain was fighting through my continued haze. I went over Gregory’s*

death, over Dr. Chan's. It had pained me to see them killed, but I also sickly understood it. And sadly, if I was forced with saving my life with Alex, my life at all, I would have pulled the trigger, myself. Maybe it was what I was now, or maybe I didn't want to let go of what I'd found in Wolf River. Of Alex and his parents. It was my happiness and all I had.

*"What happens now?"*

*Caleb shrugged. "Looks like the town is in need of a new sheriff. I could use a detective if you're up for it."*

*"Are you really asking?"*

*"Nope."*

As Caleb slipped away, I didn't bother to watch him leave. My eyes only stayed on one person. *Alex*.

Our fairytale was just beginning. It was dark and twisted, founded in a cursed town, lined with the blood of the past. We were the monsters, and although I knew our future was uncertain, one thing was for sure. I had found love. It was real. The kind you killed—and died—for.

# The End.

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

## About the Author



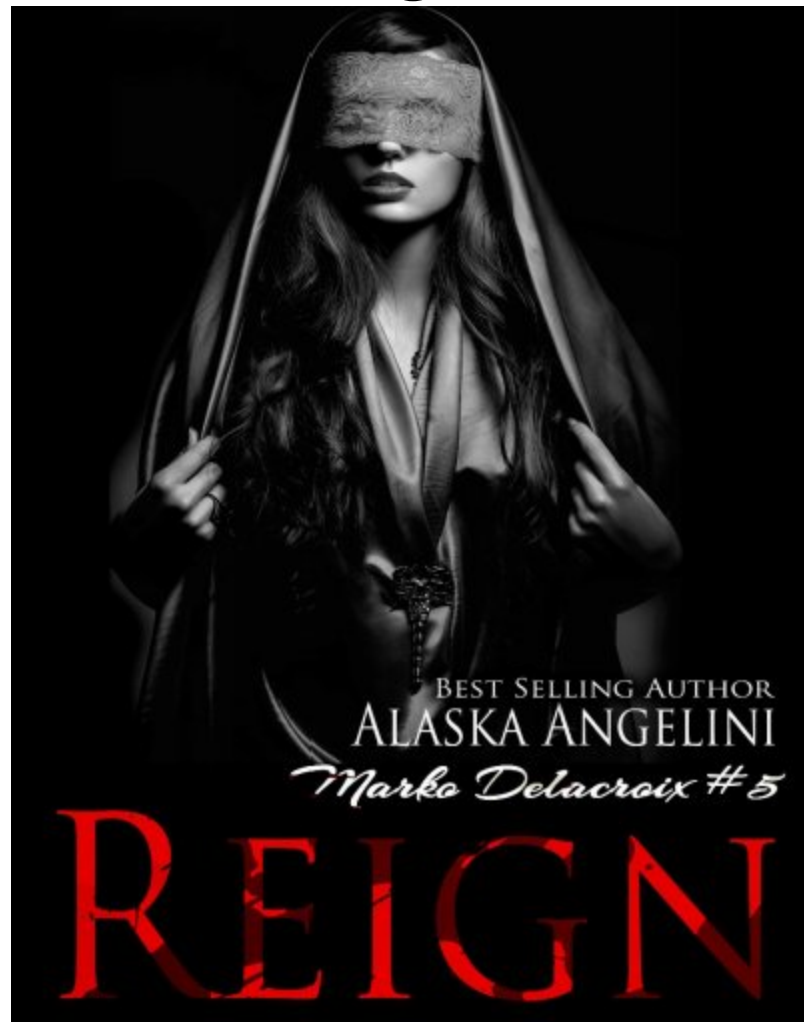
Alaska is an erotic BDSM author who also goes by the pen names Jennifer Salaiz and Jenny May. She lives in Wisconsin...for now. She's a dreamer, and longs for the day when her husband and kids can load up in the car and drive until their hearts' content. Adventure and discovering new places play a huge role in Alaska's life. It drives her, and feeds the creativity of coming up with new locations for her stories.

Within the last few years, Alaska and her family have drove across the country twice, and also drove the distance from sunny Texas to Hot California three times. Asked, if she could choose one place to permanently settle down, where it would be, Alaska laughed. "Montana, today. Tomorrow, it may be Alaska, again. I go back and forth."

When Alaska's not dreaming of spontaneously hitting the road to find a new place to write about, she's being a mother and wife. If you're looking to connect with her to learn more, feel free to email her at [alaska\\_angelini@yahoo.com](mailto:alaska_angelini@yahoo.com), or find her on Facebook. You can also stop by her website [jennymayauthor.com](http://jennymayauthor.com).

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

Coming Soon!



[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

Captive to the Dark fan?  
Also Coming Soon...

