

## Chapter 1

Sierra's POV

I'm standing in my bedroom, looking at myself in the full-length mirror on the back of the closet door. The stark white of my graduation gown really makes my red hair and hazel green eyes stand out. I can't believe it's nally my last day of high school. I'll be turning 18 in 2 days, and then I'll be off to college not long after. The reality that I'm now a young adult settles in my mind; I smile inwardly thinking about how things are about to change.

I pick up the cap that is sitting on my desk just next to the closet. I slip that on my head and adjust it so that it's not crooked. I fan out my long curls so it looks as good as it can. I guess a cap and gown can only look so good. I pull it off my head, not wanting to put it on until the last second, when I hear my mom's voice ring up the stairs.

"Sierra! Hurry up or you're going to be late!"

"Coming!" I respond. I took one last look in the mirror, satisfied with my minimal make-up and simple white, spaghetti-strap dress. I never really like getting dressed up. I did on occasion, but for the most part I preferred to be in jeans and a T-shirt. I was wearing a small wedge heel, so I didn't sink into the turf of the stadium where they held the ceremony. I headed down the stairs to my waiting parents.

"Oh, look at you!" My mom beamed at me, tears forming in her green eyes. She had gotten very dressed up for the occasion. Wearing a blue knee-length wrap dress with black pumps. Her shoulder-length red hair perfectly blown out, like she had just walked out of the salon.

"Mom don't cry. It's just graduation." One thing we always gave my mom a hard time about was how emotional she was. I'd caught her crying at a dog food commercial, and when I asked her why she was crying she said, "They're just such cute dogs!"

"Are you ready for the big night?" My dad asked me as he came into the foyer.

"Yup, ready when you guys are." I said, nally descending the last of the stairs.

"We need some pictures rst!" My mom quickly pulled out her phone. "Nathan, will you please go get the tripod from the drawer?"

"No problem." My dad responded, turning back towards the kitchen. He came back in quickly and set it up, placing my mom's phone in the center. He sets the timer, and we all gather close together. I smile and honestly feel excited for the night.

My dad drives us all towards my high school, which also happens to be the school my mom teaches at. She's a history teacher for the freshman, she's been at the school since I was little. I don't remember much from before I was about 6. My parents say I probably just have a bad memory, but sometimes I can't shake the feeling they aren't telling me something.

After about a 15-minute drive, we arrived for my graduation. The parking lot is already very full, with a sea of white and red gowns walking inside. Our school was called North High, and our colors were red, white, and gold. The women wore white robes and the guys got to wear red. We had to report to our home rooms before we lined up for the ceremony entrance. I made my way to my room and my parents headed to the stadium. Mrs. Holland, my homeroom teacher, was in her cap and gown from her college graduation, as are most of the teachers for the senior class. I see my best friend Aubrey chatting away, her curly hair lying in beautiful ringlets around her heart-shaped face. She waves me over when she sees me.

"Hey, how are you?"

"I'm good, how are you? Are you nervous about your speech?" Aubrey was the valedictorian.

"Nah, girl, I've been preparing for this for years." She laughed and so did I. Her condence was unmatched, and I sure wished I had the same amount. Suddenly, I felt arms wrap around my shoulders, and a kiss on my cheek. I knew that was probably only one person.

"Hey Jeremy." I said, looking up at him.

"You didn't respond to my text, I asked you what color shoes you were gonna wear." He huffed at me, taking the open seat next to me.

"Sorry, I didn't even see it. Why didn't you ask Alex?"

"Girl please, that man wouldn't know color coordination if it slapped him," Jeremy retorted.

"Yeah, but you love him, and that's why he's lucky to have you."

"Oh, come on Sierra, you know Jeremy is lucky he nally found someone to put up with his high-maintenance ass!" Aubrey laughed.

"I'm not high maintenance," he said in a mock offended tone. "I just have high standards."

"Is that why you've been unable to hold a relationship for more than a week?" Aubrey joked back. They always play fought like an old married couple.

"Okay everyone, it's time to head to line up. Please make your way to the gymnasium." Mrs. Holland's voice rang out in the loud classroom before Jeremy could respond. Everyone was murmuring as we walked through the hallway and led into the gym. We had to line up in alphabetical order, in pairs of two, one girl, one boy, and then march down to the stadium. My partner was a guy named Ben Eckhart. He and I have never really talked much in the last four years, but I knew he was a nice guy. After everyone was situated, we made the short walk to the stadium. I could hear the buzzing of partners, friends, and family as we approached the gates. The lights were a full blaze, lighting up the 200 chairs in the middle of the old all facing the stage, which had another 10 chairs, a podium and microphone.

We had to stand at the far end of the stadium and walk in our respective pairs to our seats. The standard graduation song blared in the background, blocking out any other sound. Once everyone was seated, our principal, Mr. Long, got up to make a speech. After him it was Audrey's turn. She got up and gave the most awless speech I had ever heard. The applause she got from the students alone was enough to shake the ground. That was one of the things about Aubrey; she was liked by everyone. She never looked down on people and she was always looking for a way to help others. I admired her for that. Once she was done, our principal got back up and started listing off names. We got up row by row and walked across the stage, receiving our diploma from the vice principal, and shaking a lot of hands. I lost count of how many times I hear 'congratulations.'

After everything was said and done, the parents made their way onto the old for pictures with their children. I heard a shriek and turned just in time to see a ash of dark curly hair engulf me in a hug.

"It's over!" Aubrey yelled.

"I know," I responded. "Your speech was amazing, by the way."

"Thanks," she said, nally letting go of me. Jeremy walked up behind her and gave me a hug also. From over his shoulder I spotted my parents. I waved at them, and saw my mom's eyes were red. Of course she had been crying.

"Congratulations!" She said, giving me a hug.

"Ocially an adult," my dad boomed, hugging the two of us together.

"Well, not until the day after tomorrow," Jeremy reminded him.

"That's right!" Aubrey beamed. "We have to do something special. It's the big one eight."

"Let's get some pictures!" My mom yelled, pulling out her phone. My friends and I gathered together while my mom took about one hundred photos. Next, we did some family ones, which Audrey took for us and I found a few other friends of mine who wanted pictures. After a lot of smiling and some more crying from my mom, we headed towards the car. We made the 15-minute drive back home, where we all changed and sat down to watch a movie. My mom went around passing us each a cup of tea. This was what we usually did every night, movie and teatime.

"So, what's it gonna be tonight? Comedy, action, horror?"

"Denitely not horror on my graduation night," I told him.

"Comedy it is," he said, searching through the list of movies.

"I've been thinking about what I wanna do for my birthday. You guys haven't said if there's anything planned, even though it's in 2 days." I said to them. Both my parents froze and just looked at me. "You know, I'll be 18, so I was thinking about just going out with my friends."

"Well, you still have a few days to gure it out yet, and you can always celebrate with just us too." My dad added quickly, glancing sideways at my mom. They both continued to look at each other, and to me it seemed as if they were having a silent conversation.

"I know, but this is a big birthday, so I'd like to do something special."

"I'm sure we can gure something out hun." Added my mom. Neither of them said anything else, which was weird. They usually always had at least dinner at a restaurant planned for my birthday.

"Are you guys okay with me just doing something with my friends?"

"Sure honey, it's your birthday," my mom said, sitting down on the couch beside my dad. I went to say something else, but my dad opened his mouth rst.

"Perfect! We're the Millers, everyone loves that movie!" He turned the movie on and sipped his tea. I did the same but couldn't help noticing the tension in the air.

Once the movie ended, I got up and went to the kitchen to put my mug in the dishwasher. Then I went back into the living room to say good night.

"Good night, I'm gonna head to bed. I have work in the morning." I worked at the local bookstore on the weekends.

"Good night." They both chanted in unison. As I walked up the stairs, I couldn't help catching the same strange tension I felt earlier from the two of them. I don't know why, but lately, it seemed like they were hiding something from me. I told myself I was probably reading too much into it, even though my instincts almost always turned out to be correct.

I changed into my pajamas, before washing my face, brushing my teeth, and climbing into bed. I checked my phone and responded to a couple of texts from my friends. As I was falling asleep, I thought about how tomorrow was the start of my last summer before I went off to college. I was determined to make it one of the best. I mean I was about to turn 18. What could possibly go wrong?

I woke up the next morning to the alarm on my phone blaring at 7:00 in the morning. Groaning, I rolled over and hit snooze. A few extra minutes wouldn't hurt me. After showering, and putting on some leggings, sneakers, and a t-shirt, I headed to the kitchen for coffee and breakfast. When I entered the kitchen, I caught the tail end of my parents' conversation.

"We have to tell her today!" My dad said.

"I know, I know. There's no waiting anymore, her birthday's tomorrow." My mom said back.

"Tell me what?" I asked, walking in.

"Good morning sweetheart. Can you come sit with us? We need to talk to you about something." My dad's voice was serious.

"Okay." I said as I poured myself a cup of coffee. Very rarely did my parents 'need to tell me' things. We didn't have many secrets. I was very close with my parents and basically told them everything. I sat down with them at the kitchen table and waited.

"What we're about to tell you is going to be hard to believe." My dad started.

"But please, try to just listen to our entire story before you say anything." My mom interjected.

My dad took a deep breath before continuing. I noticed my mom's hand was shaking, my dad reached over and covered her hand with his. She instantly relaxed and smiled at him. "There's no easy way to say this part, so I'm going to say it quickly, like ripping off a bandage... We are werewolves. You, my self, and your mother, we're werewolves." My mom was nodding next to him, a look of sympathy in her eyes. I looked between the two of them with my mouth slightly open. He opened his mouth to continue, but I just couldn't help interrupting.

"Um, I'm sorry what?!" I questioned.

"Werewolves." They both said together.

"No, I heard you the rst time. I'm just trying to see whether this is some kind of joke." I almost wanted to laugh at them about how serious they both looked. Werewolves didn't exist. My parents had raised me on folkore and fantasy stories of pixies, witches, werewolves, vampires, and magic lollies; but that's all they were, stories. "Are you too trying to play some weird prank on me?"

"This isn't a joke, we're being serious." My mom looked at me with raised eyebrows. I narrowed my eyes and just continued to stare at them. Did they think I was buying this?

"I think we might just have to show her what we're talking about," my dad added.

"Show me what?" I was starting to get annoyed. If they kept this up, I was gonna be late for work.

"Are you sure, Nathan? I don't want to totally freak her out."

"I guess we should. No use hiding it now. I don't think she'll actually believe us until she sees it," responded my dad.

"Show me what?!" I asked a little louder this time. Suddenly, my mom got up from the table.

"Come outside with me. There's not enough room in here." She said, turning on her heels and walking towards the back door.

"Umm..." I said, looking at my dad.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" He gestured in the direction my mom had gone. I got up and followed her with my dad right behind me. My mom began to untie and drop to the backyard. She was only wearing her robe, which she walked to untie and drop to the ground.

"Mom! What the h\*ll?!" I yelled out, covering my eyes.

"Oh honey, stop it and just look at me. I gave birth to you, you can see me naked." I took my hands away from my eyes slowly and unwillingly, but also curious as to why my mother was suddenly naked in our backyard. Thank goodness we lived in the woods and there wasn't anyone around for miles. I watched her stand there very seriously for a moment. Then I heard strange cracking sounds; hair started sprouting up all over her body. Her mouth was growing into what looked like a muzzle, her hands elongated, rst into her hands with long sharp nails and then into full on giant furry paws. Her arms landed on the ground and there, standing on all fours, was a giant Auburn wolf the same color as her hair. It howled into the air before looking directly at me.

"WHAT THE F\*\*K?!" I screamed out, jumping back. I looked at my dad, but he didn't seem phased by watching his wife morph into an animal. In fact, he was smiling at her, an endearing and loving smile like he was seeing the sun for the rst time. I looked back at the wolf in time to see the hair retreating, my mother's face, arms, and hands reappearing. She bent down and picked up her robe, sliding it back on and re-trying the belt.

"DAD..." I just trailed off, I didn't even know what to say. What I had just witnessed shouldn't be possible in nature. I had always thought it would be amazing for things like this to be real, but never imagined I'd watch my mother transform before my eyes. I just looked back and forth between them; words wouldn't even form in my mind.

"Let's go inside and we can explain." He said, taking my arm, after realizing I probably needed help to walk. I let him lead me back into the kitchen, followed by my mom. I sank into the nearest chair, too stunned to speak.

"I... you...she...what the actual fuc..." my mom cut me off.

"Please, give us a chance to explain." She sat back down at the kitchen table and so did I; falling into an open seat.

"Yeah... explain..." I was truly interested in how they planned to explain this.

"So, it all started about 21 years ago," started my dad. "Your mother and I were the Alpha and Luna of a pack called Silver Willow." I had listened to enough stories they had told me to know what Alpha and Luna meant at least. "We were invaded by a neighboring pack looking to expand their territory and gain more power. Their plan was to kill all the local members of the pack, and take over both territories, but your Aunt Andrea got involved with the gting, just in time. She was able to help your mother and me escape after most of the ocial members and their families had been killed. It was horrible, I was supposed to be the one to protect everyone as their alpha." He hung his head in what seemed to be disappointment in himself.

"Wait, how did Aunt Andrea help? How did she know what was happening?"

"Well, she's a witch," my mom said. I raised my eyebrows at her.

"A witch?"

"Yes," she continued. "And she's not really your Aunt. Well, not your blood aunt. She and I have been best friends for years. She lived in our pack and came to help us ght the enemy, but she got there a little too late and there wasn't much she could do. The warriors of the attacking pack managed to overtake our patrols without hesitation. We still have no idea how they did that. Andrea thinks they used dark magic to gain strength."

"Right, so, after we escaped, we found refuge in the Opal Moon pack. They took us all in even though we were technically rogues. The Alpha there, Alpha James, was a very kind man. He ruled with compassion and respect. We asked him to keep our presence there a secret, in case anyone came looking for us. Shortly after we got there, we found out your mom was pregnant with you. Werewolf pregnancies are only about 3 months, so we hadn't been there long when you were born. We lived there happily for about 5 years, but then Alpha James and the Beta were poisoned by someone and they ended up dying. Andrea tried all the tricks she could, but she wasn't able to heal them. Their mates died shortly after, not able to handle the pain of losing their fated mate."

I stopped my dad again, "fated mate?"

"Yes, every werewolf has a fated mate. That is, the person who holds the other half of their soul. They are destined to be together. It is the greatest gift the Moon Goddess can give," explained my mom. "Your father and I are fated mates." I remember them talking about mates, the mate bond, and the Moon Goddess in their many stories, but it had been so long ago I didn't remember a lot of the details.

"After they were poisoned, things changed." My dad got a dark look in his eyes. "The Alpha's son, Mathew, took over. He was just 18 and I think he let the power go to his head. He was cruel and horrid to everyone, killing people for the smallest infraction. All he wanted was to be feared and seen as the most powerful Alpha. We tried to live under his rule, but when you turned 6, we realized you were not an ordinary wolf."

"How so? Wait, how am I a wolf? I'm just a human."

"No, you're not dear," my mom chimed in. "You're special, you can't shift like we can because you're not 18. That's when you get your wolf. That's why we're telling you all of this, since your birthday is tomorrow, and you'll start to hear your wolf."

"What do you mean hear my wolf?" I asked.

"You'll start to hear her in your head and see her in your mind's eyes. She's a part of you and will help guide and protect you." I just shook my head at them.

"What if I don't want this? What if I decide this life isn't what I want? I was perfectly happy waking up just me this morning." I wasn't sure this was real. How was I, a normal teenage girl, so I thought, supposed to now be a werewolf?

"Unfortunately, it's not really a choice. You were born into this life." My mom looked at me with loving eyes and reached for my hand, but I drew mine back off the table.

"Why did you take me away and lie to me all these years?"

"Well," began my mom. "Like we said, we realized shortly after your 6th birthday you weren't a normal wolf. You had special gifts and abilities. You started levitating objects and pushing things around the room. You also had vivid dreams that usually turned out to be true, and we realized they were visions."

"We didn't tell anyone besides Andrea, and we tried to keep it a secret. We tried to stop you from using your powers, but trying to get a 6-year-old to do anything is virtually impossible." My dad now looked sad at the words he was saying. "One day, we were out for a walk, and you started lifting objects. We tried to stop you, and we thought we were alone, but it turns out the new Beta Mathew had put in place, Brad, saw you. He and the Alpha were 19 now and looking for their mates. He immediately went to the Alpha and told him what he had seen. Because Mathew was so obsessed with power, he thought you would make a good chosen mate when you turned 18. A wolf with power is very rare. Your Aunt Andrea heard from one of the kitchen omegas, he was planning to take you away from us and start grooming you to be his Luna. We could and would not let that happen. He was a horrible man. We knew he would beat and punish you if you disobeyed him and turn you into a breeding machine." I could see the pain all over my parents' faces. This was a very dicult story for them to tell.

"We decided then we would leave the pack and go into hiding. We hoped your aunt's magic would keep us safe and it has for many years." My mom took over as it seemed like my dad was having an internal battle with his eyes closed. He was breathing very hard. My mom reached over and began to stroke his arm, his breathing slowed, and he nally opened his eyes.

"What magic is keeping us safe?" I asked. My anger towards them started to ebb away and was replaced with empathy.

"Well, we moved states with the help of her teleporting. That's how we ended up in Pennsylvania. She placed a protection spell around our house after she conjured it for us. And, since we left the pack, we're all technically rogues, so we smell like rogues to other wolves, we would be easy to spot. The tea we drink every night masks our smell, so we smell like humans if we come across any wolves. And yours helps keep your powers dormant so you wouldn't know about them until we were ready to tell you." My dad was able to continue the conversation now that he had calmed down.

I was having a hard time wrapping my head around all of this. I was still angry at them for lying to me for the last 12 years. I slightly didn't believe what they were telling me about my abilities, even if they were dormant, shouldn't I have some memory of me using them? Come to think of it, I couldn't remember anything before the age of about 7.

"Okay," I said, standing up from the table. "This has all been very educational, but I'm late for work."

"Sierra, we have more to tell you," my mom said, grabbing my arm.

"Yeah, but I can't listen to it anymore right now." I pulled my arm free, before grabbing my purse and heading for the door. I climbed into my small silver Honda and began the drive to the bookstore. This was just all too weird, certainly they couldn't be serious about all of this. I mean, I did see my mom transform into a wolf right in front of me. That part I couldn't deny, but there was no way I was a wolf or had special abilities.