

Chapter 4

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Josh

It was nally that time. Senior graduation was tonight, and Dad decided to let Hailey attend after all. Of course, he did. As much as he hounded her for being stupid when it came to school, he was just happy she would graduate with passing grades. Dad could be an asshole all he wanted, but it didn't change the fact that he did love us in his own sick and twisted kind of way.

I was happy for my sister and somewhat proud. I didn't think she even passed all her exams, but somehow, she did, graduating with an average GPA. I don't know where things went wrong regarding Hailey and having brains, but she has a lot of brawn, which makes up for it. Hailey hated school and only went for social reasons. Hailey wanted to be a ghter within the pack, and of course, Mom was against it. She said that girls shouldn't ght, but the whole situation with that girl Kalea proved mom wrong, yet again. Hailey was meant to be on the battlefield. With her anger issues, it suited her.

As for me, Dad would nally hang it up and hand me the Alpha title, with or without a mate by my side. With my turning twenty this summer, Dad can't afford not to. All of the other Alphas in the region are around my age, minus a couple here and there, but he knows that handing it over so that I had something in common with the other Alphas would help with alliances down the line. Plus, Dad wants to avoid dealing with the young-uns, as he calls us.

As I sit in my room waiting for the graduation ceremony at the school, I see that I have at least an hour to kill before I need to start getting ready. I decided a run in wolf form would be nice. My wolf has been agitated all morning, and I haven't been running in a few days since I had been busy learning the ropes from Dad the last week. I throw on some basketball shorts, forego a shirt, and head downstairs and out back. I walked over to the line of trees behind the packhouse and stripped down before turning into my wolf, Fenton. Now that I had been shifting for a few years, it wasn't as painful as my rst time. The dislocation of bones and fur sprouting from my skin didn't burn as much as before, and now I can shift in nearly a minute. Once Fenton fully came forward, he stretched his legs and dug his claws into the grass and dirt. He shook his fur loose as if he hadn't seen the outside world in ages and trotted along the trees to get the blood owing in his legs.

Fent, are you ready to get some exercise?

Yip!

Fenton's started to gain speed, and his trot turned into a full-on sprint in seconds. As he ran along the tree line, we could see pack members on patrol or hanging out within the territory. Those in human form bowed their heads as they passed, and those in wolf form howled. Fenton responds with his howls and keeps on running. As we're passing the Omega's homes further towards the end of the territory, Fenton comes to a sudden halt. He skids and nearly topples over from hitting the brakes so suddenly.

What the hell, Fent?

Do you smell that?

Smell what?

I briey take the reins and sniff through Fenton's big snout. That's when I sensed it. Something sweet and euphoric.

Fenton, what is that?

I don't know, but I like it.

Let's go check it out.

Fenton takes his time as he follows his nose to whatever this wonderful scent is, and the sensation it gives off is alluring. We eventually come up to one of the last houses within the territory, and I know these cottages belong to the lowest level Omegas within the pack. As we get closer to the house, the scent is giving off the most potency, and the closer we get, the more we start to hear voices.

"I don't understand!" I hear a familiar voice.

"Sweetheart, maybe it's too early. Most wolves don't have their rst shift until the night of their eighteenth birthday," I hear a woman respond.

"Mom, it's almost six in the evening. I should have shifted by now! I should have heard her voice by now! Where is my wolf!?" the familiar voice all but cries. Am I hearing this right? A pack member without a wolf. That's odd and somewhat disturbing. I'd never heard of a werewolf that didn't get their wolf on their eighteenth birthday. By right, she should have gotten her wolf at midnight and shifted for the rst time.

"Don't panic, Two-Tone. I'm sure it's just a uke. Maybe she's not ready, or perhaps she's just waiting for the moon tonight," a male voice sounds. What kind of nickname was Two-Tone, and where had I heard it before?

"Don't panic!? What if the pack nds out!? What if the Alpha nds out!? I don't have a f'cking wolf! It's bad enough that the entire pack hates me for being different, but if they nd out I don't have a wolf, it will give them more reasons to harass me!" Did she say harass her? The only pack member I know that is being harassed is – holy f**k.

Fenton, we need to go now!

No. The scent is strong. I want to get a better smell.

Dammit, Fenton! Let's go! We need to head back so I can prepare for the graduation and the party.

The scent is strong here. Just one look. I think it is ...

Don't say it!

I force myself forward and retake the reins. I make his legs retreat and force us to return to the packhouse. I knew what Fenton was about to say before I shoved his conscience back and took over his body. This couldn't be happening. There is no way that the Moon Goddess would punish me this way. Kalea, the orphaned freak, my ... my ... Hell, I can't even say the damn word. I couldn't deny that she was a looker, even with those freaky-colored eyes. But if what she and her parents were arguing about just now is the truth, and she has no wolf, there was no way that I could take her to be my Luna. This pack couldn't afford to have a human as a Luna.

What are you saying?

I have to reject her.

You will not! She is our ...

Don't f'cking say it! I don't care! She has no wolf! She's a freak! She's an Omega! She's weak! We need a strong Luna.

We can make her strong. The bond will make her strong.

I can't take that risk. If I take a woless orphan as my Luna, we'll be the laughingstock of the entire region. I will not allow us to be humiliated because of her.

Fenton huffed at me and retreated to the far corners of my mind. Was he giving me the silent treatment? I didn't have time to dwell on it. I got back to the packhouse and went immediately upstairs. I would have to do some major damage control before the bond works its way into my system. Without her wolf, I doubt she will feel the bond. I needed to make it through graduation, the party, and the announcement tonight. Then, I would nd her and reject her. The Moon Goddess made a mistake. There was no way in hell that I was going to accept Kalea.

Kalea

I couldn't believe it. The Moon Goddess had to be punishing me or hated me for some reason. Did I do something horrible in my previous life? Not only did my birthdate turn into an utter disaster because of f'cking Hailey, but come to nd out, I don't have a wolf. What would happen when the Alpha wanted all of us to run in wolf form after he announced Josh as the new Alpha? This was going to oust me as a woless werewolf. It's bad enough that I'm made fun of for being different, but having no wolf, I'd be the laughingstock of the entire pack, more so than I already am.

"Kalea, we won't tell anyone, okay? Maybe you're just a late bloomer. It does happen from time to time," my father says.

"Easy for you to say, Dad! You're not a freak like I am!" I cried. I didn't even want to go to the graduation ceremony tonight. I wanted to stay in my room and have the world swallow me in a never-ending black hole. Could my life get any worse? Without a wolf, would I be able to feel the mate bond? What am I saying? Why would it even matter? I know for a fact that my mate wouldn't want me now.

"Two-Tone."

"STOP WITH THAT NICKNAME!" I screamed, making my parent inch. "Goddess! Do you know how much that nickname hurts my feelings, Dad!? It's a constant reminder of what a f'cking freak I am! These eyes, my eyes, are why this entire pack hates me! That and the fact that I'm actually from this pack!" I shout, and tears fall from my eyes. Why did my life have to be hard? Why did the fates have to be so cruel?

"Kalea, there's a chance of nding your mate tonight," my mom said cautiously.

"My mate?" I huffed in annoyance. "My mate? Mom?! Do you think that my mate would want me!? I DON'T HAVE A WOLF!"

"Keep your voice down, Kalea!" my father shouted. "If you're so worried about it, stop shouting!" I gape at him and cross my arms. "If you don't like your nickname, that's ne, but don't take your anger out your mother and me. We're only trying to help. But if you don't want it, then that's ne too. You're an adult now. You can do what you want with the advice we're trying to give you. But don't be a little brat about it. We will keep this under wraps for now, but eventually, you'll have to come clean to Joshua that you don't have a wolf. You can't join the training regimen for newly shifted wolves. You'd be killed."

"Better than living this sorry excuse of a life," I grumble.

"Kalea." My dad sighs exasperated and then pinches the bridge of his nose. "Forget it. Just go get ready for the ceremony."

"I don't want to go anymore."

"Kalea, what do you mean you don't want to go anymore!?" my mother gasps.

"I don't feel like celebrating anything. This entire day has been f'cking awful," I sob. Some eighteenth birthday this was turning out to be.

"Kalea, you're the valedictorian; you have to go," my father tells me. I grumble again, realizing that he's right. I stomp my way upstairs and force myself to prepare for the ceremony. This day was already as long as it was; now it looked like it would turn into a long night as well.

The ceremony went as well as it could. Obviously, during my speech, no one was even paying attention because no one cared what I had to say. I couldn't help but feel the hairs on my neck stand up now and then. Almost as if someone was watching me intently. After my speech, the staff went through the names alphabetically, and we each walked the stage to get our diplomas. Of course, I was right in front of Hailey, which made it highly awful when my name was called, and there was silence in the auditorium except for my parents and a few of the friendlier pack members, then when Hailey's name was called, it erupted into roars and hoots of congratulatory praise. That was the most hurtful event of the night. I knew the pack didn't like me, but to not even cheer for me during graduation was just a stab in the heart. Some pack this was.

Once the ceremony was over, all pack members went straight to the packhouse for the party that the Alpha and Luna were throwing for the pack. I didn't want to go, but because Josh was also being named the new Alpha, pack member attendance was mandatory. I just wanted to go home. By the time I had gotten to the packhouse, the party was in full swing, and parents and kids were eating, drinking, and playing games like there was no tomorrow.

I walked around and avoided everyone like the plague. A few friendlier pack members congratulated me on graduating and complimented my speech at the ceremony. This was surprising since I didn't think anyone was even listening when I was speaking. I made my way to the kitchen and grabbed a bottle of water. Before I could even swig, I was roughly turned around and slammed against the fridge.

"What the ..." I rubbed the back of my head and wasn't surprised to see Hailey and her raggedy-Ann friends. "What do you want, Hailey?"

"Schools over now, b*tch. Now, picking on you is fair game. I don't have to worry about Mr. Scout reporting me, or anyone else for that matter," she sneered.

"Seriously? It's graduation night. Don't you have anything else better to do than harass me!?"

"Let me think," she says while tapping her chin. "No!" she cackles, and her friends follow suit. She pins me against the fridge and leans uncomfortably close. "Kalea, I heard something exciting today before the ceremony," she whispers eerily. "Rumor has it you ... don't ... have ... a wolf." I tense at her words as she steps back and has this evil glint in her eye. I look at her in dismay. How did she know? "I wonder what the pack will think when this news becomes public?" she says, tapping her chin again. Evil b*tch.

"Hailey, please," I start to beg. I hated begging. I never begged, but I couldn't let this news get out. I'd be laughed out of the pack, or worse, I could just be banished.

"Or what?" I pause, not knowing how to respond. "Kalea, Kalea, Kalea, you should have done what I said last week and lied for me. But no, you had to be a dog gone goody two-shoes. Now look at you. You're lower than low. I can't wait for my father to hear about this," she smirks again and then walks away. I could feel the tears prickling in the back of my eyes. I couldn't believe that Hailey knew. How though? I take a deep breath and decide that enough is enough. I needed to get out of the packhouse for some fresh air.

I dropped the water bottle that I was holding, not caring that I just made a huge mess. With how everyone was partying, the packhouse would become a mess anyway. I slowly made my way back towards the main door of the packhouse, but before I could even reach for the knob, I heard a growl behind me. Now what? I turn around and see Josh standing in front of me. He, too, gets uncomfortably close to me, and what catches me off guard is that he sniffs my hair, and I could swear he seemed to like it.

"What are you ..." I was about to ask. It seemed my voice brought him out of his daze, and he shook his head. He growled at me again, and I cowered as far as possible while pressing my back against the door. He got even closer to me and looked me up and down. What was he doing? Why did she smell so good? Why did he have to look so good? Goddess, I hated him, but his proximity to me made me want him at the same time.

"Kalea, come with me," he says in my ear with a low snarl. He grabs my wrist and drags me upstairs. I turn around and see that no one is paying attention to us. They're too busy partying it up to notice that the future Alpha is forcibly taking me upstairs. Josh is tall compared to me, even though I'm in heels. I try to keep up with him, but it's complicated. When we get to the top oor and the middle of the hallway, he stops, pulls me as hard as he can, and swings me until my back hits a bare wall with a thud.

"Ah!" I wince in pain. "What the hell was that for!?" I shout at him. He covers my mouth with this hand and shushes me. Why was I feeling tingling sensations where his hands were touching me? Tingly sensations? Wait, oh goddess, could he be? A small smile crept on my face, and I looked him in the eyes. But what I saw wasn't happiness from him. I saw anger, loathing, and disgust in his expression.

"Tsk, ts, ts, Kalea, I can see the hope in your eyes. I'm sorry to tell you, but that hope is about to die," he says sadistically.

"Hmm?" I moan because his hand is still covering my mouth.

"Oh, you didn't think I'd take you as my Luna? You?" he says in an acid-laced tone. Immediately, tears o'd take my eyes. "I, Joshua Harding, future Alpha of the Silver Moon pack, hereby reject you, Kalea Hall, as my mate and Luna."