

Prologue

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Hailey's POV:

"Hailey, the position should be MINE! YOU'RE A F****G FEMALE! I expect my mate to be home, care for the house and raise my offspring!" Kelvin yells in my face. To say Kelvin is livid is an understatement.

Upon being splashed by his saliva, I take a step back and wipe my face to remove it, simultaneously creating distance between us.

Jared, our friend and Alpha called to inform us I would be the next Beta after my father. Zino, Kelvin, and I had put effort into reaching this point. We proved ourselves and showed our strengths. Despite Zino being the Beta by blood, I became Jared's Beta, and Zino became his Gamma. Kelvin's lack of success in catching up left him without a title to his name. He's my mate. He could assist me, but he won't get any credit for it.

Taking that step back was a mistake. Kelvin assumes I'm intimidated by him, so he pushes me with force, causing me to collide with the wall behind me. His face is very close to mine, and his hands are pressed against the wall right next to my head.

"You're going to inform Jared that you've changed your mind. Now that you're pregnant, you're waiving the position as Beta, but you're willing, aside from your role as a mother, to step in to assist me now and then, if needed." He threatens me again.

I've had my II of it! I can perform the Beta role with no issues, even when I'm pregnant. My condition is pregnancy, not disability. There are so many Lunas who do the same, and their work is much more important!

"NO!" I tell him firmly. "Jared trusts me and I'm going to make it happen!"

Seeing Kelvin's contorted face is a sign that I shouldn't have spoken. The humanity in my mate disappears, leaving only a violent monster that acts out of desperation. Once his hand closes around my throat, I know it's a life-or-death scenario. My disobedience led to refusal, and now I'll have to pay the consequences.

As soon as I feel my windpipe constrict, I sense someone shaking me vigorously.

"Hailey, wake up, it's just a nightmare!" Zino's words jolt me awake. My eyes open wide, and I'm gasping because of that terrible dream. I can't escape the haunting memory of that day, even after all these years. Once my eyes are shut, I'm transported back to our house. I'm stuck reliving that day again and again.

Kelvin attempted to strangle me, intending to take my life. He was close to succeeding, had it not been for my father's timely arrival.

After speaking with us, Jared called my father in to explain his decision, and my father came to congratulate me. The instant he entered our house, he saw me passed out on the floor. Kelvin had turned the house upside down by that time and was packing his things.

My father quickly figured out what might have happened when he looked Kelvin in the eye. I'm still unsure about what exactly happened, but Kelvin was taken into custody, and I was admitted to the hospital. After that last straw, Kelvin wanted to reject me.

Unfortunately, that approach failed. The bond remained intact. Jared lost trust in Kelvin and banded him from the pack as punishment for attacking me just because he didn't get the position.

"Are you alright?" In a gentle tone, Zino asks.

"Thanks, yeah I'm fine again," I lie. Even though I cherish my brother, I can't open up to him. Concerning the things that are chasing me at night. I stopped attempting to win the fight that's impossible after three years.

"Sis, you're a terrible liar," Zino says, as he gets me a glass of water.

"Thank you," I shot back. It's impossible for me to lie to him, but then again, I also didn't want to speak about it.

Zino came back to me while carrying a glass of water in one hand and raising the other.

"Alright, I won't mention it again. Jared said we'd be leaving early in the afternoon. Our destination is a hotel, where we'll have dinner. Tomorrow morning, well-rested and fed after a good night's sleep and breakfast, we'll set off to meet the king. They have arranged a welcome lunch for everyone, followed by the first scheduled meetings in the afternoon. When the materials arrive, you can proceed with leading the training on the second day."

One of the reasons I love my brother so much is because of this.

He's someone you can count on to do what he said he would do.

Having consumed the glass of water, I nod in agreement. "The warriors who will join us. Are they aware of this?"

"The question was if you wanted to let them know about this during the training."

"Fine. Go back to sleep Zino, I'll take a shower and then..." My eyes wandered to my alarm clock, to check the time. The clock shows it's four in the morning. After my shower, I have enough time to pack my things and prepare for today's workout.

"Once I'm done, I'll pack my things and take care of the training in the morning."

"Sleep is important, Hailey!" Zino says as he exits my bedroom.

"That's the reason you're allowed to nish your beauty sleep," I call back playfully. I can hear him chuckle in response.

I get out of bed and make my way to the shower. I carry out my daily routine. I grew up in a male-dominated environment. I wouldn't say I'm a tomboy. No offense. Though, my bathroom doesn't have an abundance of beauty products or makeup. Wearing makeup is a rare occurrence for me. Let's just keep it at natural beauty. The only thing that matters to me is my blonde locks. My hair is very long, reaching my butt. The hair has a natural wave that isn't quite curly neither straight, and it's a golden blonde shade. My sea-green eyes are the nishing touch to the look.

'Aurum' is the perfect name for my wolf, whose coat boasts a beautiful golden blond color.

It means gold in Latin. The sun is linked to gold in virtually every culture, which is especially fascinating for a shifter devoted to The Moon Goddess, Goddess of the Night.

Once I'm ready to begin the day, I opt to pack my suitcase before anything else.

Zino, Jared and I are planning to travel on our motorcycles, while the ve warriors accompanying us to the king would travel in two large SUVs. Our luggage could go there. Our motorcycles are more or less our distinctive mark. The top-ranking trio of wolves in Blood pack. A mutual passion for it brought the three of us together and we thought it to be fun.

Our departure would last for ve days. The plan is to spend three days with the king and two days traveling. The king's invitation to visit is a rare occurrence for packs. Then again, our pack is located eight hours away from the kingdom, so it's not a distance to travel frequently.

I'm all set to walk towards the training eld at 4:30 after leaving my suitcase at the door.

Upon my arrival at the training eld, I immediately start preparing the equipment for today. Our daily routine includes starting with a good run every morning. At rest, in human form, but later, after training, in wolf form.

The training eld is slowly getting crowded while I'm preparing the mats and weights. The warriors start stretching as they arrived, one by one.

I cheerfully call out to everyone across the eld, saying "Good morning." It's ve AM and not everyone is an early bird like me.

"Good morning," they all reply. A few people yawn, but they keep it to themselves.

"An announcement for those heading towards the king: we leave early in the afternoon. The Alpha has expressed his desire to drive the journey of more than eight hours, in a single attempt. Ensure that you are prepared on time. You are free to leave the training eld to pack and possibly get some sleep before departing, if you wish."

It's clear they have doubts, based on their expressions. They think I'm running a test on them.

"I assure you, this is not a test, gentlemen. An Alpha in a grumpy mood is not what I'm looking for. You won't face any consequences if you leave the elds now. However, there will be, if you choose not to rest now and then cause problems along the way." I assure them.

The group of ve warriors exchange glances, nodded in agreement, and proceeded to retrieve their belongings and rest.

"Alright, that's sorted now. Begin stretching as usual. Take ten minutes to stretch and loosen up, then we'll start running." I start my training.

After two hours, I express my gratitude towards everyone for their time and attention. Following the cleaning up, I leave the training eld.

I make a beeline for my bedroom as soon as I get back to the packhouse. I get in the shower once more and ready myself for some rest. Since it's going to be a long journey, if it affects the warriors, it will affect me as well, if I don't grab enough rest.

I step out of my bedroom after showering and walk towards Jared's oice. I'm immediately told to 'come in' after knocking on the door.

"Hailey, did everything go smoothly during your training this morning?" The moment I shut the door, Jared asks me without delay.

"Yeah, ne. The ve warriors, who will accompany us on our journey were excused from training. I gave them the opportunity to rest after packing their things. We can keep going without interruption, as you want." I explain to him.

"Alright, and how about you?" Jared then asks.

"Unless you have something for me, I will lie down now. Before we go, I need to eat something, then we can start our trip."

"There's nothing pressing you need to do right now. Otherwise, I'll ask your father."

"Okay, I'll be in my room then," I speak, with the intention of turning around and leaving.

"Are you nervous?" Jared suddenly asks. I look at him in surprise.

"You're not going to tell me it doesn't affect you, Hailey," he continues.

"It certainly does something to me. If all goes well, I can look for my so-called mate in ve days, and close a chapter which I thought I would never be able to close. Though I'm not nervous, I don't have to prove myself, I just need the right last name. I need recognition so I can reject Kelvin. Nothing else will change!"

"You certainly don't have to prove yourself. If your father doesn't see what an exceptional woman you are, he's blind, and it's his loss. What if you meet your second chance mate?" He suddenly asks me.

"You know how I feel about that!" I tell him defensively.

We've talked about this before. I don't want a mate. The sparks would terrify me rather than make me swell over them.

Kelvin was one of the guys I grew up with. I skipped a class in school and joined the boys' class. It's always been the ve of us: Jared, Kelvin, Theo, Zino, and me.

There were the wildest rumors that I would have three mates or that I would sleep with one of them one week and the other the next, but no one dared to ask us. There was no truth to it.

Jared and I have a good friendship, a blind faith in each other, but no deeper feelings than those of good friends.

Zino is my brother, maybe not by blood, but I grew up with him being my brother. I really couldn't and didn't want to see him any other way.

Kelvin and I weren't necessarily romantically involved either, at least not until we found out we were mates. From that moment on, we were inseparable. Because Kelvin being a year older than me, we waited a year to mate, but we were always together until we weren't.

"Hailey, I'm not saying you'll run into him; I'm just asking, What if? You're a beautiful woman, Hailey. You're smart and funny. You're loyal to the people you hold dear, and I understand that Kelvin has taken a piece from you, but look where you stand. You deserve to be loved, differently from who we do here."

He means well. It's a well-intended pep talk. I just don't know if I could do it again. Kelvin and I have been together for years. Ten to be exact, if you count the last three years we lived apart. We were in the process of starting our own family. Of course, there had been some struggles along the way.

For example, my wolf Aurum, is a bit bigger than his wolf. My guts are better in some situations, which is why I ended up getting the position of Beta.

If Kelvin had his way, I would have been his trophy wife. My only right would have been the kitchen counter. To put food on the table when he got home. One pup in the hand and the other in the belly. And that's ne, if you choose to do that together, but it wasn't my choice. Kelvin more or less forced it on me. Had I known all this before we tried to get pregnant, I probably wouldn't have even started it.

"Thank you. I just don't know if I can do that again. I think I'll forever be scared of 'when will the love bubble pop?'. Maybe it isn't meant to be. Maybe it's better to just be here, with the people whom I trust, who each care about me in their own way." The crack in my voice betrays the emotion behind my words. Jared is quiet for a moment. I think he wants to give me time to get myself back together.

Just before I walk out the door, I hear him say, "Maybe, but I think you deserve more!"

I know I don't have to respond. It's his opinion, and he just wants to let me know.