

CHAPTER ONE

“We hunt *and* kill her... tonight.”

I feel my fingers curl into fists, so tightly that my claws dig into the hardened flesh of my palms. It has been seven years since I relinquished my Missouri boy persona and joined the pack I was always meant to be in... *this* park. But tonight, I feel like that helpless little boy again.

No, I think immediately, booting my prior thoughts out. My claws dig even deeper in my skin as I say that word. There’s no way in hell I’ll allow *anyone* make me feel like that again. Not even the alpha. Not even an alpha like Harden.

“I would suggest otherwise,” I tell him now, forcing myself to relax my fists.

Harden gazes at me with dark eyes full of mistrust. “What do you care?” he says. “She’s a nobody, a *human*, sent to hunt us to our doom. Surely you don’t think there is any reason we need to keep her alive? Except...” his eyes narrow into slits “... she is not somehow in your sketchy plan for ridding the pack of me and taking over?”

I sigh, my anger fizzling out of me. “I am not trying to take over,” I say to Harden, for what has to be the hundredth time. I don’t blame him for being mistrustful. If Harden’s father, Gregor, had not been the alpha for the last fifteen years, he would definitely not have become the new alpha.

But, luckily, Gregor’s name, although dead, still held weight around here. That, and the fact that I, the only person who could have outbid Harden, was an outsider, and outsiders did not get to be alphas.

“Then what exactly are you doing? You come into my home...” he spreads his hand to gesture at the hut we are, bigger by far than everyone’s else’s “... to tell me to let Marisse McCulloch go? She’s not the only police woman who has hunted us, but she is *dangerous*, and we should all be scared. Our pack has stood for centuries. Before you found out you were a werewolf and got booted out of your life suburban existence, I watched my father deal with outside opposition like this. They had to be crushed.”

I ignore the insult about my upbringing. A lot of werewolves in the pack had become completely open with me as the years went by. I had gone from being avoided to being ignored and then trusted. Harden, my then best friend, had led the campaign against shunning me. Now, though, he remembers what a few people still think of me as. An *outsider*. Someone fated to live life on the shadows around the pack because his parents were not werewolves.

“Gregor never killed a random policewoman for doing her job,” I tell him.

“*My* father did not face a human threat as large as this. And he told me what to do when the time came.”

I stare at him. He’s lying, but there’s no way to prove it. He stares back at me, his dark eyes probing into me.

“Why do you care?” he asks again. “What on earth is so special about that tawny brunette?”

I let the silence fill between us. That, I cannot answer.

“You’ve given me your answer,” I tell him. “I have to go.”

I walk out of the alpha's home. After a few steps, I find myself in the open, surrounded by the thicket of trees that have hidden our pack for generations...

Their pack, I correct myself, swallowing hard. The park would never truly be mine. Harden becoming alpha was enough proof of that.

I force myself to not think of that right now. Right now, I needed to think of Marisse, the woman intent on hunting us to our doom.

The woman I cannot let anything happen to, no matter what.

My small town suburban life was a miserable existence. I hated every aspect of it, especially the parents who refused to believe in supernaturals and were eager to get me out of the house.

But as miserable as my first few years of existence were, it did give me the love of my teenage life.

I would hate for Harden to think that I was acting purely out of feelings. Only a foolish werewolf felt anything for a human.

And so, I grasp on gratefully to the other, only valid reason I'm doing this.

Marisse is a supernatural as well... and she does not know it. But the moment she finds out she is one of us, she will lay down her arms.

I'm certain of it.

Especially when she finds her high school boyfriend stuck in the mix.

A bird whistles in the tree next to me, and I force myself to look at the commotion in front of me. Members of the pack are all around, gathering up things, stomping out fires, gearing up. I glance up at the red-blood moon in the sky. It is full moon, and that is always a special time for us. This time is even more special, though.

Tonight, we kill the policewoman that is inches from discovering a civilization and warning an entire town that there is a werewolf pack living in the mountains around their homes.

And tonight, I save Marisse.