

Chapter 111

While I'd initially been searching for Asher, it hadn't been my intention to go scurrying to him, squealing about his younger brother's lack of boundaries and basic respect for women.

I squashed the part of me that wondered why Brandon was such an ass, especially towards his older brother, reminding myself it wasn't my job to figure him out.

There were far more worrisome things that had my attention, like murderous witches and plotting vampires.

'You should have let me come out.' Maya huffed for the third time, her bloodlust not at all satiated. It felt nice leaving him groaning in the sand, his beer overturned and forgotten. Maya's version of justice held the ruthlessness of a Luna. 'A nasty scar—or a hand, that would teach him. He'd never touch us again.'

'I won't be known as the Luna who bites off hands.' I told her pointedly but snorted when she snapped her teeth.

"Well, hello your majesty."

Well, hello your majesty.”

“Careful, Zeke. I’ve already kneed one guy in the balls, and I’d hate to damage your favorite organ.” I smirked, not at all surprised when I turned to find a sharp-eyed brunette beneath his muscular arm. 1

Her bottom-heavy lips were turned up in a friendly smile, amused by my witty comment. The cropped tube top she wore had a small butterfly on the front, matching the pale bikini bottoms tied at her hips. I knew instantly, from the slim figure to the glossy and expertly curled hair, that this girl was popular. It was evident in the way she held herself, how she grinned and nodded at people who looked her way. With every turn of her head, the silvery highlighter on her cheeks caught the moonlight.

“I have no doubt Brandon deserved much worse. That should keep him off you for the next forty-eight hours, at least.”

Zeke laughed fully, his chest expanding and lips widening to a dimpled grin. How he and Asher had maintained a friendship for so long astounded me. I guess opposites truly did attract, even with brooding and savage Alpha’s. 1

with bleeding
"Maya wanted to take a hand." I told them, sighing. "His balls will recover quickly, unfortunately."

"I would've gone with your wolf's suggestion. Nothing short of maiming will chase Brandon off, not when he's hellbent on pissing off Asher." Zeke shook his head, but quickly cheered up as the brunette placed her hand on his bare chest, looking up at him with curious eyes. "Ah, right! Lola, this is Carson. She's the president of one of the sororities at the University."

There was a certain eagerness in her baby blue eyes, and a friendliness that put me oddly at ease.

"Alpha Phi, and we're the largest in the state. I knew I had to meet you after that whirlwind of an announcement! Our sorority's vision is lifting powerful women, not breaking them down. It's so amazing that our Luna is the embodiment of that!" She smiled sweetly, her words warm and surprisingly honest. The tips of her manicure tapped across the phone in her hands, as she opened the camera app. Her

hands, as she opened the camera app. Her lips looked even more pouty when she asked, "I run the sorority's Instagram. Could I get a few pictures with you, Luna? Pretty please? You'll send our followers through the roof, and just in time for Spirit Week!"

"Oh, sure—of course." I stammered, caught off guard. I caught Zeke's smirk and snarled at him, making Carson giggle. She all but shoved the phone into his hands while rushing to my side.

"Make sure you get us both in the center—no, ugh. Not from that angle. Are you trying to make us look two dimensional?" She shook her head disparagingly, "An Alpha who hasn't mastered the art of taking a basic picture ...tragic."

After positioning both Zeke and me, Carson posed at my side, placing a hand on her hip as she grinned proudly at the camera. I froze my smile in place and counted the number of photos he snapped. After the first ten she had me remove my sweatshirt, and finally my shorts. The last few shots were of us in our bikini's, the full moon and glittering lake in the background.

take in the background.

“These are perfect! Thank you so much, Luna.” She beamed, bouncing on her heels as she swiped through the pictures. Her eyes darted up from the cellphone, glittering mischievously. “Also, we’re having an after party at the frat house next door! You and Alpha are more than welcome to come—it would be an honor, actually.”

“I’ll see what I can do.” I promised her, returning the excited grin she gave me with one of my own. Turning to Zeke, I asked. “Speaking of Asher, have you seen him?”

“I escaped him half an hour ago, somewhere towards the docks. We’re headed to the after party. Your cockblock of a mate seems hellbent on keeping me in sight.” He chuckled, his laugh mixing with Carson’s. Under firelight, the golden flames highlighted his sharp jaw and chocolate eyes, his features even more charming. “Unlike Brandon, I know when to keep my hands to myself.”

“I trust you won’t get yourself into trouble.” I lifted an eyebrow at him, scenting his lie the moment his lips twitched

twitched.

"I would never." He vowed, a hand on his bare chest and the other around Carson's waist.

"It was great meeting you, Luna! Follow us on I***a!" Carson waved, gazing up at Zeke as they left. I could hear her giggling fading in the distance, along with his raucous laughter.

'How much trouble can he get himself into at a frat party?' Maya snorted.

I continued along the beach, passing dimming fires surrounded by college students, either too drunk or high to notice their Luna wading through them. Couples were tangled around one another, filling the air with their sighs and breathless gasps.

'Asher?' I called down the bond, feeling it's soothing thrum course through me, connecting me to Asher no matter where we both were. I waited until seconds turned to minutes, and my lips turned down.

Shaking away that inkling of worry, I tried to sort through the hundreds of scents that crowded the beach,

ents that crowded the beach, overlapping one another as they mixed with the scent of fresh water.

I strayed closer to the forest line as I walked around a larger group, their fire three times the size of the others I had seen. I had no intention of stopping but halted in my tracks when a voice sneered my name. It wasn't one I had heard before, but I'd never mistake that ignorant, demeaning tone.

"Luna Lola? Is that really you? Shit, when I heard you were coming—I thought you'd pussy out." I stopped in my tracks and turned, gazing at the half-illuminated figure of a tipsy frat guy.

His polo was the same sky-blue color as his eyes and fit perfectly to his athletic form. The shorts, sandals and cheep beer in his hand only enhanced the spoiled jock look. I made no mistake; even drunk, there was a cruel intelligence in his eyes, and determination. His voice caught the attention of the others sitting around the fire. Couples untangled themselves, the sounds of their kissing fading beneath the crackle of flame.

'We knew this would happen.' I reminded

...e knew this was...
Maya (and myself) that violence wasn't always the answer. 'There's going to be backlash. What matters is how we deal with it. This is why I'm the one who handles diplomacy.'

"I don't run, especially not from a party full of college students." I shrugged, unfazed while Maya snarled away in my ear.

The frat boy smirked, but there was nothing playful about the expression. Even with his floppy hair and straight teeth, his beauty was marred by cruelty. "Well, that's not entirely true, right? Most of us, we're not idiots. We've done our research on you, Luna."

"Why the fuck do you always have to start shit, Devin?" A feminine voice snarled, which I quickly realized belonged to Alex. Her neon streak was darker, but still unmistakable. One of the many perched around the flames, watching the showdown between a drunken dickhead and their Luna.

"Dude, Cass warned you--." A guy's voice grunted.

"Fuck Cassidy." Devin spat, his eyes narrowing on me. I kept my stance relaxed, unbothered since bothered is exactly what he wanted me to be. "You idiots only listen to her because she's crawled her way into the Alpha's bed. She's been there a lot longer than you, Luna. Have fun sharing your throne, blood sucker."

"I ran once, but if you've actually done your research, then you'd know I'm an entirely different person now." As always, I was reminded of my power when the shadows surrounding the forest pulsed and quivered. Tendrils slinked forwards, only to retreat when they reached the glow of the firelight. Called by my anger and irritation, born and bred to tempt. I was sure that no one here could see them. No, they'd be running in terror if they could see how they pooled around my ankles, close but never touching my skin. However, there was a darkness in my voice they could feel, like the icy caress of the shadows across their skin. "I'm a little busy right now, searching for your Alpha. But rest assured, I never forget a face."

e.”

“We’ll talk again.” I promised him, letting cold rage splinter and fracture within the depths of my eyes, staring until his throat worked and gaze flitted away.

My blood was racing as I turned on my heel and stalked off, keeping my shoulders loose and posture relaxed. The last thing I needed was for them to taste my rage, the anger that came with being disrespected, especially when power pulsed beneath my skin.

‘They keep getting curious...coming without being called.’ Maya said, worriedly. The two of us glancing towards the shadows that now scattered, deep within the darkness of the forest—always watching and waiting.

Chapter 112

I made it halfway down the beach when a series of cheers and whooping filled the air, followed by laughter and thundering feet. There were at least a hundred men and women running down the beach, towards the forest's emerald leaves, muted from the dark but still beautiful beneath the moonlight.

A few shifted prematurely, shredding bathing suits and swimming trunks as fur sprouted from their arms, neck, and torso. For many the shift was instant, an animal breaking free from its two-legged prison. Large paws dug into the sand, spraying those who hadn't yet shifted. Some shouted and groaned, while others laughed and tried not to get it in their eyes.

"Manhunt! Manhunt!" A few guys chanted, dispersed throughout the crowd. Their voices were nearly drowned in the laughter and cheering. Still, the word brought nothing but confusion.

'Isn't manhunt like adult hide and seek?' I asked Maya, even though there was no

way she'd know the answer.

When she responded with a shrug, I cut my losses and peered down the beach. I couldn't see too far, but there were still four fires that dotted the sandy dunes. People sat around them, most obscured by distance and darkness. It was unlikely Asher would be sitting around a fire, surrounded by people as he ignored my voice ringing in his head.

'Asher? I'm walking down the beach. Where are you?' I called out, only to again be met with silence. ²

'Let's not panic.' Maya said firmly, but I was no longer sure if she were talking to me or herself. 'There could be a good reason he's ignoring us.'

'Hopefully, there's a good reason for this feeling I'm having.' I grunted, unable to place the odd tingling in the pit of my stomach.

I could walk down the beach and search each bonfire, or I could go into the forest — which seemed the more likely option between the two. My mind was concocting all sorts of things. Perhaps he

had found a vampire lingering on the

● concocting all sorts of things. Perhaps he had found a vampire lingering on the borders, or did something new happen with the witches? It had been almost twenty-four hours since their first attack, and I was already beginning to wonder how soon the second would come.

As I tried to convince myself there was no need to worry, irritation began to take hold. I would know if something happened to him, but Asher wouldn't ignore me.

With a huff, I turned and chose one of the dirt trails that led into the forest.

Asher's scent was practically all over the place. Trailing throughout the forest from recent and old patrol routes with Zeke, Mason, and countless other warriors. It would have been easier if nearly a hundred people hadn't just come storming through, but it was better than searching a dwindling beach.

The beach behind me all but vanished, swallowed by foliage, and cloaked by night. If I hadn't had a glass of blood before the party, the gust of chilled wind that passed through might've made me shiver. It wafted up the sweatshirt and

ver. It wafted up the sweatshirt and through the flimsy bikini bottom's that I wore.

My feet crunched beneath the leaves and branches, padded across damp soil and rocky earth. The distant sound of shouting and howling, followed by laughter rippled throughout the forest.

I headed north, deeper into the forest and farther from the lake before cutting to the east. My intention was to circle back around, to search the car if I couldn't pick up his scent.

A branch cracked not too far away, it's sound deafening in my ears. My spine went rod straight, sending Maya on full alert. The feeling in my stomach was growing worse, turning sour and more wrong by the minute.

Another crack, another snap. This one to the left of me, and then another to the right.

The shadows twitched and writhed in the distance, and for once, I was half tempted to call on them.

'We're being circled.' Maya snarled,

'We're being circled.' Maya snarled, sending a burst of strength into my legs as I kicked off into a sprint.

We should have shifted, but only a few long seconds had passed before the feeling subsided, and the sound of padding feet grew quiet and distant. I came to a stop beside a great oak tree, using its thick trunk as coverage. Silence enveloped the forest for so long, that I jumped when a triumphant whoop filled the air.

Before my hand could fall against my racing heart, something huge charged from the brush, barreling into me faster than I could process. There was no pain, only adrenaline and shock as I recoiled seconds too late.

My feet twisted and tripped over the earth as this mass of flesh toppled me over, tearing the air from my lungs when I fell on my back. I snarled and thrashed, sweat and dirt clinging to my skin, filling my nostrils as they hovered over me—their weight bearing down on my chest.

All too easily they wrenched my hands from my chest, pinning my wrists down with brutal force. I wondered if my heart

with brutal force. I wondered if it would stop from how hard it hammered, from how fast the adrenaline coursed through my veins, heightening every sensation that rippled across my skin.

“Hasn’t anyone told you, little girl...” Asher’s voice was dark with anger, his eyes black holes that devoured my trembling, panting face. His breath fanned across my face, “...never go in the forest when a game of Manhunt is being played. Not unless you’re willing to play yourself.” 3

A fire burned low in my gut, searing my insides as it traveled lower—to where Asher straddled me. It grew, pooling between my legs every time I thrashed or made him snarl.

“How—how do I play?” I panted, sucking in a breath when his eyes zeroed in on my mouth, narrowing when my tongue darted out to wet my dry lips.

I could see the outline of his hand and stiffened when it traveled lower. I thrashed when I felt the ghost of his fingertips gliding across my hip, where the strings of the bikini met in a neat bow. I clenched my legs together,

how. I clenched my legs together, knowing it was only a matter of time before he could smell me—before he could find out how depraved I actually was.

“You play by running...by praying you don’t get caught.” His voice was soft, but there was nothing gentle in his words. They were unforgiving, revealing a fate I couldn’t escape.

I stiffened beneath him when the pieces clicked together in my mind, bringing back a memory I thought I had long forgot.

In the past, Tyler and I had been to countless parties. Being seen with him enhanced my image, made me more important than everyone else. Or that’s what I had thought at the time. There had been one party in particular, one where Tyler vanished halfway through. A game of chase had been happening when the moon had risen, between nearly a dozen male and females. I had never once thought Tyler would be among them, that he would cheat on me of all she-wolves. Even when he appeared just an hour after the final howls of the night sounded, I



The final howls of the night sounded, I never once entertained the thought.

Chase, as my pack called it, was a game between unmated males and females — one that almost always end in having carnal sex, deep within the forest. I had never played it before myself, and not once did I think a different pack might call it something else. ①

Seconds had passed and yet I still asked, “And what happens...if you get caught?”

Fingers brushed my thigh, raising goosebumps even though the chill of night held no affect on me. The dainty bow that held my bikini unraveled, rendering the scrap of fabric useless.

I felt him breathe deeply, his voice turning guttural. “I can smell you, Lola. You know exactly what happens.”

His hand ghosted towards the other bow. Perhaps it was his determination, or my waning will to fight, but it had been all too easy to situate himself between my legs.

It had all but vanished the moment his hand slipped between my legs, seeking

hand slipped between my legs, seeking out the heat between them. Stubborn as ever, I bit back my groan when he dragged a finger through my folds, circling my clit once before pulling back.

“There’s more out there, watching—wanting a taste of you.” He murmured in my ear, peeling away my useless bikini bottoms and tossing them to the side.

He did another long drag with his fingers, bringing that slippery moisture to my clit. I ground my teeth together, refusing to give him anything—even the barest of sounds. He let out a snarl as he grew impatient, making my eyes roll when he pressed the pad of his thumb against it. 1

“Will you fight me, Lola? Even though I’ve caught you fair and square?” There was that anger again, delicious as it seared my skin and made his movements blissfully rough. His fingers dug into my wrists, pinning them harder against the earth. His teeth nipped at my neck, the euphoric sting of them pricking my skin made my back arch, giving me a glimpse at how much Asher was enjoying himself. “Even after I stalked you—hunted you,

you'd fight me?" 1

When my face turned red and I refused to answer, he smirked against my neck. "You're angry with me, for ignoring you, my sweet little mate. Allow me to make it up to you."

Ever so slowly, he removed his hand from my wrist. The moment I began to move, his hand came slamming back down. His voice was harsh, barely concealing a threat, "Keep your hands where they belong."

I had promised myself I'd keep up my silent protest, fighting even when my body ached and craved his rough touch. There was nothing gentle about the way Asher worshiped my body, dragging his teeth and lips across every inch of my skin, leaving tiny welts in their place. 1

When his arms wrapped around my thighs, pinning my pussy against his mouth, the sound that left my mouth was unmistakable. He had torn the scream from my throat with his tongue running through my folds and against my clit with eyes that burned with ferocity.

I had always had this adverse reaction to Asher's anger. While everyone else blanched and cowered, I found myself excited. My body reacted as it always had in his presence, even though my legs still trembled from what happened moments ago. My mind, however, was focused on not igniting a war between two hardheaded brothers. 2

With a sigh, I let him into my thoughts, replaying the brief encounter with Brandon. I could hear Asher's snarl in my head, feel his rage at his brother's words. Even the begrudging satisfaction he felt when my knee sent his brother to the ground, was fleeting. As a tremor ran down his shoulders and spine, I wondered how close my mate was to murdering his brother. This feud between the two of them clearly ran a lot deeper than I had thought.

"Killing your brother wouldn't win people to our side, it would send them running in the opposite direction." I tried to convince him in the only way I could, by keeping my stubborn as hell attitude in check. "We have more important shit to



Chapter 113

Just when I thought Asher would put me out of my misery, he stiffened above me. Even his breath halted, grazing just below my collar bone. He cocked his head to the side, his voice deadly calm.

“Why is my brother’s scent on you?” ¹

I froze beneath him, my mind taking a few seconds to process his question. I sniffed the sweatshirt I wore, catching remnants of wet sand, fresh water, and sunblock. Asher’s scent had mixed with my own when we completed our bond, but hidden beneath it all, I could distinctly smell Brandon’s mint and cheap beer scent. I hadn’t even realized, and neither had he until now.

“Don’t, Asher.” I warned him, sitting up when he leaned back on his knees. Shirtless and bathed in moonlight, he looked like a vengeful God, eyes swirling with flecks of gold. “He’s using me to get a reaction out of you. Believe me, I didn’t let him get away with it.”

“Show me.” He snarled; his anger directed towards younger brother.

I had always had this adverse reaction to Asher's anger. While everyone else blanched and cowered, I found myself excited. My body reacted as it always had in his presence, even though my legs still trembled from what happened moments ago. My mind, however, was focused on not igniting a war between two hardheaded brothers. 2

With a sigh, I let him into my thoughts, replaying the brief encounter with Brandon. I could hear Asher's snarl in my head, feel his rage at his brother's words. Even the begrudging satisfaction he felt when my knee sent his brother to the ground, was fleeting. As a tremor ran down his shoulders and spine, I wondered how close my mate was to murdering his brother. This feud between the two of them clearly ran a lot deeper than I had thought.

"Killing your brother wouldn't win people to our side, it would send them running in the opposite direction." I tried to convince him in the only way I could, by keeping my stubborn as hell attitude in check. "We have more important shit to



check. "We have more important shit to worry about. If he can't keep his hands to himself, I'll make him. Who knows, maybe I'll let Maya bite off one of his hands. It's better than you hunting him down while he's drinking himself into a stupor."

"He already knows he's going to pay for touching you, but he knows I'll wait until he's sober." Asher grunted. Frustrated, he ran a hand through his hair, making the once neat strands messy. "I knew he'd use you to piss me off. I expected him to insult you or disrespect your position in the pack. It would have been easily dealt with. In other packs, it is a death sentence to touch an Alpha's mate." ¹

I frowned, surprised that this was something he had contemplated. Sean had pissed me off more times than I could count, pushing until we were both red-faced and shouting at one another from down the hall. Dad even had to intervene a time or two. He had doubted my capability when I first returned home, but not once had I thought of hurting my brother.

"What happened between you two?" I

wanted to know what would cause such a divide between them, what would pit brother against brother until there wasn't a shred of familiarity left.

"I'm not sure I even know anymore. His version of events might be different than mine." 1

Before I could learn anything further, or at the very least, quell Asher's anger, his Beta's voice played within our heads.

'Alpha, Luna—we have a Cordelia Warren here at the main gate. Her credentials check out, as does her luggage. We clear to send her on through?'

Asher and I locked eyes. The rune and protection witch was here, which meant we could finally comb through the house he had built for us. I wondered what damage the witch had done. Who knew how much time she had to roam the house, to tamper with anything inside?

'Escort her to the estate. I have to check in with Mason and the rest of tonight's patrol. Let her know we'll catch up shortly.'

"I can head there now." I assured him, all

can head there now." I assured him, all too eager to put my relentless worries to rest. I hinted the reluctance in his eye and reassured him, "Breyona and Giovanni will come with me."

"Have them meet you at the forest line. From the sounds of it, tonight's game of Manhunt is coming to an end."

I sent Breyona a quick mind-link, making a small sound of satisfaction as she answered instantly. Her and Giovanni were nearby, already on the move to our meet-up point.

"I wasn't aware there was a patrol roaming the lake tonight, or that Mason had joined them. I guess that's why he wasn't at the party."

I accepted Asher's hand and stood, watching with held breath as he retrieved my bathing suit bottoms and retied the dainty strings.

"You didn't think I wouldn't have you protected at all times?" He lifted an eyebrow and gave me a look, holding out the bottoms for me to step into. "I'm letting them off early, anyway. Just in time for some afterparty they were

● For some afterparty they were talking about. There's a smaller patrol that circles the estate. They're ordered to alert us both if they pick anything up."

Giovanni pulled into the circular driveway out front of our estate, which still sounded strange to my ears. I gazed up at the bay windows that looked into the living room and pinpointed the spot I had been standing when the witch attacked.

"The attack last night, I get the worst feeling any time I think about it." I said absentmindedly. My confession made Breyona, and Giovanni fall silent, both of which watched me curiously.

"What kind of feeling?" Breyona asked.

"Like..." I paused for a few moments, trying to turn a vague feeling into words, "...like this is just the beginning." 1

I wouldn't voice my other feeling, that there was more to this attack than what met the eye. No, my father had nothing to do with this. The man himself—he was dead, his body burned along with the rest lost that night.

"I've seen the feelings Holly gets. If you

"I've seen the feelings Holly gets. If you ever get them around me, let me know." She shuddered in the passenger seat, "As for this just being the beginning...I have to admit, I hope your wrong, Lola."

"I do too."

Cordelia Warren was what grandma would have turned out to be if she had been born a witch and not a werewolf.

Her chestnut hair, streaked with grey, was held back by a bandana. Laugh lines creased around her lips and at the corners of her eyes Crystal earrings dangled from her ears, matching the silver pendants around her throat. She had the same knowing light in her eyes as grandma, along with a kindness that instantly set me at ease. Her scent was one that brought back memories of grandma's cottage, the scent of her herb garden as it baked beneath the sun.

Giovanni leaned against the wall, in between Cordelia and me. The warriors that had escorted her here remained outside.

"How wonderful to meet you, Luna Lola." She smiled warmly, the bracelets o

How wonderful to meet you, Lúna
“Lola.” She smiled warmly, the bracelets on her wrists twinkling as she clasped her hands together. I felt like I was greeting a distant family member when she let out a soft sigh and said, “Let me get a good look at you.”

“You don’t have to call me by my title. Lola is just fine.” I assured her.

“Nonsense, it’s a title to be proud of.”

I stood a few feet away, swaying awkwardly, as the middle-aged witch looked me up and down. There was nothing disapproving in her gaze. If anything, I couldn’t help but feel as though she were marveling a bit. ‘Strong, hard-working hands...’ She murmured, toying with one of the pendants around her neck.

“You’ve got old magic in your blood. Passed down through your lineage, I recon.” She said, turning to rummage through a large tote bag she had placed on the couch. A dainty looking amulet was shoved in my face, the chain thin and gold as it caught the light. “Take this and wear it. The stones inside are quartz and citrine. It’ll help focus your thoughts and

citrine. It'll help focus your thoughts and
strengthen your magic. Had you have
been trained, that dark witch wouldn't
have dared step inside your household.
Whoever she was, she was relying on
your inexperience."

"What you don't know, can in fact hurt
you." Breyona said with a worried frown.
Her eyes brightened as she eyed the
necklace in my hands, "So you're saying
the crystals humans buy from those little
shops are actual magic? Mom got me a
few last year, I keep them on my
nightstand. My favorite is the little
amethyst geode. I actually brought that
one with me!"

"Depends. Did your parents buy them
from a witch?" Cordelia laughed, and the
sound reminded me of fluttering wings.
Breyona seemed relaxed around the
witch, reinforcing the familiarity I felt. "
Crystals work only when a witch fills
them with her magic. It'll run out
eventually, but they can be recharged.
They're capable of different things,
depending on the quality and shape. But
without a witch, they're just beautiful
rocks."

"Can they help protect me, and my

“Can they help protect me, and my people?”

“Their power varies on how much time and energy you put into them. They cannot protect an entire pack and clan of vampires, but they can help keep you and your inner circle safe.” She said softly, stepping forward when Giovanni’s harsh expression relaxed. There was a sincerity in her voice that came from years of experience and understanding. “If you’d let me, I’d like to teach you what I know. At the very least, I can offer some protection on your journey.”

Chapter 114

Asher arrived minutes after I had accepted Cordelia's help, slipping through the front door with much more stealth than he should've had for someone his size. I spotted his towering form from across the room, the crease between his eyebrows and tension in his shoulders were among the first things I noticed.

"Was everything alright with patrol?" I asked, drawn to his side. He slid an arm around my waist, letting his hand rest inches above my backside. I could feel the ire he was holding back and gave him a stubborn look.

I let my thoughts mix with his, so that he would be the only audience to what I said next. 'You're not running this pack all alone anymore, Asher. You can tell me things.'

"Patrols are running smoothly. It's just quiet out there." Asher cleared his throat, directing my attention from his plush lips and eyes of molten honey. His thumb skated along my pulse, those lips

skated along...
twitching as they registered the brief spike.

His eyes flickered to Cordelia, who had fished out a bundle of sage from her bag and lit the end with a match until it was smoldering. Asher watched with a dry expression as the middle-aged witch wandered throughout the lower floor of the house, humming softly as she wafted the burning herbs through the air.

“An honor to meet you, Alpha Asher. And thank you kindly for allowing me inside of your pack.” Cordelia said with a warm voice, giving Asher a motherly smile.

He blinked a few times, watching the witch as she continued throughout the house. We followed her up the stairs, both Breyona and I cooing as Asher gave us a tour of the second floor.

The halls were wide and the ceilings tall, but they were nothing like the labyrinth of Tyler’s house. Asher knew the last thing I wanted was to live in an empty mansion, where my footfalls and hushed breath would be the only sounds to grace the halls.

'The house is beautiful. It's better than anything I could've imagined.' I made sure to tell him, hiding my smile as pride swelled in his chest.

"Burning sage will get rid of the witch's negative energy. I could tell her death happened in the living room. That's where the funk was thickest." She addressed both Asher and I, her hands clasped together. "I sense no spells or curses placed on the premises, so it'll be safe to stay here tonight. I'll come back tomorrow, and we can go over some other means of protection for you."

As Breyona and Cordelia began chatting about crystals and their different structures, I was focused on Asher and the cellphone pressed against his ear.

Even without enhanced hearing, I'd be able to pick out Zeke's boisterous laugh among the crowd cheering through the phone. Some obscure pop song thundered through the phone, drowning out the sea of individual voices nearby.

"Heeey, Ash!" Zeke shouted from the other end; the rest of what he had to say was muffled by the crowd and pulsing

was muffled by the crowd and music. "Some kid...drugs...knocked-out... cops...didn't even believe I'm an alpha..."

I felt my lips twist into a smirk when Asher gave me a look that said, 'don't even think about it.'

"Never call me Ash again." Asher rolled his eyes, running a hand over his stubble covered jaw. The frustrated action had an unintended effect on my lady parts, who found Asher even more alluring when he was pissed off. The dark look he threw my way only worsened that feeling. "Can you blame them for not believing you're an Alpha when you're piss drunk?"

Zeke, pouty and defensive, shouted through the phone.

"...not drunk...couple bottles...best-friend forever..."

"Did he just say 'best-friends forever'?" Breyona snorted, claspng a hand over her mouth to hold back her laughter.

"Who knew Zeke was a clingy drunk?" I whispered, clutching onto Breyona as the two of us erupted in muffled laughter. Even Asher, whose eyes softened as they found my face, cracked a smile. 1

found my face, cracked a smile.

"Why not just mind-link me?" Asher sighed heavily, "I'd be able to hear more than every other word."

"no time...too drunk...hurry up..." Was all I heard on the other end, followed by a 'click.'

"What's he gotten himself into this time?" I shook my head; if there was one person who could get into more trouble than myself, it was Zeke.

"Aren't you glad best-friend here gets to go and deal with it?" Breyona teased, her grin growing wider when Asher flashed her a dark look.

"I have no clue, but if he's caused any damages, I'll take over his pack." Asher grunted, and while Cordelia's widened in shock, Breyona and I smirked.

Even Giovanni chuckled under his breath. Asher threatening to conquer Zeke's pack was a frequent occurrence, but it was something we all knew would never happen. As stoic and brooding as Asher acted, he enjoyed Zeke's chaotic presence as much as the rest of us. 2

...much as the rest of the world.
"I'll come with you." I insisted, sighing softly as a yawn rose in my throat.

Even before we completed the bond, Asher had this uncanny way of seeing right through me. The announcement, the assassination attempt, and the party—a girl only had so much energy when it came to nights of crappy sleep, even if she was a tribrid.

"No. You'll stay here and get some sleep, like you've been wanting to do for days now." His stare rooted me in place, along with the fondness only I could see, the savage love that came with being mated to a beast.

I let out a sigh, guilty because I wasn't the only one suffering from lack of sleep. Asher had just as much on his plate as I did, and had managed it a lot longer than I.

This time I couldn't hold back the yawn that left my open mouth, making my eyes water and grow heavy. Beneath it all, I was a little more than excited for tomorrow, to learn the basics of magic. I was more than curious about my witch

heritage and hoped that this was my chance to fully understand what I was—which was becoming more complicated by the minute.

‘Go to sleep, Lola. You have a busy day tomorrow.’ The reverence in which he said my name made my heart flutter, filling me with a warmth that prompted me to wrap my arms around his torso, breathing in his woody scent.

‘You won’t be long?’ I pouted, feeling a sense of relief when the husky words, ‘I promise,’ swirled through my head.

“We’ll stick around for a while.” Breyona chimed in helpfully, peering up at Giovanni through her lashes. The way he looked down on her, the hidden adoration in his eyes, I swore he and Asher had more in common than they cared to admit. “We’ll also drop Cordelia off at the house on our way back. We just have to get back before the sun rises.”

Once Asher left, I explained to Cordelia her new living situation. Her eyes lit up at the mention of another skilled witch, one she’d be sharing the house with.

...of being sharing the house with.

We spent the next several minutes talking, with Breyona providing a near endless stream of questions that captured even my short attention span. Her hazel eyes held the same excitement her parents had whenever they discovered a new academic trove or forgotten piece of history.

“If the Luna is alright with it, you’re more than welcome to join our training courses. Not possessing magic doesn’t mean you can’t learn. We’re always in need of more people to pass on the craft.” Cordelia offered Breyona on their way out.

Breyona gave me a hopeful look, bouncing on the balls of her feet with an expectant grin. I let her squirm for a few seconds, giggling when Giovanni had to steady her.

“Of course, I don’t mind if you come to magic training. Who better to keep me on task?” I smirked.

“Awesome, I can’t wait!” She exclaimed, pecking me on the cheek. “Just text me what time you want me to come over.”

what time you want me to come over.

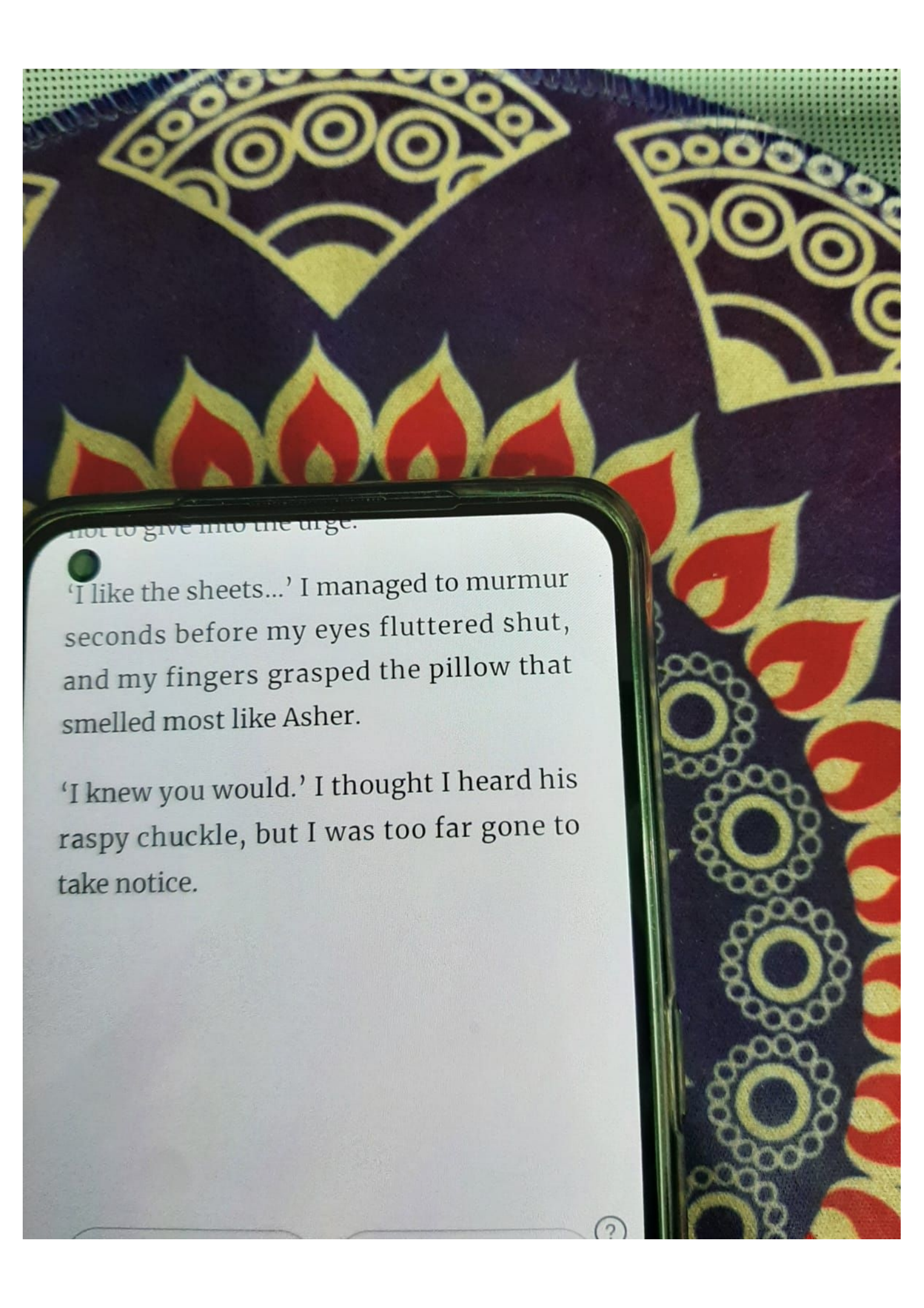
The moment the three of them left, I took the time to explore the bedroom Asher had designed for us. As soon as I stepped inside, I was engulfed in his scent. Wood and amber along with the faint undertone of something purely male, husky, and mouthwatering all on its own.

I understood why the moment I sank into the ridiculously large bed, much bigger than anything Asher or I would need. I knew I could be a bed hog, but I wasn't sure anyone was that bad.

The blankets and sheets on the bed were made of the softest cotton, midnight black in color. Asher's scent clung strongly to the sheets because they were his from back home.

It was a piece of the place we had left behind, a place that had once comforted and provided me with a sense of safety.

I hadn't planned on passing out minutes after sinking into the bed, but with his delicious scent wrapped around me, lulling my already exhausted mind into a false sense of security, it was impossible not to give into the urge.



not to give into the urge.

● 'I like the sheets...' I managed to murmur seconds before my eyes fluttered shut, and my fingers grasped the pillow that smelled most like Asher.

'I knew you would.' I thought I heard his raspy chuckle, but I was too far gone to take notice.

Chapter 115

I was only partially awake when I heard the bedroom door open. The cold draft in the hallway whooshed into the bedroom, blowing Asher's scent until it swirled around the room.

My nose twitched, and even in my sleep I knew when he was near. Fingers brushed my cheek. Just two, trailing slowly to my jawline. The sparks, which could be overwhelming at times, turned subtle and soothing.

As his hand drifted lower, grazing my neck and shoulder, he gradually came to a stop. I could no longer feel his fingers gliding over my skin, but instead knew where they hovered.

For months I pretended the crimson mark on my skin was non-existent, a nightmare that I had long ago woken up from. Tristan was trying, working to make up for his mistakes and to preserve his people, but I'd always have the physical reminder of what side he had once been on.

physical reminder of what side he had once been on. ①

Even without his mark, as his Queen, I'd always have that faint connection to him.

"Is Zeke alive?" I mumbled sleepily.

"Alive and bailed out of the county jail." Asher's reply had almost come a few seconds too late. My eyes fluttered open, confusion and amusement written across them. It wasn't surprising. Zeke with a bunch of college students, things we bound to get crazy. "I'll explain everything in the morning, after we both get some sleep."

My eyes opened just a sliver when I felt the rough palm of his hand against my stomach. A jolt of awareness rushed through me, similar to adrenaline as I caught Asher's swirling golden eyes, peering at me through the darkness. The intensity of his gaze, the way he fixated on me obsessively. Was it screwed up that I found that intoxicating?

"You're wearing too many clothes." He grunted, tugging on the hem of my tank-top with impatient fingers.

"Then undress me, Alpha." I giggled

When undress me, Alpha." I giggled sleepily, stretching my arms over my head as I watched pale threads of moonlight stream through the curtains in the room.

Asher replied with a vicious snarl, and I knew that if I reached out, I'd be holding the stiff length of him in my hand. He removed my tank-top with surprisingly gentle hands, toying with the fact that goosebumps erupted wherever he touched.

Cold air enveloped me the moment my chest was bare, the tank-top I had worn discarded on the floor. My eyes were still shut, arms still splayed out above my head as I hovered in between sleep and consciousness, that euphoric state where everything felt both sensitive and cloudy.

I could feel him watching me, peering through the dark as he devoured my bare breasts and soft curves. Oh, we were playing this game again. Warmth blossomed between my legs, tightening my nipples and elevating my heartrate.

His fingers stilled at the top of the leggings I wore, teasing where my skin

leggings I wore, teasing where my skin met the fabric with skilled fingers.

"Can I play with you, Lola?"

"Mmm." I sighed softly, turning my head on the pillow to get comfortable.

The haze had worn off as he slid my leggings off and tossed them onto the floor, leaving me hyper sensitive and aching in all of the wrong ways. My breasts bounced as I shifted in bed, my legs parting just enough for Asher to slip his hand between.

"Fuck, Lola. See how quickly you get wet for me?" I whimpered softly when his fingers glided through my folds, collecting the wetness that coated my lips. As much as I tried to tone down my reaction, nothing short of a miracle could keep my back from arching when he placed a thumb against my clit, losing some of his earlier gentleness. "You can try to pretend, but your body always gives away how much you want this."

I sank my teeth into my lower lip, silencing my reply. It was in my nature to fight, to revolt and thrash against anyone who would hold me down. It was the

•o would hold me down. It was the nature of a werewolf, a Luna, and a Queen. There had always been something about Asher that allowed me to let go, to forfeit the control I was always seeking. Handing it over to him, it was exhilarating.

“You want to play quiet, sweetheart?” He chuckled low in my ear, his spontaneous nickname for me had nearly broken my vow of silence.

There was nothing kind about the endearment. It was a challenge, a taunt, a promise. My eyes rolled when I felt the blistering heat of him against me, the swollen head of his cock nudging against my entrance.

His laugh was dark and bottomless, “That’s fine by me. Don’t make a fucking sound.”

Goddess, what had I gotten myself into.

One stroke of his length against me, his shaft gliding through my folds, grinding against my clit until stars danced in my eyes. The muscles in my legs and core clenched painfully, warning me how quickly my orgasm neared.

quickly my orgasm

"I don't even have to fuck you to make you scream for me." He grunted in my ear, just as breathless and lust-stricken as I would've sounded. His cock felt like steel as he thrust it against me, the hand he used to pin my hips down left small bruises that would heal all too quickly. The feral need that boiled in him, it showed me how much he enjoyed this. He cursed under his breath, "You're going to come, all from rubbing that little pussy on my cock."

He was right; at some point I had begun moving my hips, matching his rough strokes as the head of his cock grinded against my clit. My eyes fluttered open just in time, latching onto his as my pussy spasmed and a desperate moan was ripped from my throat.

"Remember what I told you?" His eyes were blazing, orbs of molten gold that swirled and churned. I had never seen him like this, this feral. Like the most savage parts of his wolf were rising to the surface. His thick head parted my lips, pressing against my entrance. He slammed the full length of himself inside of me, just as he clasped a hand over my

me, just as he clasped a hand over my mouth. "Don't make a fucking sound."

I wasn't sure I had ever screamed like this before. My pussy stretched until it was almost painful, wrapped around his cock as every brutal thrust made my eyes roll. Every whimper and plea for more, they were muffled against his hand.

"That's it, take my cock." Asher snarled, his words delayed as he cursed and rolled his hips against my own. Every time my pussy throbbed around his shaft, he let out a husky grunt. "You can't help but scream, can you?"

There had to be something wrong with me. The feeling of his hand over my mouth, while he cursed and shuddered in pleasure, it sent me spiraling over the edge.

At the last moment, his hand lifted from my mouth. His name was the first thing I cried out, sinking my nails into his shoulders as I went loose and taut. He held me close, his pace still brutal as he found those last moments of pleasure buried inside of me. His lips latched onto my bouncing breasts, and I could feel the moment he snarled my name against



my bouncing breasts, and I could feel the moment he snarled my name against them, thrusting deep as his seed filled me.

Curled up in Asher's arms, with everything blissfully sore, I had the best sleep I've managed in weeks. It should have been common sense that with a good night's sleep came a long and stressful day.

The next morning, I found myself perched on top of the marble counter in the kitchen. Standing between my legs, smirking down at me as I devoured my third bowl of cereal, was Asher.

This was our first time living together, without the company of either one of our families. That alone made it difficult, with our wandering eyes and greedy hands never getting enough of one another. In fact, we were well on our way for round two when Asher's cellphone began buzzing.

Zeke's name flashed on the screen, accompanied by a picture he had to have taken himself. Asher flipped the phone over, making me snort.

"Don't ignore him. Who knows what he's

● Don't ignore him. Who knows what he's gotten himself into after last night, which you still have yet to elaborate on." I pointed out, flipping the phone back over.

Asher sighed and answered the call, while I ate another spoonful of cereal. He pressed the speaker button, and immediately I began laughing at the whine that was Zeke's voice.

"Don't make fun of me, Lolaaaa." He groaned, his voice extra gravely in the early morning hours. I swore there was still a slight slur to his words, even though it should be wearing off by now.

"What do you need, Zeke? Party too hard?" Asher asked dryly.

"Ugh, can you come get me? I think I drank the liquor store." He moaned miserably, "It even hurts to mind-link you. I left my car at the lake. Some of Carson's gymnast friends drove us to the afterparty."

"Sure, we'll be there. Text me the address." Asher's reply brought a grin to my face. Even brooding and grumpy, he was a good friend.

was a good friend.

“How was that after party, Zeke?” I asked.

“Which part? The one where I figured out that college parties charge you for alcohol, or when I figured out they’ll let you have a tab, but only if the Alpha is your best-friend.” Clearly, he was still somewhat intoxicated, because sober Zeke usually had an easier time filtering what he said. “Or when I joined Carson and her little gymnast friend for a little —”

“The first two parts, Zeke! The first two!” I said hastily, placing a hand over my face.

“I’d like to hear more about that tab, and exactly who will be paying it.” Asher said, rightfully so.

If there was one thing all college students had in common, human or werewolf, was that they could throw back some alcohol.