

Chapter 2

"Don't Charlotte," my little sister, Tabitha, whined.

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"I'm just trying to help. Your cookies are going to be too big if you continue making them like this," I pointed out.

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"Leave her alone, Charlotte," My father ordered from the living room.

For a moment I waited for my mother to defend me, but all I heard was the steady clicking of her knitting needles. In all fairness the only person in this pack strong enough to oppose my father was the alpha. He wasn't used to arguments from anyone, not even his own family. Besides, my mother wasn't one to break tradition. She was the meek silent type who let her husband speak for her. So I sighed and let my little sister, the favorite of the family, continue making cookies that were the size of her face.

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"I thought you were going to be babysitting tonight," my mother piped up.

I cringed as she spoke. Being a twenty one year old werewolf who still lived at home was not the most common thing in the world. Most wolves met their mates in high school or the beginnings of college. Unfortunately, it seemed that no one within the packlands was my mate and when I had stretched my reach outside of our borders to take a college course I didn't have much luck either. Since then my parents had been pushing me to move out on my own. As far as they were concerned I had some education behind me and the sooner I le

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"Sandra cancelled again. She said that Abby has gotten into some weird habits and she's a little concerned. Apparently she's started sucking her thumb again and wetting the bed," I explained.

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"She's seven," my mother said, wrinkling her nose in disgust. "My, we certainly baby our children too much these days."

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At that my father's eyes snapped to me and I knew the conversation that was coming. He felt that I was being babied by still being here. And I knew that he was more than ready to get rid of me. If I wasn't working and contributing to the household and if my mate wasn't in this pack then I should've been gone months ago.

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"I'm going upstairs to get ready," I blurted before he could start. "Caleb is coming over to help me apply for some jobs. Just send him up when he gets here."

I had pulled up two job posting in nearby towns and nestled myself on my bed when Caleb finally showed up. his hair was still wet from his post hockey practice shower and I had to force myself to tear my gaze away. Why did my childhood best friend have to grow up to be so hot?

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"No babysitting?"

"No, she's having problems."

"Shame, it was good money and a pretty cute kid," he mused. Then he changed the subject. "You still wear that necklace?"

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I blushed and my fingers automatically fluttered to the base of my throat. It was a cheap necklace that Caleb had purchased for me when he and his family traveled to Alaska a few years back. Then, it had been a beautiful chain with a heart shaped pendant. Now, it was turning black and faded, but I still wore it o en.

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"Come help me," I instructed, patting the open portion of my bed.

Caleb flopped next to me, using my decorative pillows as a back rest and propping his head on my shoulder. For a couple hours we flicked through listings, hoping that one of them would respect my limited experience and basic college education. He told me to try for higher paying jobs but I was already so sick of rejection that I would've taken anything to boost my confidence at this point. When we were finished I had sent away six resumes and deleted the handful of rejection emails I had received.

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"Something will pop up," he soothed. "With a pretty face and a body like yours they would be dumb not to hire you."

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"What about my personality or my education?" I laughed, smacking him on the chest.

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"Oh, that too," he added with a cheeky grin. "Come on, let's put on a movie and relax for a bit, I'm wiped out."

Everything felt normal for the first half of the cheesy film I picked. His head was cradled on my shoulder and I was leaning my weight against him. It was all just how it always was. Sure, maybe we weren't mates, but this was perfect. This was all I could ever want.

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Until I felt something brush against the side of my neck.

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For a moment I stayed perfectly still. It felt like he had kissed me, like Caleb had pressed his mouth against my neck. But that was impossible. I must've wanted it so badly that my mind was now playing tricks on me. I took a deep breath and tried to focus back on the movie, convinced I was imagining things.

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But then his hand slid up the front of my sweatshirt, moving towards my breasts. And something so and warm touched the place where his lips had been.

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"Caleb," I whimpered, hardly able to speak with the sensation of his tongue on my skin consuming my mind.

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He said nothing. He just let out a muted moan and shied so he was pressing his body up against me. I could so easily feel the hardness beneath his jeans pressing against my hip. And, as he peppered my neck with more kisses, his hand slid up higher until it cradled one of my breasts in his hand.

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God, I wanted it. I wanted him. I had been denying myself of this for so long. He was my soul mate. I was supposed to love him. He was created to be my mate; something had just gotten mixed up along the way. I was sure of it. I had been waiting years for this moment. Since we were mates there was never any way to know if he felt the same way about me. That pronounced erection told me everything I needed to know. He wanted me just as badly as I wanted him.

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But I couldn't.

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"Caleb," I repeated, my voice coming out a little stronger this time.

"Charlotte," he groaned back, now moving to get his hand under my shirt.

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"Stop," I whispered. The word felt foreign and wrong in my mouth. How could I want this to end? I had dreamed of this moment for years.

"What?"

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"Stop."

Caleb peered up at me through his eyelashes. Concern was written all over his handsome face. "Did I do something wrong? I thought that you wanted me. I'm sorry if I read the signs wrong, it's just..."

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"I do," I admitted. And it hurt so much to tell the truth, to know that it wasn't possible. It was almost enough to bring me to tears right then and there.

"Perfect." A perfect smile overtook his face and he moved like he was about to kiss me again.

"No," I managed, "We can't."

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"But- "

"I know. It's not about me not wanting you or anything like that. God, how could I not want you? You're perfect."

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"Then what's the problem Charlotte? I love you. I love you so damn much and I want to show you."

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God, didn't he know how much it hurt me when he said things like that?

"I know, I know all of that. But we aren't mates. I know that you are going to say that it doesn't matter but it does. Mates or not I will never feel any differently about you, but I could never forgive myself if we took this too far. What if you find your mate and you can't stand to look at me anymore? I want to be a part of your life forever and that can't happen if your mate finds out that I was your first and she wasn't. I can't take that away from her, whoever she is."

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"We are both over twenty, the chances are so low," he argued with a shake of his head.

"I know, I know. But, if I've waited this long, I can wait another year or so just to make sure that we aren't hurting us in the long run."

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Caleb took a deep breath and ran a hand down his face. I just watched him pensively, scared of what might come out of his mouth. There was a big chance that, through trying to protect us, I had hurt us even more.

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"Okay," he finally said.

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"Okay?" I repeated.

"I can wait a year," he agreed, but then a devilish smirk took over his lips.

"But, just know, that on this day next year I'm not going to be able to help myself. You're going to be on a bed under me."

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My face flamed. "That sounds amazing."

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~~~Question of the day~~~

What is your favorite snack?

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