Just Another Werewolf AU

by YatoJaeger

Summary

This is a story about werewolves.

Mainly.

Werewolves and college and that one guy who threatened me that one time. You know, the one with the grey eyes and the constant scowl? Yea, him I can't seem to stay away from. Call me suicidal.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
This is a story about werewolves.

Mainly. I mean, it’s a story about me and I’m kind of a werewolf so I guess by association that makes the story about werewolves too, right? Nevermind, let’s start again.

This is a story about me.

I am a werewolf.

How did this happen, you might ask. Are you sure you’re not insane, you might wonder. Maybe I should quit listening to this guy now, you may think. In response to your questions I give you this brief introduction to the healthy process of becoming a werewolf:

1. Do your research. Sounds boring? Dull? Like a total waste of your time? It probably is to be honest, most of that stuff online is total crap and only worth reading if you want to make yourself cry. But seriously, if you know how to research this stuff then do that because you do really kinda very much need to know what you’re actually getting yourself into. I seriously cannot stress this enough. If you don’t look this stuff up beforehand then it is most certainly going to come back to bite you on the ass and bite you hard, my friend.

2. Make sure this is what you want. Go talk to an Alpha werewolf about the lifestyle, the pros and cons, the potholes and loopholes and the general rules and shit. If you want to walk like them, then you need to open up an honest line of communication with someone who knows the know. Don’t think you could manage getting furry once a month and hunting bambi? Don’t go and get yourself turned into a freaking werewolf. It’s really quite simple.

3. Contacts. Get yourself some contacts. Find an expert or two. Make nice with the locals and politely ask if it’s okay for you to join the Pack. Don’t just demand to be bitten. Don’t invoke some ancient, dodgy-as-fuck ritual because you think that’s the way to go. Believe me, there are better ways to do these things. Go through the proper channels and if you want to back out then tell them you’re backing out. Don’t feel pressured because you’re likely not going to be.

4. And then, once you’ve gained your tail and teeth make sure you stay close by with others of your kind. You’ll need the support. Supernatural aftercare is essential post-turn because that’s when you’re most susceptible to supernatural influence. (i.e. going rabid and letting the animal side take over indefinitely as you go on a crazy murderous rampage through the city. Not good. It’s shit like that that you really wanna avoid, okay?)

That’s how you should go about this.

That’s how you stay safe out there in the big wide world of the big bad wolf.

Take it from me, kids; if you fuck this up and do it wrong, you’ll regret it instantly.

This right here is very much a case of do as I say, not as I do, because it really really sucks if you don’t know what´s happening before it’s too late.
Now I guess I should just get on with it, huh? Tell you my tale of woe? Okay.

Before we get started, you should know that it was never my intention to get bitten. Hell, up until five years ago I didn’t even know werewolves actually existed. I just thought of them as an overused plot device. Like. They had been around in stories and films since forever. When you think werewolf you think of the movies you watched as a kid like Teen Wolf or An American Werewolf in London. Maybe Resident Evil will come to mind. That’s where you see the Hollywolf, so to speak. The overly-dramatic transformations into some grotesque hybrid of man and wolf that looked damn painful and damn ugly. (Seriously. They’re making us look bad.)

You’d think that if there was something out there that looked and acted like a freaking rabid wolfman with a crazy strong bloodlust, that people would’ve heard about it by now. Right?

Wrong. Oh so wrong.

There was something out there. Several somethings, in fact, and I was unlucky enough to get bitten by the insane one. Literally. Like, all the other werewolves I’ve come across in all the years since that fateful (and, quite frankly, excruciatingly painful) night have had perfect control even on the night of the full moon. All smiles and warm embraces and understanding. Not any of that glowing-red-eyes-over-wide-gaping-maw business. Turns out I had had one of the shittiest introductions to the wonderful world of lycanthropy you could possibly imagine. Go figure.

So no; I hadn’t wanted the bite, I hadn’t even known that “the bite” was a thing that could actually happen in our reality, and I most certainly did not deal well with receiving said bite against my own will.

And that was all five years ago. Jesus. Five years. Time sure does fly when you’re stuck having a supernaturally-powered existential teenaged crisis on your own.

Now I’m nineteen, I’m all grown up and to prove it I’m about to start my first semester at university. I thought I should mark this occasion down or something because I sure as hell did not expect to ever make it this far. But hey, I figure if I managed to face down an Alpha werewolf and win then I can definitely manage getting a degree, right? Right.

I open the truck door and get out.

The parking lot isn’t half full. It’s still a day or two before term starts so not everyone has rolled in just yet. I got here early so I could get settled in relative peace and scope out the place, get a feel for things before I start to get to know people and get dragged into college life.

I head toward the reception of the building and sign in, pick up my room key, pick up a site map so I can figure out where the hell my room is and then head back to my truck. I’m not gonna lie, it does kinda stand out like the piece of trash it is, but it’s tougher than it looks and when you have super human strength and have to drive out into the middle of open country every once a month, a truck is pretty much ideal.

That and the trunk space comes in very handy when transporting half your earthly belongings 600 miles away from home.

Home. Something in my chest pinches as I think about it. Home is where my Pack is. I’m not going to be able to see them for months. It’s going to be pretty weird not having them around all the time, but I’m hoping the pull to run back to them won’t be too strong. Besides, I’ll be surrounded by total strangers all eager to make friends and form cliques, so it shouldn’t be too hard to fill that Pack-shaped void, right? Well I hope so, at any rate.
I lift a cardboard box of stuff out of the trunk bed and head round to the back of the dorms where
the map promises me there’ll be a set of stairs. I’m up on the second floor. This place it set out so
there’s five flats of five people on each floor, with four floors in total. Each flat has one kitchen and
one bathroom but we all have ensuite shower room things so I’m not worried about that so much.
My flat is right on the end which means a few lucky fuckers are getting a room with a view.

I climb up to the second floor and use my key to beep myself into the building. I’m room five. I
can’t help but laugh when I realise room five is set against the outside wall. Guess I’m a lucky
fucker, huh?

I open the door and the scents of ten different people hit me at once, all covered over with a haze of
cleaning products and a fine film of dust.

Ah. Problem.

A wolf’s sense of smell is a lot stronger than that of a human’s. I’m talking like, can-smell-prey-
from-a-mile-away strong here. As a werewolf, that means I’ve got a sense of smell a lot stronger
than your average Joe’s, and right now is it a bit of a problem.

Werewolves hate sleeping in unfamiliar places. A new house, an hotel room, the back seat of your
best friend’s car; it doesn’t matter where, just know that as long as it’s somewhere we haven’t been
before, we won’t get to sleep much if at all. It’s all something to do with familiarity-equals-safety.
We rely on our sense of smell an awful lot too, just like the wolf. When something smells like
Pack, you know it’s safe. When you walk into a room and it reeks of twenty total strangers and you
realise you have to sleep there for the next couple hundred nights… not safe.

Territorial instincts and all.

But this is where I’ll be sleeping for the next couple hundred nights so I can’t back out like a little
bitch. If the smell is making me uncomfortable right now, the sooner I get my stuff unpacked and
spread out – the sooner I start actually living within these four walls – the sooner that sense of
discomfort will leave. I shove aside the warnings my wolf is throwing at me and I step into the
room.

It takes me an hour to bring up all my boxes and get them unpacked. Well. When I say unpacked I
really mean I upended said boxes onto the floor and haven’t actually bothered to put all my stuff
away yet. (I got distracted when I found my DS, but I’ll get around to it eventually, okay?)

Ten minutes into a thrilling game of Pokémon I hear footsteps approaching and then a tentative
knock on my door. I stiffen slightly as I stand up from where I’ve been slouched next to my pile of
books, dvds, clothes and toiletries. Yea, I seriously need to sort that mess out.

I open the door and there’s this guy standing there with a hopeful smile on his face. Blonde hair,
soft eyes, smells like oranges and mint and nervousness. I crack a smile back as he introduces
himself, apprehension leaving me.

“I’m Armin.” He holds out a hand and I shake it. I’m careful not to put too much strength into it,
but guessing by the way his eyebrow raises just a hint, it was too much all the same. “I’m your
next door neighbour. We’re basically like the only people here yet. Want help unpacking?”

And that’s that. I let him in. I let a total stranger into my room - my territory - and my wolf barely
even grumbles at the prospect. He looks at the pile of stuff on the floor and glances at me over his
shoulder, hands on hips, amusement dancing along his tone as he says;
“Guess I’ll be getting to know you a little better than you might like.” And then he bends down, picks up a pair of my underwear, throws them at my face. “Let’s get this done.”

I grin.

Armin Arlert is a godsend. Seriously. This guy knows how dorm storage works and despite me bringing way too many clothes (having the ability to turn into a huge wolf at will does have some downsides, after all) we get everything put away without too much hassle. I secure myself enough cupboard and refrigerator space in the unexpectedly large kitchen, and together Armin and I make an incredibly healthy lunch: noodles. I see I’m starting off my college life on the right footing.

We spend the afternoon in Armin’s room because he has an Xbox and I don’t and really you’d be a fool not to take advantage of a nearby games console when you have fuck all else to do.

Armin’s room is a lot like mine with the layout and the thickly layered scents and the white walls and pin board by the door. Only difference is his room is tidier than mine and he’s got a bunch of posters tacked up already. We’re sitting on his bed, although at some point I’ve managed to scoot right up to the edge and now I’m practically hanging off it as I jab at the controller and yell at the screen. Armin’s laughing at me as his avatar manages to kill mine in one hit and I let out a very unmanly squeak of indignation.

“Another game?” he asks, his tone teasing. I side-eye him and nod seriously. Another game. The glee that rolls off him is nearly overpowering. I wonder how long he’s been here.

“Just two days,” he tells me when I ask. The screen’s loading and it gives me a chance to look at him properly. I set the controller down and turn to him.

“So how come you rocked up so early?” I ask. If he’s been here two days already and it’s still a few days til the beginning of fresher’s week, then he turned up way before he had to.

He shrugs. “I couldn’t wait to get away from home, you know?”

I hum in agreement but in all honesty I don’t. Home is Pack and Pack is family and I’m missing them already. Being part of the unconventional world of the supernatural means that I don’t have experience with a lot of normal crap like family drama and commitments and a steady home life. Even before the bite I still didn’t have much of that. I try to think what it would be like growing up as a normal kid and I can’t come up with much.

“Tough parents?” I guess. He laughs and it doesn’t sound faked but he doesn’t look particularly happy.

“They’re going through a divorce.” He explains it like he’s done this a thousand times. His voice is clinical and detached but as I scent the air I pick up on his hurt and his anger and something sharper beneath it all. Loneliness. My wolf whines at the back of my mind and I have to say I empathise. Armin’s eyes are far too soft and kind to be hiding all that pain inside.

“They keep buying me all of this stuff, you know. An Xbox, a laptop, a new camera… It’s like they’re trying to apologise for ruining my life or something by giving me things to distract myself with.” He sighs then and smiles up at me. “It’s not really working but at least I’ve got something to waste my time on at university.”
I laugh. I have to. He’s being brave and I know it because I know what he’s really feeling. It’s coiling around him like a cloud and I want nothing more than to flap my arms and chase it away, but you can’t chase away emotions like that.

I try my own hand at distracting him and hope I have better luck than his parents.

“You said they got you a new camera?” I prompt. Like the sun coming out his whole disposition changes, and suddenly he’s all smiles and bubbles and eagerness. I inwardly pat myself on the back as he dives across the room, game screen loaded up now but entirely forgotten. He fetches his camera and I note that it’s a big, professional-looking thing that must have cost a fortune.

“I’m studying photography,” he explains when he sees the face I’m pulling. “I do a lot of nature shots. I could show you some if you’d like?” He sounds uncertain, but hopeful, and I don’t waste time in assuring him that yes I would definitely like. My wolf is practically wagging its tail at the warm emotions coming off this guy. I’ve only known him a day but I can already tell I’m going to get along with him just fine – both sides of me are, in fact, which is a small miracle and definitely not something I shall ever take for granted.

We eventually do get around to playing another game, but by then it’s getting dark outside and I’m starting to get peckish (i.e. my stomach is putting forth a symphony performance of growls and rumbles and Armin laughs at every single one of them). Being a werewolf means I eat a lot. And I mean a lot. Seriously. I used to pass it off as a “growing teenager” thing when I first turned, but since then I’ve had to come to terms with the monumental food bill I manage to rack up each month.

Armin suggests we order pizza, and if I had a tail it would be wagging. We end up back in my room once it arrives, camped out on my freshly made bed and surfing Netflix. Armin puts on Grimm and we make it halfway through the first season before we realise what the time is and he sheepishly apologises for taking up so much of my time when it’s my first night here. I get the feeling he’s used to apologising a lot at home for all the wrong reasons. I decide I don’t like that.

Armin leaves and I take a shower before collapsing on my bed, the towel not doing much to save the sheets. I close my eyes and let it all sink in, let my wolf filter through to the forefront of my mind as he listens to the world around him and takes in all the different scents of the room, now smelling more strongly of myself, Armin and the pizza we polished off at record speeds. My sheets smell of home and I bury my face in them, trying not to let it get to me that much, now that I’m alone, that I truly am alone.

No Pack.

No home.

Just me in this place I have yet to get used to.

I’m glad it’s just me and Armin at the moment. I’m relieved that I’m not surrounded by a load of strangers all trying too hard to make friends. I can hear Armin in his room clearly, getting ready for bed. I listen to him brush his teeth and pull back the sheets and then the tap of fingertips against a phone screen. I wonder what it would be like listening to four other people all living so close to one another – living so close to me – and not being aware that I can hear their every move. I know my wolf will hate it. He’s already starting to get antsy.
I roll out of bed and hunt for my ipod, pull the blanket that smells like Pack around my shoulders, and let the music in my ears block out the sound of everything else as I try to fall asleep in a strange room.

It works. I slip into unconsciousness and that night I dream of running through the woods with my left-behind Pack, a new face among them; Armin’s face.
Oh Sweet Merciful Traffic

Chapter Summary

Eren and Armin go to the city. Armin drives.

I wake up the next day feeling like I haven’t slept at all, which is just great. It’s roughly 9:00am and I drag myself to the kitchen like it’s 5:00am and I have no control over my limbs.

Breakfast is what I need.

I cook bacon and eggs and eye the sausages but decide against it because sausages should be eaten only when you’re awake enough to appreciate them, and I most certainly am not awake enough. Like, I’m feeling the need to prop my eyes open with cocktail sticks because they keep sliding shut of their own accord.

I shovel food into my mouth and plot out a plan for the day. Maybe I should look around campus, find out which buildings my lectures are going to be in, see what freshers week will bring. Maybe I should drive into town, explore the city a little, see what a city like Trost actually has to offer a kid from the country like me. Or maybe I should take my truck out to the reserve where I already know I’ll be spending my full moon nights. I’d like to get a feel for the place beforehand, you know? Everything always looks different seen through the glowing golden eyes of a giant supernatural animal. It’s probably wise for me to make a note of the frequently used tracks so my wolf knows to stay away from them. God help us all if some poor lady finds a half-mauled deer carcass whilst on an early morning run.

Armin makes an appearance as I’m blearily washing up my dishes and I know it’s bad manners but all I can do is grunt in response to his overly-cheery-for-this-time-of-the-morning greeting. He laughs. I grunt again but in a slightly different pitch as I acknowledge the fact that no, I am not a morning person, and yes, I can only communicate in Palaeolithic grunts and grumbles before 11:00am.

He asks if I want to come into town with him. I grunt an affirmative and whilst he eats his breakfast I lie slumped over on the table top, head nestled in my arms, trying to ignore the world. It doesn’t work. One of the joys (note: sarcasm) of being a werewolf is the heightened senses. Your sense of smell you can pretty much live with – it’s not so bad unless you take a deep breath or you actually, you know, want to get a taste of everything wafting around in the immediate vicinity – but the hearing… God there’s just no way to turn off the hearing. Sure, I gotta focus if I want to, say, pick up on the conversation that’s happening down in reception between two ladies, but for the stuff like the guy shuffling around on the top floor or the water running through to pipes headed to someone’s shower, I pick up on that stuff naturally and without choice. It’s instinct, I guess. It’s my wolf’s way of keeping me safe – keeping it safe. It fucking sucks.

What with the constant noise filtering through to me and the lack of sleep, I’m feeling just grand.

I groan.
“Eren, are you okay?” Armin asks, genuine concern lacing his tone. I blink up at him blearily from the cocoon of my forearms.

“Yea,” I lie. My wolf doesn’t like showing weakness. He kicks up a fuss every time I do it. Showing weakness in a human form is like baring your stomach to another in wolf form. It’s not in our nature to do it. We don’t like it, neither of us.

“You look kinda…” he trails off, a little crease between his fair eyebrows. I shrug. I know I probably look like I feel, i.e. shit.


Armin winces in sympathy. I say I’ll take some aspirin or something although I know I won’t need it. That seems to appease him at least. I gesture to his empty bowl and ask if he’s done. Now that I know we’re going into the city I really want to get moving as soon as possible. I didn’t get to drive through it on my way here but my Alpha’s been here before and he says it’s not too big, not too noisy, and just kinda perfect for a college-going werewolf like myself. He helped me pick it out. Trost University might not be the best for my chosen course, but it sure as hell works well if you’ve got a little wofly problem that needs taking care of once a month.

We take the drive in Armin’s little Toyota because as soon as he sees my truck I can smell the fear on him, which I’ll grant him because yea the thing does rattle a little like the chassis’ coming lose and the driver’s side seat belt doesn’t really work anymore.

His car is light blue and smells vaguely like sweet popcorn and salty fries. It’s a good smell. A teenager smell. I don’t feel apprehensive about getting into a vehicle with him at all.

At least, not until he pulls away from the parking lot and I realise he’s not as calm about driving as he is about everything else.

Oh no, he takes to the road like a deranged duck takes to a runway. I wonder, briefly, if I will die in here, strapped into a metal four-wheeled coffin in baby blue with a blonde maniac behind the wheel. I grip my seatbelt tightly and pray to any god that’s out there that if (in all likelihood) we do end up pretzel-ed around a tree somewhere between here and Trost, my werewolf super-healing will be enough to save me from a very painful and very final death.

Armin drives one-handed as he flicks on the radio and tells me to pick a station. As a result of this minor distraction, he takes a roundabout way too fast, barely swerving the car at all, and the wheel hits the centre island, lifting us off the ground. I yelp, and my wolf is in my throat, my heart beating fast as my fingers scrabble at the control column. I choose a station at random as Armin reaffirms why speed limits were invented and I go back to gripping my life line of a seatbelt.

I acknowledge that Happy by Pharrell Williams is playing only because Armin starts to sing along and I laugh because this is how I will die. There is now no doubt in my mind. I shall die in a Toyota Aygo, driven by my own personal Charon, listening to Pharrell Williams sing about the one emotion I am most definitely not feeling at this time. I want to throw up, and as Armin brakes sharply at a red light, I very nearly do.

I watch the buildings blur around us and try to focus on anything other than my thundering pulse. I can feel my claws start to push through my nail beds and pierce the fabric of the belt. This is not good. It’s not like I’m actively in any immediate danger or anything – I know that – but the adrenaline running through my system right now is more than enough to force the shift on me and that is not good. If I shift and go furry inside a moving car I guarantee it won’t end well. The constant thoughts about dying probably aren’t helping.
I close my eyes and forcibly retract my claws, letting the stinging pain of freshly opened nail beds distract my mind from my surroundings. By the time I open my eyes again we’re slowing to a stop.

Oh sweet merciful traffic.

“Hold on,” Armin says. “I know a short cut that can get us past this.”

And then. he. just. cuts across lanes like it’s a perfectly legal and sane thing to do, and I yell as we swerve in front of oncoming cars and then we’re zooming down a narrow side street between buildings and I don’t think it was technically built for cars but as long as no pedestrians get hit I’m not going to mention it to this crazy motherfucker sitting beside me.

“Wanna hit Westgate?” he shouts to me over the music and my own garbled yelling. No, I think, no I do not want to hit anything. If we hit something we die. So I shout back;

“What?” and hope it comes out less panicked than I feel.

“Westgate,” he states, looking over at me as he takes a left turn and narrowly misses a boy on a bike. “You know, the shopping mall?”

“Eyes on the road, Armin. Eyes on the road!” Is all I can say in response to that. He laughs at my utter terror and nonchalantly performs what can only be described as a perversion of the laws of physics, rocketing us out from the narrow web of backstreets and once again onto the main road that bisects the city, valiantly ignoring the changing lights and only increasing our already outrageous speed to beat the red. I whimper.

“Ooh parking,” is all the warning Armin gives me before he’s once more swerving and braking sharply, flinging me sideways in my seat as he pulls into an underground parking garage. There are – mercifully – several spaces to choose from.

When I stumble from the car I’m surprised I don’t have motion sickness. Armin stretches out his back with a contented sigh on the other side of the car and it occurs to me that maybe he has no clue how terrifying his driving is to first-timers.

“So I know my driving can be a bit terrifying to first-timers,” he says, and okay scratch that he’s totally self-aware. I wheeze out a “yep” and he rubs the back of his neck sheepishly as we head for the exit, me on shaking legs.

“Sorry about that,” he mumbles. “My grandpa taught me how to drive.”

“Remind me never to get into a moving vehicle with your gramps,” I mutter. He laughs. I don't. “I’m serious. Never.”

We end up spending the whole day in Trost. This place is huge. Seriously. I know it’s nowhere near as big as actual proper cities, but for a country boy such as myself it’s a lot to take in regardless. Armin says he isn’t great with cities either, despite living in one, and this is perhaps the main contributing factor to us ending up lost somewhere very far from Westgate with little idea of how we got there, half an hour left on the parking ticket, and one partially eaten packet of chips between us as we stumble out from Le Recoin– a family-owned coffee house that gave us refuge from the winding streets for an hour or two.
“Where the hell are we?” Armin is the first to voice his concerns as we circle the square we’ve found ourselves stranded in, phone in hand, GPS working but not quite because we’re still completely lost.

“Uhh…” I peer up at the name of the street closest to us. “Grove Street.”

He punches it in and after a second I feel his confusion lift and turn into relief. So I guess he knows where we are now.

“Okay yea, I know where we are now. We’re on Grove Street.” I just stare at him for a good moment, waiting for the rest of that sentence. He gazes back at me, looking triumphant. Nothing more is forthcoming.

“And how do we get back…?” I prompt. He looks down at his phone once more, turns around and starts walking back the way we came.

“We need to find Eli Street,” he says as I tug the back of his shirt and barely manage to prevent him from colliding with an open shop door. Armin doesn’t even bother raising his eyes from his phone. “Then it’s a ten minute walk out onto 104th Avenue and then two left turns and we’re back in Westgate.” He smiles up at me as he pockets his phone and I congratulate his map reading skills because that seems to be what he’s waiting for.

“After this we could go out to Cedar Park,” he suggests. “We’ve still got half a day left and apparently Cedar Park is free for students.”

I hum an agreement as I spot the sign for Eli Street and steer him in that direction. Trost, it turns out, is a lot more difficult to navigate than I had first thought. It used to be a small town some hundred years ago, but since then different bits have been added, squeezed onto the land between the various reserves and national parks surrounding the area. I know from my Alpha that Cedar Park sits at the north of Trost just behind the residential district. It tapers off into a curving valley at the far end where Cedar Lakes shine between the trees.

“Sure,” I say. I know the lakes are a popular tourist attraction, one of the main reasons behind Trost’s sudden and recent development. I also know it’s where I’ll be spending a couple of my full moon nights just over three weeks from now. “If we ever get out of this unholy maze.”

“Of course,” he says, and I swear to god the guy giggles.

We do, somehow, manage to make it out of that unholy maze and back to the car and the relief I feel is swiftly replaced by impending doom because now we’re back at the car and that means more driving with Armin. I have never before sunk into a car seat so timidly. Armin tells me I’m on map duty and hands me his phone as he straps in.

The journey, I note with some strife, is quite long. Because we’re in the centre of the city and not going straight from the university we can’t take the back roads round. No, we have to take the busy main roads. You know, the ones Armin likes to speed on. I groan internally as I hunker down in the passenger seat and Armin searches for a radio station he can no doubt sing along to.

“So,” he says, looking over at me. I try not to look as if I could rip apart into the form of a wolf if the car backfires. “How are we getting there?”
I tell him.
And then I pray.

The journey this time round isn’t as bad as the first. Now that I know what to expect as the engine purrs to life and Armin’s converse-covered foot inches towards the pedals, I can proudly say that I do not imagine my death even once as we pull out of the garage and join the line of cars seeking a route through the busy heart of Trost.

Armin sings and I alert him to which exits we need to take and slowly I find myself enjoying the thrill of being flung about around corners and having to brace myself against the dash whenever he brakes. I mean, yea, it’s still absolutely fucking terrifying and more than once as we descend into the residential district do I find myself pushing down the urge to shift, but I have somehow come to appreciate that Armin’s driving isn’t the mark of madness, but perhaps just one more mark of genius.

Like, this guy is crazy smart. That much I picked up on over the course of the past two days, what with his random fact dropping in the coffee shop and his ability to calmly and confidently state the full list of extra courses he’s taking besides his beloved photography (I mean, who takes mechanics “for fun”?). So maybe his batshit driving skills aren’t all that batshit, but are actually planned out and thought through and timed perfectly?

I notice, as we miss yet another pot hole and swerve to avoid the cat perilously lounging on the concrete, that Armin seems to be in complete control of his actions. Gone is the notion that he has a death wish. Banished are the thoughts that he knows nothing of road safety. In their place rises the simply astonishing fact that Armin Arlert is a maniac on the road because he knows he is fully competent behind the wheel of his car and that whatever danger it might seem we are hurtling toward is nothing more than the mind of the petrified passenger presenting itself with the worst case scenario.

After that point I find I rather enjoy Armin’s frenzied gear shifts and tight turns. I sing along to the radio as well, no longer feeling the need to scream at every amber light we speed through. Another plus of me embracing the madness, so to speak, is that my wolf no longer feels threatened and has settled down considerably. Mercifully. Miraculously.

“If I get the sudden urge to hang my head out the window, would you hold it against me?” I shout to the blonde as he turns the music up. “Oh shit take a right here.” And we sway with the motion of the car, wondering if it looks as ludicrous from the outside as it is from in here.

“No way. I would join you,” he answers. I laugh. I can’t help it. Maybe it’s the stress of feeling so endangered earlier or from the jungle of a city we’ve left behind. Maybe it’s just because the thought of two nineteen year old boys with their heads sticking out the window as they drive precariously through an urban landscape in a light blue Toyota, singing and not giving a shit how out of tune it is, is just too good not to want to make happen. Still, it’s actually the best I’ve felt all day and if all it takes to raise my spirits is a couple near death experiences and then the epiphany that I was only overreacting to modern day genius, then so be it.

Armin Arlert cannot deter me by his violation of road safety laws, nor by his enthusiastic dashboard drumming. Anybody else and I might have ripped their throat out by now, but not Armin Arlert. If my Pack could see this they would think I’d gone mad.
They might just be fucking right.

We take the turn off onto the Cedar Park road and the trees swallow us up almost instantly. I open up the window and take a deep breath. Pine needles and damp earth and ferns and life. The woods always smell like life.

“Fuck, that smells fresh,” I sigh.

“Nice change to the city?” Armin guesses. I turn to him with a smile.

“Smells just like home.”

“You should bring your camera up here some time,” I say as I gaze out across the lake. We’re sitting on top of a large boulder, staking out the territory it had taken us a good five minutes to scramble on top of. It’s beautiful up here. No, don’t laugh, I’m not talking about some sappy romantic bullshit here, I literally mean it’s beauty at its finest. Just the way the light’s hitting the surface of the water and the sound of the forest thrumming with scurrying, chirping, humming life. It’s beautiful. Nothing can calm me like getting back to nature.

My Alpha says it’s the connection we have to our wolf side that makes it so. Our human side needs to live in society but our wolves need to run wild. It’s the balancing effect. It’s why the shift is forced on us a couple nights every month – so that we can let the wolf out and burn off some pent up supernatural energy.

My Alpha says we have to respect our wolves. If we don’t, he says, they drive us mad. It’s why he always wanted us to shift a couple times a month of our own accord. He says it’s healthy to welcome the wolf outside of the full moon. It strengthens the bond between our two sides and gives us a greater control over it.

It’s true.

Sitting here, letting my wolf flood my body, feeling him stretch his limbs just beneath the surface of mine, I revel in how good it feels to breathe in the scents of the forest, to be able to map out my surroundings without even having to train an eye to them. I feel the familiar itch to run, to push through my human skin and wrap my wolf around me and run.

But I hold back for now.

Now is the time to be human, and my wolf respects that as I respect him. He settles down, content to listen and scent and feel.

I open up my own ears, not those of my wolf, but my own, and listen to what Armin is saying. He’s talking about all the places he wants to visit someday. The world, he says, is a beautiful place, and he wants to capture it at its finest. He wants to experience it, he says. Not just see it through the lens of a camera like any other photographer, but really experience it. He wants to know what every photo is about. He wants to hear the stories the world has to offer.

Where will he start, I ask. The ocean, he says. He will start with the ocean. He smiles and I can sense the calm settling down around him, how at peace he is looking out over the lake. The sun is starting to set, I notice, and soon the space around us will be filled with orange light, and I wonder if that is why he wanted to come up here. He runs to nature to find peace, just like I do, only he
sees it through the eyes of an artist and I see it through the eyes of a wolf.

I think if I can respect this guy sitting next to me (yes in spite of his outrageous-yet-tactical driving) then perhaps my wolf can too. My Alpha taught me the importance of having Pack humans – they help ground us, pull us back into ourselves after we shift with the moon. Hell, my mom was one of them. A Pack human. Born into a family of werewolves, but not able to shift herself. I probably would have been one too, if I hadn't been bitten, and I've always been taught how important it is not to isolate myself as a result of that.

I find myself wanting to use Armin as an anchor like that. There’s just something about his calm manner and cool certainty that I know my wolf will draw from. If I spend the day after the full moon around Armin I know he’ll be able to ground me and keep me grounded.

I shake myself away from those thoughts because I’ve never felt the need to use someone like that before. Of course, there were always those human members of the Pack that ran with us, but I never felt the need to anchor myself to one so specifically. As a Pack our collective energy was settled by them. It was a whole different thing. Now I’m on my own, I realise it won’t be so easy.

Now I’m on my own, it won’t be easy at all.

Again, I shake off those thoughts and try to stop worrying about the future. Full moon will be fine, I tell myself. I’ve spent a full moon or two on my own before, I’ll be just fine.

No need to worry about it.

Just enjoy the sunset and then try to enjoy the ride back home.

And that’s exactly what I do.

When we get back there’s a box of food on the kitchen table and I can hear someone moving around in one of the rooms. It’s a girl, I realise as I hear her voice. She isn’t speaking English.

“Looks like we have a new neighbour,” I say to Armin. We peer into the box of food and note the various packages with foreign writing on them.

“What is that, Chinese?” I guess, wrinkling my nose. It looks genuinely headache-inducing.

“Japanese.” Of course Armin would know. This is exactly why I asked him.

“Ah, konnichiwa,” I say with a bow to my blonde friend. He shoves me to get me to shut up, but he’s laughing so at least my awful accent has some merit.

“Don't be rude,” he warns. "Let’s go say hi.”

Now, I know for a fact that our mystery neighbour is currently on the phone and probably doesn’t want to be disturbed, but I really have no way of communicating this to Armin without sounding like a total freak, so I hang back and let him be the one to knock on her door and thus the one at fault for interrupting her. I hear her hang up and then footsteps approaching.

The door swings open followed by a cloud of peppermint, and Armin’s greeting is met with a surprised blink. I don’t blame her. I, too, was taken aback by Armin’s overall brightness when we
“Hi,” she says back after a brief pause in which I assume she is trying to figure out what the polite way of responding to “hey I’m Armin and this is Eren and we’re your new neighbours” should be. Her breath smells of peppermint. She’s chewing gum. “I’m Mikasa.”

“You just arrive?” Armin asks.

“Yea.”

Wow. I can see she is a woman of words. Armin clearly picks up on this too, the clever little thing.

“If you need any help unpacking or sorting out your stuff in the kitchen then just let us know,” he offers gallantly. I don’t fail to pick up on the use of “us” in that sentence. I elect to ignore it. Gallantly.

“We’ll be in my room,” I say, hooking a thumb toward my door directly across from hers. She nods, smiles as us, and then retreats and closes the door softly.

“Huh,” Armin says.

“Yep,” I say.

“You think she’s naturally quiet or did we catch her at a bad time?” Armin says.

“Probably both,” I say.

We’re still staring at the closed door behind which our still-quite-mysterious neighbour is currently unpacking boxes.

“Let’s watch *Star Trek,*” I suggest, and Armin brightens up almost immediately.

“Marathon!” he caws as he swings open my bedroom door, and yea. I don’t get much sleep that night either, and from the sound of fingers tapping on laptop keys in the room across from mine, neither does Mikasa.
Narrowed Grey Eyes

Chapter Summary

Of strip Mario Kart and dancing. Or, the one where Mikasa shows what she's made of and a drunken encounter leaves Eren's head reeling.

Freshers Week hits off with a bang: Armin pounding on my door.

“Hey you up?” He yells. Like I can’t hear him. Hell, the whole block can hear him. I swing open my door and give him my most unimpressed glare. He offers me a smile of pure innocence and I swallow the urge to huff a growl. Growling, by most peoples’ standards I have noticed, is not an acceptably human response.

“It’s two in the afternoon, Armin,” I say. “Yea, I’m up.”

“Good. I need your help buying alcohol.”

Yea. I’m up.

We buy enough to inebriate a small herd of people. Or, you know, a flat of five uni kids one of whom is a werewolf. Armin is impressively succinct when it comes to buying drinks in bulk and surprisingly carefree with his money. His parents, he explains, are loaded. They also sent him off to uni with money specifically for purchasing large quantities of alcohol. It’s moments like this that I am glad we are friends.

Armin drives us back from the store and I listen to the bottles slide and rattle in the boot and wonder just why he called for my help in the first place, considering how little I’ve actually done thus far.

Yea then he parks up and hops out and just… leaves me. To carry the bags inside. If I weren’t superhuman in the strength department I would totally be feeling outraged right now. As it is, I unpack and transport and get it all up the kitchen in one go. Armin is stumped. I am smug. I laugh.

Mikasa wanders in, takes one look at the bags on the kitchen table, glances between the both of us and then leaves. I wonder if we’ve somehow managed to offend her or something, but then she’s back and has two bottles of vodka in hand. She adds them to our collection, smiles, and then nods at us in a way I know will come back to haunt me when we’re drinking. I hear Armin gulp.

We spend the day in relative peace until at six o’clock the last of our flatmates arrive at the exact same time and the girl – she introduces herself as Hannah with a dimple dipping smile – somehow convinces both Armin and myself that it would be a good idea to help them unload their cars. Mikasa does not make an appearance and I don’t blame her. How Hannah managed to get all of this into one car is beyond my knowledge.

She’s chatty, Hannah is. Franz – a jock complete with stereotypical jacket and all – matches her perfectly. He talks sports with me as I lug a box of what I assume to be rocks up the stairs to our flat. He’s clearly the type that assumes he’ll be listened to. Popular. Uses his looks and social
standing to fuel his confidence and his confidence to gain a higher social standing to suit his looks.

I nod along and pretend to know what he’s talking about when I honestly have no clue. Despite my fit physique (courtesy of werewolf-ism) I’m not a big fan of running after a ball or hitting things with sticks. It’s never a good idea to engage my competitive instincts, so I try to avoid competitive circumstance altogether.

“Hey Franz come and meet Armin,” Hannah calls, all bubbly and enthusiastic as she drags him over to a very strained-looking Armin. I supress a laugh. He spots my minute struggle and shoots me a glare. I hurry through the door into Franz’s room and try not to wheeze with silent laughter. This is what Armin gets for being too good-hearted and open.

We get their boxes and bags and Hannah’s tv and sound system up from the cars, Franz goes to wave his parents off, and Armin and I escape.

…Okay, so Mikasa shoots a hand out through her bedroom door as we’re walking past it and somehow manages to ensnare us both and pull us inside. But still.

“Never leave me alone with Hannah or I will end you,” she hisses, by way of greeting.

“It was nice of you to help unpack,” I snap back. Mikasa’s eyes narrow. I really do need to think before I speak more often. Armin takes a step backward. Traitor.

Mikasa shrugs. “They had you two. I would have been in the way.”

“Still could have introduced yourself,” I mutter. Another shrug.

“Didn’t want to. Now, can you two play Mario Kart or am I going to have to win all by myself?”

And oh that does it. Competitive mode activated.

“Let’s do this,” I growl.

“Eren I don’t think—” Armin starts to warn me off. I stop him with a heavy hand on his shoulder.

“It’s okay, Armin,” I say, because it is. I’m confident at my own Mario Kart prowess. “I think I can handle winning a race or two.”

I do not fail to notice the way Mikasa’s eyes flicker with something akin to zeal with just a hint of malice. My wolf bares its teeth in a mockery of a grin. I do the same.

“It’s on,” Mikasa states.

Two hours later and our shouting has caught the attention of Hannah and Franz who are now standing in the doorway with mouths gaping wide and disbelief rolling off them in waves. I don’t dare tear my eyes away from the screen to greet them. Armin introduces Mikasa, who grunts in return. It’s a gloriously uncaring sound.

“Um.” That’s Hannah. Uncertainty in her tone. “Why is Eren not wearing his jeans?”

“They decided to get serious,” Armin explains, which doesn’t really explain anything now does it?

“Right.” It’s clear from her voice that this is indeed the case.
“You’re serious?” Franz sounds like he’s grinning. “They’re playing strip Mario Kart?”

“You’re serious?” Franz sounds like he’s grinning. “They’re playing strip Mario Kart?”

“Yep.”

“Awesome. Who’s winning?”

“Eren.”

Mikasa snarls next to me and I have to say it is quite terrifying. To be fair, I’m only winning by one sock. We’re pretty evenly matched.


Mikasa turns her head to answer and in that split second I overtake her and release my bananas. Not a sentence I ever thought I would utter. Mikasa’s car spins out of control and I speed ahead, completing the final lap and effectively winning the game.

“Mikasa; jeans,” Armin instructs over her yelling. She begins to slip into Japanese as she yanks off her jeans and Franz wisely backs out of the room, nudging Hannah along with him.

Mikasa, now clad in naught but her surprisingly boyish underwear, is tying her hair back. I spare a glance at our blonde officiator. He whispers the words “you’re fucked” and I agree that yes, yes I am. If Mikasa’s visible muscles are anything to go by, I’m lucky if I’m getting out of this one alive. See, this right here is why the Pack calls me suicidal bastard. I just don’t know when to quit (or maybe I don’t know how to).

“Armin,” she says, abruptly ending what I assume was a string of foreign curses, given the look in her eye. Armin snaps to attention. Literally. He stands up straighter and everything.

“Bring me my vodka.”

“Oh fuck,” I gulp. But it is too late to back out now. I am still one sock and a shirt ahead of her. I have the upper hand. I can still win this thing.

I lose.

Spectacularly.

Mikasa drinks like a sailor and swears like one too and I realise that her shy demeanour is not shyness at all but simply a lack of anything to say to strangers. She is straight forward, utterly shameless to the point that it had me blushing, and scarly competitive and I lose at strip Mario Kart and I don’t even care. It gets a smile out of her and by this point we’re both drunk and Armin too but only because he has lost all hope in us and needed something to dull the pain of disappointment. By the time we emerge – redressed and rosy cheeked – Hannah and Franz have accumulated a group of people who introduce themselves as the flat above ours, and they’re drinking in the kitchen, preparing for the first night of Freshers Week with fervour.

“Are you coming to Sina?” Hannah asks, using my shoulder as leverage to boost her up so her mouth is on level with my ear. I try not to wince. Sensitive hearing isn’t the best around drunk people.

“Why not,” Mikasa says, a smile still ghosting her lips from her previous victory.
“Goooood! Mikana you should meet Emily,” Hannah says as she takes Mikasa by the arm and steers her away.

“It’s Mikasa.” I can hear the deadpan expression she’s pulling. “And I don’t really care.”

“Oh god,” Armin moans, forehead grinding into my shoulder where Hannah had previously gripped me. “She’s going to tear them apart.” We both look to the group of prettily dressed, overly cheerful girls sipping from Solo cups as they make room for the torpedo in their midst that is Mikasa. Her stance is relaxed but I can hear her blunt responses to their questions and I know she finds them irritating.

I heave a sigh. “Come on. We need to be a lot more drunk for this.”

“If things get out of hand you’re intervening.”

“Fair enough.” We all know I’m more physically suited for that task. “I’ll act as the meat shield and you talk her down?”

“Deal.” We head for the drinks table.

Club Sina is the university’s compulsory student venue. A large building, it is full to the brim with intoxicated underage students most nights and offers an array of themed evenings throughout the year. Franz’s friends have dutifully informed me that the staff don’t care if you’re obviously underage. As long as we don’t make trouble, they’re fine with making money.

I can feel the beat of the music seeping up through the soles of my feet as we approach, Armin hanging off my right arm, Mikasa off my left. We queue and flash our IDs and nobody bats an eye at our state. Armin is currently giggling to himself, Mikasa is talking to me about something but because she keeps slipping into Japanese every other sentence it’s hard to keep track of what exactly the topic is. Behind us in line, Hannah and Franz and cosying up to one another. My wolf is hidden behind the pleasant buzz of just enough vodka and I’m fairly certain I have a smile permanently plastered across my face.

Armin pokes at my cheek. “You’re happy,” he concludes. I note the pink dusting his high cheekbones as I flick his hair back from his forehead.

“You’re drunk,” I return. He giggles once more. Armin, I have decided, is a giggler by nature. It is utterly adorable and entirely disarming and if I wasn’t so drunk my wolf would be purring. Or, you know, whatever it is that wolves do that’s similar.

“I’m happy too,” Mikasa speaks up, leaning around me to grin at Armin. She has perfectly straight teeth and that’s not fair. Mikasa is visually flawless. Her blunt and slightly aggressive-when-pressed personality contrasts this and makes her a deadly attractive person. Thank god I’m more into guys than girls or I would be in line to have my soul crushed by her, no questions asked.

“We’re all happy because we’re drunk,” Armin says, and then he’s off giggling and Mikasa is doing the same, peppermint gum visible between her back teeth when she throws her head back and laughs properly. Armin leans up and cups his hand around my ear, pulling me off balance and making us all stagger to the right.

“We should get her drunk more,” he stage whispers. I think it was meant to be a legitimate whisper but somewhere along the line his little drunken mind messed up the volume control. I suppress my laugh. “She’s less scary.”
“Hey Mikasa,” I say. She blinks up at me. “Armin says you’re less scary when you’re drunk.”

The indignant squawk from Armin as he drops my arm in betrayal is totally worth it and I breeze past him with Mikasa telling me that she is not scary, it’s just her resting face, and we walk into the noise and heat of the club with childish excitement ricocheting between us.

Now, I’m not going lie to you, I was a little hesitant about the prospect of Freshers Week, mainly because it’s the week wherein students drink themselves into a pitiful state of being each night and do really fucking dumb things. Werewolves, as a general rule, are funny creatures when it comes to alcohol.

A lot of people assume that werewolves can’t get drunk. (Don’t ask me why, I have no idea.) It just simply isn’t the case. Werewolves can get drunk. It might take us a little extra than the average human could take, but it does happen. Some choose not to drink, however, because alcohol in the system can mess with our wolfy side a tad.

Point being; it numbs the connection between the two.

A guy in my Pack once started to shift at a party. He didn’t notice it at first until he glanced at his hand and saw the claws and that was when he started to panic. And oh boy, once the panic sets in, you’re fucked. The real key to controlling the shift is controlling your emotions – remaining totally at ease, wanting the shift to happen. If you fight the wolf, the wolf fights you. This guy fought. He fought and he lost and well… you can guess how that party ended for him. Now he doesn’t drink, period.

I drink. (Oh come on, I’m a college kid with a wolf Pack, of course I drink!) I’ve never had a near-shift scare and I never plan to.

Still, that confidence in my own abilities didn’t stop me from being a little nervous about subjecting myself to the heart of a club. Loud music, alcohol haze, bodies packed in tightly together under the flashing lights. It would be a nightmare if I wasn’t willing and under the influence.

I try not to let my heart rate get too high, regardless.

Armin convinces Mikasa we need Jägerbombs because haha very funny that’s Eren’s name. Mikasa thinks it’s a wonderful idea and promises me we can dance afterwards, like the lack of dancing is deeply upsetting me or something. Judging by the way Armin is bouncing on the spot as he orders for us at the packed bar, I assume she said it for his sake too.

Somewhere after the second hour of dancing and (much needed) drinking, Hannah and Franz find us dancing and singing amidst the mass of people, and with them they bring another herd of strangers. I was right about them being the popular type. They seem to attract people to them. Hannah’s laughter is high and light. Effortless. Like she’s practiced it purely for a situation like this. Franz has a smirk that makes his eyes narrow just right and I catch a hint of arousal in the air around us. I know it’s only going to get worse as the night goes on and the dancers get friendlier toward each other.

I need a breather.

I escape the noise of the bar and head out to the bathroom, shoving open the door and blinking against the harsh white lighting. Two guys are making out by the sinks and I have to push past
them to get to the urinals. I try to ignore just how drunk I am. How I hadn’t noticed it before I
don’t know, but now I can feel I’m swaying on my feet and it’s a little hard to focus on more than
one thing at a time. I swallow and the back of my tongue tastes like ten other peoples’ drinks.

I finish up and as I turn around to leave a guy is suddenly in my space, pushing me back against the
wall and the first thought going through my head is *I’m not drunk enough for this.*

I must have said it out loud because the guy hisses right up against my ear; “If you thought for one
*second* that I’d waste my time on a filthy werewolf then you’ve got another thing coming.”

Yep. That’s right. He said werewolf. *Werewolf.* I have to check and make sure that I’m still human-
looking because wolfing out in the campus club is so not how I want to start off my first semester.

“How,” I manage, but then the guy’s hand is around my throat and my feet are off the floor and
there’s a pipe digging into my back and I don’t know how he’s managed it because he’s a lot
smaller than me. His narrowed eyes are dark grey and they’re glaring up at me and I swear to god I
have never been more confused and I’m actually kind of scared right now because *how?*

“I’m going to say this once. If I ever see you again, you are dead. Understand, mutt?” he snarls,
literally *snarls.* If I were sober right now my wolf would be pushing to the surface, anticipating the
shift, but I’m drunk and I’m powerless and all I can do is wheeze an affirmative and then my feet
are hitting the floor again and I’m staggering forward but when I look up he’s gone. I’m alone in
an empty bathroom in some club with trashy music seeping through the walls. I’m drunk,
confused, a little afraid and I’m pretty sure there’s a bruise ringing my throat. *So* not the breather I
wanted.

I feel the need to throw up but I don’t think I can make it to a stall so I just count backwards from
ten instead. By the time I reach one Armin is pushing open the bathroom door and from the way
his smile falls I’m fairly certain that I look as bad as I feel. He suggests we head back. If I wasn’t
still trying to catch my breath I would suggest he marry me.

We stumble back to the dorms, Mikasa, Armin and I. I’m shaking but not because of the cool night
breeze. Armin and Mikasa are singing something, swaying from side to side as they walk, and I try
to laugh for them like nothing’s wrong, but my evening has been effectively ruined by a pair of
grey eyes and that one word.

*Werewolf.*

That night I don’t sleep so good. My dreams are full of snarling guys with grey eyes and it sounds
like the world’s worst cliché but when I wake up with a shout lodged in the back of my still-aching
throat I know they were more like nightmares. The closest thing to a nightmare I’ve had since
those months after I got turned. That’s saying something.

As I gingerly drift off back to sleep the questions start back up again. Who was he, how had he
known, why was he so angry, why was he not scared, did he seriously mean what he had said…
and on and on until sleep once again takes hold, my wolf whining and wanting to curl in on
himself, lick his wounds.

In the morning I had forgotten all about it. Alcohol has a way of conveniently blocking out the
less-than-savoury memories of a night out. Besides, even if I had thought about it, I wouldn’t have
been able to pick the guy out of a crowd. I doubt I would have recognised him at all.
My Werewolf Senses Are Tingling

Chapter Summary

Eren finds himself stalked by the supernatural, Armin shares a tale or two, and Mikasa has connections to the mafia.

Oh thank blissfully supernatural genetics that werewolves don’t get hangovers.

It’s a Wednesday and I wake up early, not exactly feeling refreshed, but certainly feeling more clear-headed than Mikasa who is currently slumped over her cereal at the messy kitchen table. I rub between her shoulder blades and she deflates further, groaning in defeat.

“Told you to slow down last night,” I murmur, trying not to sound too smug about it. (I know; I’m a cruel person. Creature of the night and all that.) Another groan.

“The last shot was a mistake,” she concedes.

“The last five,” I correct.

Mikasa is dangerously competitive. When it comes to drinking, she is also surprisingly robust. She did win the game, in the end, but at what cost, Mikasa? At what cost?

“Have to go food shopping,” I mutter as I open the refrigerator door and glumly take in the half loaf of bread, tub of butter, opened pack of pepperoni, and bag of spinach that Mikasa insists she will eat at some point but hasn’t actually made any noticeable effort to thus far.

Looks like I’m having toast. Fun. I grab the bread and butter and bump the door closed with my hip.

“I have to go to the gym later,” Mikasa whimpers, and I smell the misery and self-loathing spike the air behind me. I cackle. Last night was pretty impressive. Mikasa may or may not have sung a rendition of Wrecking Ball whilst shoving herself in between Hannah and Franz. She may or may not have then proceeded to do it every time she saw them standing together after that.

Yea, Hannah and Franz are a thing now? Apparently? Well, I mean, if judging by the amount of times I’ve had to plug my head phones in just to block out the sound of them having sex two doors down is anything to go by, then yea. They are a thing. Super hearing sucks. It sucks so much that I’ve heard Hannah suck and no. That is not something you ever want to come home to. Believe me.

They’re not up yet. Thankfully. Their morning routine of remaining bound at the hip until after their second cup of coffee gives me cavities. But whatever, I’m happy for them. Totes happy.

I feel deeply sorry for myself, but eh, when do I not?

I cock my head to one side to check on Armin’s progress. I focus. I can hear him breathing deeply from his room, which means he’s still asleep. Well, at least he didn’t choke on his vomit and die, I
guess. That’s always a plus. Looks like I can’t be relying on him to come food shopping with me, though.

The toaster pops and Mikasa raises her head at the sound of food. I swear to god her ears actually prick up. Clearly cereal isn’t cutting it for her. I note the smudged makeup around her eyes and guess she must’ve collapsed on her bed last night without bothering to take it off. This is not like her. She’s not even chewing gum this morning. What gives?

She makes grabby hands for my toast. I tap the back of one grabbing hand with my butter knife and she retreats with a hiss. I stick my tongue out like the mature young adult I am.

“So,” I say, gesturing at her untouched bowl of slowly disintegrating cereal. “What was that supposed to be?”

“Frosties.” She glowers down at the mush. Huh. Yep, not looking much like Frosties anymore. How long has she even been up for?

“How long have you even been up for?”

“Since 6:00.”

Wow.

“But we got in at 3:00,” I say, slowly. “That’s like… three hours of sleep, Kasa.” Maths isn’t my strong point, okay? Don’t judge me here, people.

She narrows her eyes at the nickname but as she doesn’t comment I assume it’s been accepted. She sighs, poking at the sludge with her spoon. It sort of… bounces. Gross.

“I got woken up by Armin crashing through my door and singing Wrecking Ball.”

Huh. Totally slept through that one. But wait! Mikasa has more to add.

“He was wearing nothing but socks and pink lacy underwear. I don’t even know where he got them from.”

We both take a minute to let that sink in, toast hanging from my mouth, a tortured look in her eye. I decide to investigate further into this later. Once I’ve had something decent to eat.

The sound of someone getting out of bed catches my attention. It’s Armin. I pull my phone out and shoot off a text to him

[To Armin]: pink lacy panties?

I sit and wait, anticipating the moment when he realises.

I hear a long drawn out “oh god” from his room and have to bite my knuckle to stifle the laugh. Mikasa misses it.

[From Armin]: WHO TOLD YOU ABOUT THAT

This time I laugh outright. Mikasa glances up and I obligingly slide my phone to her. She grins toothily and taps out a text back to him. This time the swearing from his room is audible to us both.

He appears in the kitchen doorway a minute later, wrapped in his duvet with his usually-well-styled hair in an adorable mess, murder in his eyes and a finger pointed directly at Mikasa.
“Traitor,” he hisses.

She crooks a smile that speaks of mischief.

“That’s what you get for waking me up, princess.”

Armin’s squeak of indignation is almost, but not quite, lost beneath my laughter which finally spills over from where it has been burning my lungs. He groans and clutches his head, muttering a “too hungover for this shit” before retreating back to his room.

“And I will never let him forget,” Mikasa says, smug and evil and I find myself both respecting and fearing her.

“Will you come with me food shopping if I buy you breakfast?” I ask, once my laughter has died down a little and I can actually get the words out. She glances between her bowl of mush and my remaining slice of slightly-too-toasted toast and raises an eyebrow. “I mean a proper breakfast. There’s a café Armin and I… found.”

Found? We were kinda lost at the time. We didn’t really find it, we sort of fell through the door, relieved to sit down whilst we tried to figure out where the goddamn hell we were. Eh, details.

“If you can set me up with decent coffee and nothing greasy, I will be your little errand bitch for today, yes,” she says.

“Good.” I nod and stand, dump the poor toast in the bin and toss my plate into the sink. I pause in the doorway. “Oh, and you might want to sort out your face, Kasa. Your makeup’s a mess.”

I escape before she can throw something at me.

The day passes slowly, uneventfully, averagely.

Mikasa and I shop, eat, and then shop some more because she decides I’m going to the gym with her and I need actual things to wear for that. In the end she lures me off to the gym for two hours and I watch her lift weights and wonder if she has some connection to the mafia. Or like, ten older brothers who used to wrestle with her growing up.

(She denies it all.)

By the time we get back to the dorms, Hannah and Franz are gone and Armin is still in bed. We stand outside his door for a good ten minutes and discuss in heated whispers whether or not we should wake him up gently or… not so gently. We go with the former. We’re nice people. Well, I am. Mikasa grumbles about it and I elbow her so she shuts up.

Armin’s room smells like misery and alcohol sweat and that half-empty energy drink on the side. I open the window whilst Mikasa gets Armin to open his eyes.

“We come bearing gifts of soup,” I say as he blinks up at us blearily. We actually bought it specifically for him because apparently soup helps with hangovers (Mikasa says so and I trust her weird mafia judgement). He groans and rolls back over.

“Armin, come on,” I say. “Get up already.” I shake his shoulder. He graces us with another groan
and burrows further into his pillows.

Mikasa cracks her knuckles and shoves me aside.

What happens next I shall never speak of again, but I’m pretty sure Armin’s screech pierces the sound barrier. The next second he’s on the floor and Mikasa is walking out the door and I don’t know how I should be reacting.

It takes some coaxing to get him to come out of his room after that. He keeps crying that Mikasa is lying in wait. I assure him she is not and get him to eat some soup because it’s mid-afternoon and he’s being ridiculous.

He buries his face between my shoulder and neck when he’s done and informs me he has a headache.

He continues to inform me he has a headache for the next hour even after I manage to extract myself from his clutches and leave the room. He simply follows me. Threat of Mikasa forgotten and all in the wake of his great need to moan.

Hannah and Franz get back and they fawn over Armin who soaks up their sympathy like a goddamn sponge. He whinges and whines and Hannah coos and coddles and I grit my teeth because by this point Armin isn’t the only one with a headache.

I go out to buy paracetamol. (Honestly, it’s either that or succumb to the madness.)

The walk from our dorm block to the campus store is brief but much appreciated. The queue snaking away from the checkouts inside is less so. I find the drugs I’m looking for and resign myself to my fate of a long wait.

“Five of us and no one thought to pack pain killers. What the fuck,” I mutter under my breath as I turn the box over in my palm, reading the back for lack of anything better to do and musing at how unprepared the lot of us actually are for living without mature adults around.

It is as I stand there in a slowly moving queue, questioning my own levels of maturity, that I slowly become aware of the hairs on the back of my neck standing on end. I get the distinct impression that someone standing behind me means trouble.

I know this feeling.

I don’t like this feeling.

I tense, swallowing down the wolf that’s crawling its way up my throat in the shape of a growl.

See where I’m going with this yet?

It’s common knowledge amongst us supernatural folk that there’s a way to tell a werewolf from a human without, you know, angering and/or harming them.

Sniff ‘em.

Nah, I’m kidding. (ish? Like, it would work but it would also look pretty weird so don’t do that shit.)

It’s actually this feeling we get. Like being watched, but it’s more intense than that. Like someone nearby knows what you are and they’re trying to catch your eye and get that message across.
My Alpha says it’s the supernatural energy flowing through us reacting to the presence of another, but I think that’s some hippie wolf bullshit so no thank you, Alpha. One of my other Packmates said it was like our metaphorical wolves are sniffing each other’s butts. That’s probably closer to the truth.

Whatever it is, it’s unavoidable if you’re in close proximity to another werewolf. You don’t even have to be looking for one another, it just happens. Like my wolf is perking its ears up and forcing me to listen.

I stubbornly do not listen. I ignore all the signals he’s sending my way and focus on being a pretty little human instead. I don’t want to give in and look over my shoulder. There are too many people in this store for me to single out the one with the wolfy mojo and I can’t be dealing with a lupine encounter today.

I just have to get to the front of the line, pay for my damn drugs, then get out of here.

Yea.

Easier said than done, though.

It takes another ten minutes for the two – yes, two, thank you satan – cashiers to finish serving everyone before me and by that point I’m feeling really fucking uncomfortable. If I were in wolf form right now, I would be growling and baring my teeth, ears pressed back against my skull. As it is, my senses are all working at maximum efficiency and that’s not really helping with the headache situation I got going on. I do well to ignore it, but when I determine that my cashier ate a cucumber and ham sandwich for lunch several hours ago, I decide I really need to get out of there before I break myself in some way.

I pay and practically run out the door, pulse racing.

My wolf complains to me all the way back to the dorms that I should have stood and confronted the other, fought it out, staked my claim of this territory.

I tell my wolf to chill the fuck out.

Armin tells me he’s feeling all better now.

I take a goddamn shower.

It’s two days later and I haven’t forgotten about the mystery werewolf incident but I haven’t done anything about it either and I don’t plan to.

That is until I feel the distinct prickling on the back of my neck again and my wolf goes back to growling inside my head. It’s annoying. Really freaking annoying. I haven’t had to deal with this kind of crap in years, thanks to having an established Pack back home. My Alpha did say I might have another wolf on campus, what with is being a good place for us to rock up and all.

Foolishly, I had shrugged it off. I never considered the implications of what having another wolf on campus would mean.

(It means I’m feeling extra paranoid and antsy, if you’re wondering.)
“Hey Eren.” Armin’s voice jogs me out of my thoughts and I snap back to reality. “You okay? You zoned out there.”

“Yea, yea.” I hope it sounds convincing. “Just thinking about shit.”

“What sort of shit?” Mikasa asks, popping her gum. I wince at the sharp sound.

“Just complicated home stuff.” Not exactly a lie, now is it?


“What the fuck, Kasa, are you okay?” Armin interrupts, looking shocked. Mikasa shrugs. I smirk at the use of her nickname. Oh yea, that one’s sticking.

“’M just curious,” she says, sipping her coke.

“Curiosity killed the cat,” I point out.

“But satisfaction brought it back,” Armin responds. I shoot him a dirty look. Just whose side is he on anyway? He feigns innocence.

“What? I’m curious too. I want to know what kind of dark things my new friends are involved with.”

“Kasa’s family is part of the Japanese mafia,” I say. The look on Armin’s face is priceless. His head whips round to look at Mikasa. She smiles mysteriously and raises an eyebrow.

“He’s kidding. Right?” The doubt and mild horror in the air around him makes me chuckle.

Mikasa shrugs languidly.

By the time our food arrives, Armin has been convinced that the Ackermans are international weapons dealers from a less-than-legal background. Mikasa now has connections to the yakuza and her brother is in hiding because he cut someone’s head off.

“You’re joking.” Armin shakes his head. “I’m not going to believe you. Either of you.”

Mikasa and I burst out laughing at the indignantly tortured look on his adorable little face. He slouches in his seat and pouts.

“You guys are so full of shit.”

It is at this point, from the far side of the restaurant we are currently sitting in, that I hear the word I have been dreading all week.

Werewolf.

I tense up immediately, fork halfway between my plate and mouth, neck muscles itching with the urge to just turn and see. See who it is, see who this mystery guy is. My hearing locks in on his voice, the words “sitting with the blonde guy and Asian girl” floating to me. My breathing hitches but I force it to keep even as I listen.

A girl’s voice chimes in, “Ooh the one with brown hair? D’you think he knows we’re here?”

So there’s two of them. My wolf urges me to turn and confront the problem. Challenge them. I eat
another bite of my meal, try to calm him down a little. Their conversation continues behind me.

“He looks tense. He’s probably listening.”

I blink. This guy is good.

“So what do we do?”

*Please don’t do anything stupid please don’t do anything stupid.*

“Nothing. He feels stronger than us. Maybe an Alpha.”

Okay this is the point where I would usually turn and attack. Anyone knowing I’m an Alpha is normally enough to do it. My wolf lashes out, rakes his claws against my skin and I bite my tongue against the spike of pain. I close my eyes and count backwards from ten, force myself to calm down, remind myself where I am.

*Public place public place Armin and Mikasa public place don’t attack.*

“He doesn’t look like an Alpha,” the girl says. My claws are starting to push through my nail beds. I put down my fork and clench my hands in my lap, ignore the aching of my jaw and spine as they start to burn. I’m relatively good at holding back a shift, but there’s always a point of no return and I’m getting dangerously close to it.

“He’s young,” the boy comments. He has a southern accent. I focus on the little details, give my wolf something else to do than tear me apart in its haste to defend. “But there’s a lot of energy hanging about him. We should go. If he’s an Alpha at this age then that means he was strong enough to bring one down and he won’t like it if we approach him first.”

Oh thank god yes go. Go go get out of here and let me breathe again.

The sound of chair legs scraping back. Footsteps. My wolf acknowledges the retreat and I keep him in as close to the centre of me as possible, not letting him have his wish to give chase.

And then they’re gone.

They’re gone and they know and there’s two of them and I nearly shifted in a goddamn restaurant because he *knows* I’m an Alpha. That’s five years of repression and guilt and denial right there shoved out the window.

Fuck. I think I’ve lost my appetite.

Nothing happens for a week. Fresher’s is over and classes have begun and I’ve settled into my course fairly well. Mikasa drags me out to the gym at ridiculous hours of the day and I let her think I’m only as strong and fast as the next guy. Armin and I play video games in the evening until Hannah and Franz knock for us and invite us all upstairs to chat and drink with floor three. I learn all their names and what courses they’re on and I catch Mikasa laughing openly with the girls a few times.

I begin to feel the stress of last week leave my muscles.

I mean, I’m having reoccurring dreams where I’m chasing after two wolves through the moonlit
I wake up each morning, eyes gold and glowing in the dark, wolf craving to run. I suppose it has been a while since I’ve shed my skin.

Armin tells me about his photography course, asks me if I want to go back up to Cedar Lakes with him tomorrow. I agree with great enthusiasm, even going so far as to offer to drive.

I need to get off campus and out of my own head and out into open woodland again. I need a distraction – both halves of me do.

We leave late afternoon, planning on catching the sunset like last time. Armin says he wants to focus on the complexity and variety of natural lighting this term. He tells me about some of the best spots in the States for capturing the depth of light on camera. The combination of his voice and our surroundings help to calm my wolf and for the first time in what feels like ages I am able to relax in my own skin once again.

We park up and get out and retrace our steps to the boulder by the lake. The water is calm today, birds flitting across it, picking off the flies hanging low above the surface in the evening air. I settle in as Armin does his creative thing, listening to the forest breathe around me and soaking up the last of the late summer sun. I lean back on my forearms, lift my chin and close my eyes. Relax.

“We should go and walk around Atlas Lake,” Armin says as he flicks through the pictures he’s taken, deleting a few in quick succession.

Atlas Lake?” I close my eyes again, letting him explain as I know he will.

“Yea, it’s the smallest lake here, which kind of doesn’t make sense considering the myth of Atlas and all. But apparently it’s got some hidden beaches and I want to get some lower angled shots, if that’s okay? It’s not too far from here. I checked the map and everything.”

I honestly can’t deny this guy a thing. He perks up as soon as I agree. The emotions Armin gives off are always somewhat contagious. I grin back at him because I can’t not when he’s throwing off all these goddamn emotions. Taste the rainbow, right? I take his camera from him as he skitters down the side of the boulder and jump nimbly down after him.

“So why is it called Atlas lake?” I ask as we stroll through the trees, the air cooling the further in we tread.

“Cedrus atlantica,” Armin says. He does not expand upon this. I start to feel like I’m missing something crucial. In the end I give in and ask for more information than that.

“It’s the scientific name for Atlas Cedar. I looked it up and all the Cedar Lakes are named after one type of cedar tree. It would make sense.”

“And of course it makes sense that you just know the scientific name for a tree off the top of your head.” I roll my eyes. He giggles.

“I read,” is all he says in response to that.

Atlas Lake is stunning. The sun is setting beautifully above the tree line, leaves dusted gold and orange as they sway gently from the tips of thick branches. The lake – a perfect oval that Armin assures me is totally natural – is set deep into the ground, the earth sloping down to touch the shoreline. As Armin predicted, there are beaches dotted about around the perimeter, hidden from forest, listening to them howl back to me, calling me Alpha and yipping as we race through the undergrowth, but at least they’re not nightmares. Right? Think positive.
the outside by a fan of bushes and trees. It’s a bit of a scramble down the bank, avoiding roots and branches as we go, but when we reach the sand it’s well worth it.

Armin looks like a little kid on Christmas morning. I look at the sand below my feet and decide to build a sandcastle.

“Hey, fun fact: I’ve never been to a proper beach before,” I say. Armin turns to stare at me, eyes wide and lips pressed together in a thin line. His nostrils flare. I don’t dare break eye contact.

“Never ever?” He asks it slowly and carefully, like I’m an animal that’ll spook if he makes any sudden movement. Hell, some days I am.

“Never ever.”

“You had a very deprived childhood,” he says, and the sincerity and pity in his tone makes me laugh because well not really, I mean my childhood was pretty standard and then boom werewolves happened. Can’t exactly blame anyone for that huge cockup.

“I lived in Seattle for a while when I was little,” Armin offers, a little smile ghosting across his lips as he glances down at the screen of his camera. He huffs and comes to sit down next to me, camera carefully kept away from the sand.

“My parents have moved around a lot because of work. They’re lawyers but they’ve always been competitive. I don’t know how they managed to stay together for so long... Anyway, we’ve lived in a few big cities and when I was young we had a house in Seattle, close to the coast. My grandpa lives down there so I get to go back every now and again. My parents were always busy back then but he used to take me down to walk along the beach and collect driftwood almost every day.”

He’s staring out across the lake. There’s another beach settled amongst the trees opposite us but something’s telling me his mind is elsewhere. There’s the tang of nostalgia hanging about him. My wolf whines.

“You miss it.” It’s not a question and he knows it.

“I miss the beach, yea, and I miss being able to pretend my family was okay. I miss my gramps, too. I don’t miss the winters, though. Damn, it could get cold.” He laughs. “And the snow…”

“Ever been snowed in?” I ask.

He shakes his head. “No, never.”

“Ooh you’re lucky.” I lean back on my elbows and grin as his eyebrows rise. “Back home we get a lot of snow in winter. One winter we woke up and we were all snowed in. My dad’s a doctor and he kept getting called into town but because we lived on the outskirts all the roads were utterly useless to us and he had to hike it. Mum and I spent all day digging out a trench around the house and by the time my dad got back he was soaked through. He was so ill that winter it was unbelievable. We had to get my Uncle Hannes out to bring us food. But then the snow got worse and he had to stay for the rest of the week. My mum threw a fit.”

He laughs, real and deep. “Oh god, how old were you?”

“About twelve?” Two years before The Incident and two years before I found out what Uncle Hannes really was. (Hint: werewolf.)

Armin grins and delves into a story of his own about the summer he spent in New York. It was
when he started to take an interest in photography, documenting the city so he had memories to take with him when they inevitably moved again. I listen to him, his voice lilting above the rippling water lapping at the shore, the sound of walkers treading the trails ringing the pond. The sun disappears beyond the horizon, light leaking from the sky, and I eventually suggest we start to head back.

“Yea, sure, you go on ahead,” Armin says. “I need to go pee.”

So I set off. I remember the way, our trail still fresh for me to track. I trust Armin to be able to catch up to me and take the time alone to let my wolf off his leash a little. My eyes flicker to the gold all werewolves wear and the darkness under the trees doesn’t cause me any problems.

I can hear people walking, talking, lost in their own worlds as they skirt the trails through the trees. I wonder that they would do if I turned full wolf and walked out into their line of sight. My wolf wants to run, I know. It’s tempting, actually, if only to see the looks on their faces.

It’s as I am gently chuckling along to my thoughts that I hear footsteps some way behind me, snapping twigs and pine needles, getting closer. I assume it’s Armin so I wait for him to catch up.

Can you guess what happens next?

My werewolf senses start tingling.

I turn.

A shout of “Sasha no!” is all I hear before I’m being tackled to the ground by a girl with brown hair who’s just come barrelling out of the underbrush. Her teeth are showing in the kind of grin I’ve seen a hundred times before, eyes glowing gold and excited.

My wolf supplies me with the necessary information – beta, young, make her submit – and then I’m rolling as my back hits the ground. I pin her beneath me, one hand around her throat, one on her stomach, holding her down, careful not to let my claws catch her skin.

I growl low in my throat, heart racing as my wolf encourages me to let him do what he does best in these situations. Come out on top. He’s Alpha. We’re Alpha. We don’t back down from a challenge like this.

More footsteps sound behind me and I know it’s another werewolf but I don’t turn to face it, I don’t take my eyes away from the one beneath me. I growl a little louder, teeth lengthening, sharpening, eyes glowing vibrant and feral. I know how to scare, I can tell you that.

The girl whimpers, whines, tilts her chin back to bare her throat, arms to her sides. She shifts her gaze off me and my wolf acknowledges it for the act of submission it is.

“I won’t, don’t worry.”

“I wasn’t challenging you,” he says, voice calm. Soothing. His presence beside me – not too close but not too far that he can’t intervene at a second’s notice – is one of calm certainty. He’s confident he can handle a situation like this one; an unknown Alpha pinning down his friend. We’ll see.
“She tackled me to the ground without warning,” I growl. The girl – she must be Sasha – whines again, closing her eyes. I can smell the swirl of regret and anxiety she’s feeling and loosen up my hold on her neck a little. Anxiety turns to hopefulness in an instant.

“She didn’t mean to challenge you. She just didn’t think it all the way through,” the guy explains. He sounds apologetic. I get it. I’m the big bad wolf – an Alpha. We’re historically not known for our patience or our understanding. He doesn’t know I’ve never really acted as an Alpha before. Now would be a good time to show them that I’m not about to start acting all authoritative and dangerous. Yea, good idea Jaeger.

“If I let you up, will you explain why you thought that was a good idea?” I ask, my teeth returning to their normal shape, retracting back up into my gums with a shiver of pain. My wolf is sulking, I can tell.

She nods and I let her up, turning my attention to the guy beside me. The first thing I notice is his hair – shaved into a short mohawk that he somehow manages to pull off, it’s grey as a wolf’s coat and can’t be natural. I push that thought aside for later as the girl starts talking. She sounds younger than she looks.

“So, um, I’m sorry I ran into you like that Mr. Alpha, but I just wanted to talk to you because, you know, you’re the first other werewolf I’ve met that wasn’t Connie’s family. I’m sorry.” She hangs her head sheepishly and I’m still a little stuck on the whole Mr. Alpha thing but then the guy butts in and I don’t have a chance to correct her.

“I’m really sorry,” he says, like he expects he’s offended me. I sigh, shift my eyes back to normal and stand up, brushing off my jeans.

“It’s fine,” I say, and I mean it. “I’m not exactly a proper Alpha or anything. I shouldn’t have pinned you.” I offer the girl a hand up and smile apologetically. She smiles back although it is a little hesitant.

“I’m Eren.”

“Connie,” the guy says, nodding, hands stuffed in his pockets.

“I’m Sasha and I’m really really sorry. I’m kind of new to the werewolf thing.” Her eyes are still golden, gleaming in the dark of the forest. I shake my head.

“Don’t be. I should’ve been in better control.”

“Hey, you’re pretty fucking in control, man,” Connie says, and I can tell he’s genuinely impressed. Maybe glad. “I thought you’d rip her throat out or something.”

“What?!” Sasha squeaks.

“Yea, I mean, that’s what Alphas normally do, right?”

I blink at him.

“You serious?” I ask. I have to be sure. He looks serious.

Now he looks sheepish.

“Um. Haven’t really met many Alphas that weren’t my mom, but that’s what she said they would do if I pissed them off.”
I blink again.

“I blink again.

“Huh. Don’t know how to break this to you but only the really batshit crazy ones do that.”

“Please tell me you’re not batshit crazy,” Sasha pleads. I laugh, the last of my stress leaving me as my wolf takes in their scents and grudgingly accepts that they’re not a threat, that Sasha submitted without a grumble and didn’t challenge me further. I damn near heave a sigh of relief because holy fuck could that have gone a hell of a lot worse.

“I’m not batshit crazy,” I assure her. “I’m not really a proper Alpha.”

“Really?” Now Connie sounds surprised. “But I thought…”

“Oh, yea, no.” Fuck how do I explain this? “Technically I am an Alpha, I guess. But I’ve been part of another’s Pack since I turned. Never done much Alpha-ing myself, ya know?” Yea my personal life is a mess. I should look into that at some point, get it all sorted out.

“Wow. That’s cool.” They both said it at the exact same time and that was creepy.

“So does this mean we can be your new Pack?” Sasha asks, grinning expectantly, metaphorical tail wagging. I almost choke.

And then Armin arrives and holy fuck do I deflate like a goddamn balloon in relief. No more talking about Packs, please. Not going to do the Alpha thing at uni as well as the student thing, thanks. I don’t need that kind of shit in my life.

So I run introductions between the three of them and we of glorious night vision help guide Armin back to my truck. Somehow we convince Armin that Connie and I met at the gym and I know Sasha by association and that we aren’t all supernatural creatures with control issues that were just acting like actual animals five minutes ago. I know I’m a horrible liar. I’m so relieved Connie’s good at it.

I give Sasha and Connie a lift back to campus because they apparently walked the many miles out here, the freaks. Armin does exactly what I hoped he wouldn’t and invites them up to play video games.

I suffer.

We play.

Mikasa comes in and interrogates the new faces and she sits beside me on Armin’s bed and I rest my forehead against her shoulder and curse my life.

Before they leave (at some ungodly hour of the morning, but they insist they don’t have classes the next day so it doesn’t matter) Sasha goes ahead and in her sweetest voice she asks me if they can please please please join my new Pack. I tell her there is no such thing, I’m not a proper Alpha, she should just stick with her boyfriend (this gets me a snort from him) and not bother with a wolf like me.

She turns on the puppy dog eyes and dear god she has powers that rival Armin’s.

“But I’ve never had a Pack like this before,” she whispers, looking down at her feet, the picture of abject heartbreak. I can feel my resolve cracking.

Connie puts an arm around her shoulders and I’m pretty sure he’s putting on an act but goddamnit
he makes it look so convincing.

I sigh.

“Look, guys. I’m not really an Alpha, okay? I don’t exactly want to be one either. But-” Sasha’s head whips up at that one word, eyes wide and hopeful “-full moon is the week after next. We should run it together.” Makes sense, right? We’ll all be out on the reserve anyhow. Might as well run together.

“Yes!” Sasha whoops. “Full moon run with my new Pack!”

I don’t even worry that she’s yelling this shit in the hallway. Her total enthusiasm makes me laugh and I don’t bother correcting her because fuck if she’s going to actually listen to me. If I’m not her Alpha, I can’t boss her around, right?

“Thank you,” Connie says sincerely as he shoves a whooping Sasha out of the door and down the stairs. “She’s been looking for another wolf ever since we got here.”

“Yea, I noticed.” I grimace, recalling the times I felt another werewolf nearby.

He winces apologetically. “I promise she won’t be too much trouble.”

“Connie, get your cute booty out here!” Sasha yells from outside and Connie pats me on the back before doing just that.

After he’s gone I stand and stare at the door, wondering what I just agreed to, exactly, and why I thought it was a good idea. I tell you, if my Alpha could see me now he’d be laughing his ass off. And highly unlikely to help me. Probably. I send him a text just in case.

[To Hannes]: hypothetically speaking if two werewolves approached me and asked if they could be in my pack what should I do?

It’s late and I don’t expect him to reply so I take a shower and get ready to fucking collapse.

The screen lights up with his response.

[From Hannes]: Hypothetically speaking it would do you some good kid

[From Hannes]: Get yourself a pack and stop bothering me

I have to laugh at that. Having Hannes as my Alpha seriously saved my ass when I first got bitten. He knows I’ll always slip back into his Pack whenever I come back home, and I trust that he knows what’s best for me when I’m away from everyone.

I miss them. I miss my home and my big ol’ dysfunctional family. Sure, Armin and Mikasa help dull that ache, but maybe getting to know a couple other wolves will help even more. My Alpha sure seems to think so.

I groan and bury my face in my pillow. This is something I’m so against doing but at the same time…

Maybe.

Maybe it won’t be so bad.

I close my eyes and let all the maybes and what ifs float away.
Asshole McCreeper

Chapter Summary

Pack and Problems, OR; That One Guy Who Threatened Eren That One Time Makes A Reappearance.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

What is Pack?

Pack is safety. It is security and strength and comfort. It is what makes an alpha an Alpha. It is what gives betas balance and omegas protection. It is a bond between wolves, a purpose for us, a single thought that draws us back home.

Pack is family. Closer than blood. We share experiences with one another that you couldn’t share with your own relatives. It is constant and it always has your back.

My uncle told me once, that as an Alpha the most important thing to him is the wellbeing of his Pack. It’s what led him to take me in after I went through a pretty traumatic first full moon (despite me being tied to another Alpha, which was a pretty risky move for him to make and… well, it ended about as well as you would expect), and what urged him to help me control the shift, regardless of the danger he put himself in from me. He says he puts Pack above all else because that is what Pack is for him.

Spending so much time with Sasha and Connie over the past five days is starting to clue me in to how that actually feels.

It feels something like this:

“Sasha.” No response. “Sasha, please move. Sasha, please. I can’t feel my feet.”

The girl in question lifts her head and blinks at me.

“But I’m comfy,” she says.

I sigh.

She lowers her head and I resign myself to being her pillow once more. I wouldn’t really mind, it’s just that the way she’s laying across my thighs, hugging my waist, is slowly cutting off the blood supply to my lower limbs. She might not look it, but she sure weighs a lot. Werewolves tend to.

“She isn’t gonna budge, man. You gave her the power of hugs. Never do that. Never give her the power of hugs, dude.” Connie’s words are a little muffled where his face is smooshed into my shoulder but I catch them all the same. He sounds like a veteran of this particular war.
“Yea, I’m starting to get that,” I deadpan. He rumbles a laugh and tightens his hold a tad. Great, now they’re both at it. Suck it up, Jaeger, you encouraged this.

You probably won’t believe me, but this right here – the three of us crammed into my bed on a lazy Wednesday afternoon – is actually fairly normal for werewolves.

We’re tactile creatures. Touch, in a Pack, is comfort. It’s safety and reassurance and home. I did it with my Pack back home and I’m doing it with my sort-of-Pack here. I know the importance of being in close contact to those you view to be “yours”, you know, and I can see the difference it’s already had on Sasha and Connie.

It’s been almost a week since I met them, and since then we’ve spent each day in each other’s company. I’ll come back after a seminar to find them hanging out in my kitchen with Armin and Mikasa, or Connie’ll text me telling me to come over to their rented place down in the city to play GTA. It’s nice. It’s comfortable. It’s keeping my wolf in check, being around others like me, just like Armin and Mikasa ground my human half.

Uncle Hannes was right. I shouldn’t have worried about being around other wolves so much.

Sasha shifts position slightly and I start to rethink that sentence.

“Ow, seriously, Sasha. Getting pins and needles here.”

She huffs as Connie laughs, but she does move. Her nose is now pressed into my stomach, my body curled slightly around hers, her hands pressed against the base of my spine, trapped there by Connie’s solid body against my back. A sense of calm settles over us once more and I feel myself relaxing, falling into a light doze as I listen to the oddly-in-sync breathing of my new friends.

“Haven’t done this in a while,” Connie mutters against my shoulder. I make a noise that indicates I am both surprised and intrigued by this. He grants me with more; “Pack back home only really does this after full moons.”

“Mine used to pile up whenever we got together. We spent Friday’s at my Alpha’s place watching films or whatever. He said it was healthy to keep close,” I offer in return. We’ve been trading stories over the past few days. Marking out the differences between Pack dynamics in the north and south America because we’re both nosey and curious little fuckers at heart. I know Connie’s Pack consists of his family and Sasha, no outsiders. And it’s a small family at that.

“It is healthy,” Connie agrees. “I didn’t realise how much I missed it.”

Now that he says it, actually…

I’ve been at this university for weeks now, away from my Pack, my family. I haven’t had close contact like this – innocent and trusting and needed – for just as long. Being huddled between these two I’m starting to see all the more benefits to having them close. I smile to myself and wrap an arm more tightly around Sasha’s shoulders. She hums, contented.

We’ll move when Mikasa gets back from the gym and comes looking for us, but for the time being we stay huddled together in my too-small bed and nap in peace.

I catch a break from my lupine companions the following day in the form of a cancelled lecture that gives me a whole hour in which to do… nothing.
I have nothing to do.

Literally.

Nada.

I spend a good ten minutes wandering around campus before I set my sights on the library building and think *You know what? Screw it. I'm going to the library.*

I sit up on the third floor, pick a table by the window and order myself a coffee. I totally bypassed the actual book sections. Coffee shop is much more suited to my tastes.

I sigh and settle back into my seat when it arrives, staring out of the window across campus. This place is huge. The university itself squats on top of a hill, overlooking the city below and the national reserves that lie beyond. Mountains dust the horizon, obscured by the clouds that collect there. Total postcard view.

Trost is pretty much hemmed in on every side by one national forest or another, which hey that’s great for me, Connie and Sasha, but not so great if you’re looking to go visit the next city over. It’s a long drive. Armin has complained about this. I have pointed out to him that he could’ve chosen a university closer to home, but he said he likes the forests and the promise of mountains. Really, he does. He just… doesn’t like it when the forests and mountains prevent him from driving places easily.

I smile into my cup as I think about it, and as I do so I catch a glimpse of something in the reflection of the window: a pale face turned my way.

Now, anyone would think that this guy is just looking at the same view I am, right?

Right.

Well. I’m not just anyone.

I’m a werewolf (in case you missed that particularly large memo – check the title of this story sometime, yea?) and as a werewolf I have this thing called heightened instincts and right now as I lock eyes on this man’s reflection, those instincts are screaming at me to run, to get the fuck away.

I turn around and I meet his gaze like the unbelievably stubborn moron that I am.

Grey eyes bore into mine and I’m struck with a feeling of de ja vu. I’m certain I’ve seen those eyes before…

Well fuck.

The distorted memory of being shoved up against a wall in the bathroom of Club Sina comes hurting back to me and I nearly choke on my coffee.

Well *fuck.* He knows what I am. He also threatened to utterly *destroy* what I am. Great.

I should leave.

His glare is telling me I should leave.

My wolf, however, is telling me to stay and fight.

Know what I do?
Yea. I glare right back and stand my ground… sit my ground… whatever.

It is, quite possibly, the most intensely angry staring contest I have ever unwillingly entered into; him obviously contemplating my aforementioned demise and me trying to convey that I am offended he would even consider removing my magnificent being from this earth. I don’t think he quite gets the picture but he sure knows I remember him and that seems to be boosting his confidence somewhat. Neither of us is backing down.

And why the hell should I? He threatened me for no good reason. Unprovoked. I was so in control of my wolf that night I have no clue how he figured me out. I don’t even know his goddamn name. There is no way that I will let that stand.

I gulp down another mouthful of bitter coffee just to have something to hide behind because there is also no way that I have enough confidence to confront this guy.

His grey eyes narrow and I nearly jump out of my seat as my wolf responds to the vibes he’s giving off. I grip the edge of the table, metal creaking slightly under the pressure.

I notice my attacker (he so attacked me in that bathroom, don’t even deny it) has not blinked once since setting eyes on me.

There is something so very not right about this guy.

“Hi, I’m sorry, is anyone using this chair?” A girl’s voice jolts me out of my angry glaring match and I glance up at her, release my death grip on the table top and tell her no, no one’s using that chair, she can have it. When I look back, the guy is no longer looking my way, vision veiled by black hair as he reads his book, and I don’t know if that makes me feel any better or not.

I convince the animal side of me to just let me drink my goddamn coffee and stay out of his way. His grey eyes narrow and I nearly jump out of my seat as my wolf responds to the vibes he’s giving off. I grip the edge of the table, metal creaking slightly under the pressure.

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I convince the animal side of me to just let me drink my goddamn coffee and stay out of his way. If this guy knows what I am then he’s trouble of the worst kind. I don’t need to be dealing with that kind of shit first thing on a Thursday.

I finish up my drink and get the hell out of there as fast as I can. Eyes follow me. Grey eyes that make my skin burn with the hatred blazing in them and my wolf thrash about at the prospect of a challenge. I ignore it as usual.

Needless to say, I don’t get much work done that day; my thoughts are elsewhere. And when Mikasa and Armin drag me out to Sina later that night, I avoid the bathroom at all costs.

The next day I wake up to find Armin face down on the mattress beside me.

“Eeree,” he whines. I know that tone of voice. He’s hungover. Hungover and hurting because of it. I tug my phone out from under my stomach and squint against the glare of the screen. It’s 10am and he has class in an hour. He has yet to shower, dress and feed himself. He smells like sour despair laced with beer and vodka and lemonade.

“What?” I ask around a mouthful of pillow. I try to make it sound sympathetic. The pillow impedes this severely.

“I don’t wanna go to my lecture,” he moans.

Ah yes. Hungover Armin likes to complain. He also likes to burrito himself in his duvet (and nothing else, I might add) and walk around like that smelling like alcohol sweat and regret for
hours on end. He is currently burritoed in my duvet and I thank small mercies that he has some form of clothing on and hadn’t walked across the hallway butt naked. Small mercies are what I get by on.

“So don’t go to your lecture,” I suggest. Not really a suggestion – more like common sense.

“But I haaave to.” He lifts his head to look at me with bloodshot eyes. His eyes seem to be pleading for me to make it all go away.

I humour him. “Why do you have to?”

He drops his head and mumbles something completely unintelligible and I hum like I have any idea what he just said.

Another mumble. I pat him on the back and return my face to my pillow.

The next mumble is slightly different. It sounds like a question. Alarm bells go off – too often have I agreed to something without understanding what it is I have agreed to. Too often has this then come back to bite me hard on my beautiful ass.

I poke him in the side. “What?”

He spits my pillow out of his mouth and fixes his blue eyes on me. “I said that because you don’t have a hangover and you have no classes today, could you go to my lecture for me?”

Um…

“Sure?” I say. He smiles his big ass smile, eyes lighting up, probably realising this means he gets to sleep some more. (Hopefully not in my bed.) “Where is it?”

And thus, I find myself heading off to KLT6 for some lecture I have no clue about, Armin’s notepad in hand, pen in my back pocket, ready to do my friend a favour.

It isn’t until I’m sitting in the concave lecture theatre, students filling up the room around me that I look up and read what’s written on the screen.

Pre-Raphaelite Art.

Shit.

I pull out my phone.

[To Armin]: i’m in the wrong lecture?? it’s on pre raphaelit art

Tap my pen against my leg as I wait for his reply. Glance at the clock. Three minutes to. It’s okay, I can escape if I need to.

[From Armin]: Are you in KLT7 ?

[To Armin]: WHAT NO YOU SAID KLT6

[To Armin]: FUCK

[From Armin]: Just leave?

The door swings shut. I lift my gaze to the front of the room and yup. There he is. The lecturer. He
smiles wide and greets us. There’s a murmured response around me from the couple hundred other students that actually need to be here.

[To Armin]: it’s just started

[From Armin]: fuck

[From Armin]: Give me notes anyway? Sounds interesting.

I groan and slide down further in my chair.

This is going to suck.

Turns out it sucked infinitely more than I thought it would. The lecture itself was surprisingly interesting. Only problem was the guy sat down to my left, three rows in front of me.

Black hair, black shirt, pale skin, red pen. He flicks his gaze up my way and oh yea there they are: grey eyes.

My wolf acknowledges the threat before me, urges me to shift and fight. I feel like crying.

At least he doesn’t glare at me this time. Just narrows his eyes. It still feels like a bullet to the chest, but hey, that’s improvement right?

I focus on the fact that he won’t be able to harm me in such a public space and try to convince my wolf to stick to the same principle. He eventually settles down with a grumble of annoyance at the back of my mind and I turn my attention back to the lecture.

I don’t stay focused for very long.

Out of the corner of my eye I can see that Grey Eyes has turned his body slightly in my direction, one leg crossed over the other, foot resting on knee. He looks, for all intents and purposes, a relaxed older student listening to the man stood before us, a slightly bored expression on his features, but I know he’s watching me out of the corner of his eye too.

I continue to surreptitiously watch him watch me pretend to ignore him as he does the same. That sentence alone gives me a headache. I follow the second hand on the clock above the white board with my eyes, count the seconds by in my head, try to determine whether my wolf will let me bolt from the lecture theatre when time is up, or not.

Movement to my left: he’s turned his head to look at me. I make the mistake of meeting his eyes.

He pulls back his lips in a mockery of a growl and it is then that I notice his teeth. They’re pointed. Too sharp to be human.

The sensation of another supernatural being nearby hits me like a speeding freight train and I nearly lose it. My wolf wakes the fuck back up real fast and my eyes flash gold, teeth baring in part grimace, part growl as I suck in a deep, rattling breath and try to stamp down the howling need to shift. The guy tenses up but doesn’t look away.

His teeth lengthen.

I splinter our locked gaze and pull my phone out of my pocket. I shoot out a text to Connie telling
him I’ll be coming by later. I don’t wait for his reply before I text Armin to say I won’t be going out that night.

My hands are shaking. I glance around to make sure no one saw anything. The collective gaze of the room is on the lecturer. Nobody noticed our little supernatural exchange.

I tell my wolf to focus on small mercies.

He doesn’t want to.

Ten minutes until the end of the lecture. I don’t dare look his way again. All I can think is he’s not human he’s not human he’s something supernatural and I don’t know what it is but he’s not human.

My control is fraying at the edges, hinges to that five year old cage creaking as the wolf in me slowly forces it open. I’m starting to panic that I’m losing control but the panic is driving my wolf to take over faster. I grit my teeth. This isn’t happening.

This isn’t happening.

I do what my Alpha used to tell me to do when I didn’t want to shift; I put my head in my hands and start counting my breaths and swallow my wolf down with every inhale. I imagine that I’m taking myself back from his grip one inch at a time, from the tips of my claws inwards. I force myself to hold the shape of a human.

By the time the bell rings I’ve wrestled him back into his cage and have enough control to push myself out of my seat on shaky legs.

I take the steps two at a time and run through the doors. Keep running til I’m halfway down the hill into the city when I have to bend over and catch my breath because I still don’t have total control and I’m starting to shift from the adrenaline. My back bows under the strain of my wolf trying to burst free but I somehow reel him back in and gasp through the wave of pain stopping the shift causes.

Don’t panic, I tell myself. Panicking makes it worse.

Adrenaline subsides as I regulate my breathing, control returning to me in increments. My wolf kicks and writhes the rest of the way to Connie and Sasha’s place, but I make it there, and I make it on two feet not four.

“I’m cursed.”

It is the only explanation. I almost laugh.

This is how I greet Connie and Sasha as they open up the front door and into their two bedroom house. Immediately, they sense that something is very wrong and Sasha whines a noise of distress, dragging me into the lounge and pushing us both down onto the couch and laying us sideways so she can wrap herself around me. She buries her face against my throat, anxiety spiking the air.

“What’s happened?” she asks, just as Connie says, “You almost shifted, didn’t you?”

I nod. He lets out a short, sharp breath and then he’s piling onto the couch as well, wriggling in behind me so I’m pinned between them. Smothered by the concern and comfort of my betas. My
wolf subsides the rest of the way as we lie there, breathing each other in.

They don’t ask me to explain myself. They don’t push me for details or to open up to them. They know that what I need right now is for them to be there and to let me know they’re safe.

After a while I close my eyes and start to talk.

I tell them what I can remember from the night at the club. I tell them about yesterday at the library. I tell them about the lecture I’ve just left.

I tell them about the man with the grey eyes and the teeth of a predator and they know without having to ask that I am scared.

I am angry and terrified because this is something none of us has heard of before and I want the threat – I want him – gone.

“I didn’t even sense he wasn’t human,” I say. “Not until he showed me his teeth.”

“A challenge?” Connie asks, quiet and uncertain. I don’t like that tone of voice on him. Connie is always so certain of our weird world.

“A warning, I think.” I have to swallow the knot in my throat.

“What are you going to do?” Sasha whines. She’s been quiet up until now, just breathing in my scent and holding tight to me. They’re both clinging harder than they usually do, sensing my shaken balance. I need to calm myself down. Soothe them. They should be my main concern here.

What am I going to do?

“I’m not going to let him hurt you guys.” That much I know instinctively. “If he wants to go against the Alpha then he can, but I won’t let him hurt my betas.”

That gets Sasha to raise her head from my shoulder and look at me with those big brown eyes of hers. They’re wide with wonder. Belief. She trusts me to protect her.

“Beta,” she mumbles, and I know she’s thinking that it’s the first time I’ve referred to them as such and I know it means I see them as mine and that’s a pretty big thing for us. She looks a little lost. Something in my chest clenches and I bring her back down against me, bury my face in her neck in return. She whines in the base of her throat and I feel the vibrations against my skin. I huff and nod. Of course they’re my goddamn betas; they’ve been calling me Alpha for a week now.

“I don’t think it will come to it,” I tell her – I lie to her – “but if it does, then I want you and Connie to stay away. I want you two safe. Let me deal with it. Please.”

They agree. They don’t hesitate. Something in my voice must give away how much I need them to say those words, because they offer them up without protest.

What I sensed in that guy, though… It was something I’ve never encountered before, and being part of a larger wolf Pack back home I’ve encountered some pretty unusual beings of the supernatural world. Quite a few of them we only approached because as a Pack we were strong enough to take them. Three wolves against something as powerful as Grey Eyes? I don’t want to think of the consequences of that mistake.

No.
If he makes a move to threaten my betas, I will fight, but I cannot risk moving against him on my own hasty terms. He would beat me into the ground and go for the others because me challenging him would be open invitation.

“What are you going to do?” This time it’s Connie who asks. I sigh. I know they want reassurance, but I honestly don’t have many options available to me.

“Confront the problem,” I mutter. I feel them both simultaneously tense up.

“But you just said—”

“I don’t mean violently. I mean peacefully.” Hopefully. “I helped my Alpha negotiate with other Packs and a couple different supernatural beings. I’m thinking if our guy sees us as a problem here enough to threaten and warn me off, then I should talk to him and let him know we mean no harm and maybe this will end without a blood bath.”

It doesn’t do much to appease them, if the mix of emotions I’m scenting is anything to go by.

“Do you think it’ll work?” Connie asks carefully.

“I think if it doesn’t I’ll be a wolf-skin rug,” I answer. At least I’m being honest here. God, that’s depressing.

“No,” Sasha whines. “I like you.”

I laugh. I can’t help it. It’s loud and unexpected and it makes her rear back so suddenly that she topples from the couch and lands on the floor with a thud.

That only makes me laugh harder and then Connie’s joining in and Sasha’s sulking but I can see a smile flickering at the corners of her eyes so I slip onto the floor and press my forehead against hers and grin.

“I like me too,” I say.

It does the trick.

Her cheeks dimple and her eyes crinkle and she punches my arm as she laughs.

The spell of gloom is broken then, and the two of them are shaking off the heavy concern that’s hung over them since they opened the door.

“Come on,” I say as I heave her back up onto the couch and settle between them. “Let’s watch a film.”

“And order pizza,” Sasha demands, mirth still caught in the lines of her face.

“Definitely. If it’s going to be my last supper we should dine in style.”

She nips at my jaw with her teeth to tell me to shut up, that she doesn’t think joking about my possible death is funny, and pulls out her phone as Connie flicks through Netflix.

I turn over the things I’m feeling for these two – the need to be close to them, the protectiveness, the way my handle on my wolf is definitely stronger with them around. I come to the very real conclusion that I’ve been seeing myself as “theirs” for days now.

“Pack, huh?” I murmur. I smell the shift in their emotions as they catch the words and the meaning
behind them. Relief floods through them followed by fuzzy, giddy happiness. I let them nuzzle against my neck because yes. We’re Pack. A dysfunctional family of three in a very human world.

I’m going to stand as Alpha and protect them from harm.

And they’ll let me.

They won’t just let the earlier conversation slide, but for now they know discussion is over. They let me make sure they’re taken care of with food and something to raise their spirits and we curl pile up on the warn leather couch and try to be average 19 year old students for a while.

I stay at their place that night. We pile into one bed, covers kicked to the side because with the shared body heat of the three of us there’s really no need for them. I lie with my nose pressed against the crook of Connie’s neck and shoulder with Sasha tucked against my back, the two of them holding hands across me. Considering these two are actually together I’m surprised they always end up putting me in the middle, but then I remember my Pack back home doing the exact same with our Alpha and it starts to make sense. Everyone should be in contact with the Alpha. It’s the way we feel safest. It actually makes me feel proud and (dare I say it?) wanted.

Sasha falls asleep first, breathing evening out, grip relaxing on the both of us. I try to sleep, myself. Close my eyes, count sheep, the whole lot. But I can’t seem to shut out the room. Connie’s thinking something. He smells… not exactly anxious, but bothered? Does that make sense? My wolf seems to think so. He whines at me to check up on my beta.

“What’s with your smell?” Wow, Eren. Real eloquent.

“I was thinking about what you said earlier,” he says, voice quiet in the dark. I hum. He gets to the point. “About confronting him and negotiating or whatever. I don’t think you should do it alone. I don’t want to stand back as he threatens my—you.”

“Alpha?”

“Yea, that,” he mumbles. I snort at his sudden discomfort, but don’t question it. Today made it real. When he says that, it means something now. He kicks my shin. Maybe it doesn’t mean much, I think wryly.

“If he hurts you we’ll rip his throat out.” Connie sounds certain of that. I feel oddly smug about his defensiveness. So does my wolf. I pat his chest.

“Good beta,” I say. He snorts a laugh. “Now go to sleep. You have Saturday classes tomorrow.”

“Fuck you for knowing my timetable, man.”

“If I don’t whip your ass into gear, no one will,” I counter.

I know and he knows that I’ll be confronting the threat alone, but he still had to say it and I guess I still had to hear it.

We sleep.

I make good on my promise to confront Asshole McCreeper the next time I see him, which just so
happens to be on Sunday. The day of the full moon.

Yay.

Because it’s not like full moon days aren’t shit enough already, oh no. No, now I have to deal with this guy on top of all that. (And the inevitable panic-attack-slash-shift-in-public he will cause.)

This time round, however, it is totally me who runs into him.

Before you ask, no I was not tracking him down via scent, not at all. I just happened to be walking through an area of campus I have no reason for being in whilst he conveniently happened to be nearby.

Okay, I was totally stalking him like goddamn Bambi, but he doesn’t exactly seem surprised to see me so I figure no harm no foul, right?

Sigh.

Of course I’m wrong.

“Are you done fucking stalking me?” he accuses. First actual sober words to me and he manages to put as much disdain into his tone and facial expression as is humanly (or, I guess, non-humanly) possible.

We’re standing behind the old science buildings where the forest has crept up the hill to touch the edge of campus. Plenty of cover from prying eyes.

I take a real deep breath.

“Look,” I start. He rolls his eyes and turns away. I take a step toward him and he snaps his gaze back to me, glaring, stopping me in my tracks. Not good. I raise my hands, palms open and facing him. My heart is racing but I hold it together.

“I just want to say that I’m not going to be a problem for you,” I say, and I say it slow. His top lip twitches into a sneer and I figure yea that was a little patronising of me but I have no idea how I’m supposed to be dealing with him.

“If you’re trying to tell me that you and your little Pack won’t be an issue for me, I don’t buy it.”

He mentioned Pack.

He threatened my Pack.

My wolf ripples beneath my skin and I let his anger mingle with mine.

“Why not?” I grit it out through clenched teeth as I make myself stand my ground, not rise to his bait. He raises a thin, dark eyebrow.

“Because you animals always are.” He says it like it’s a fact he’s bored of. He’s doing a real fucking good job of pissing me off. Fucking full moon fucking up my control. I fight all the more to not let it show.

“Met many werewolves, then?” I manage to make it sound casual and curious. I would pat myself on the back if I could actually move without losing control.

“A few.” He shrugs, voice bored. “ Gutted the ones who got too close.”
What the fuck do I say to that?

“What’s the matter, mutt?” he asks, smirking, teeth lengthening to fangs as he does so. “Wolfsbane got your tongue? Or have you just never met a real monster before?”

And it’s that that does it. It was dumb of me to think that I could do this without my wolf making a forced appearance. I knew I would struggle. I knew confronting him alone was fucking stupid especially on the day of the full moon.

What I didn’t count on was how much of an infuriating asshole he would be.

“I am a monster,” I snarl.

My eyes flash gold and I give into my wolf and hurl myself at him.

Five minutes later and I’m panting wetly against the ground, several of my bones knitting themselves painfully back together as he stands above me, boot resting between my shoulder blades. Keeping me down.

My wolf roars at the humiliation but I have the good sense not to try getting back up just yet, no matter how much I may want to.

“Are you done?” he asks, calm and cold. I growl at him, furious. He tutts.

“I told you once before; if you came near me again I would kill you.” Those words shut me up real fast. I hold my breath. I know he’s serious. I also know that if I shift fully I can put up much more of a fight.

My bones ache with the calling of the shift but I refuse to give in. I won’t shift this close to campus. If I lose control entirely who knows what my wolf will do.

“Why don’t you do it then?” I rasp past a mouthful of thick wolf’s teeth.

“Why don’t you shift and make me,” he counters. I growl into my next words.

“Because I’m not an animal that needs putting down.”

“Oh?”

He sounds so fucking uninterested. He’s got me pinned to the fucking ground, half-shifted, burning with rage and the desire to tear his throat out and he acts like it means jack shit to him.

I writhe.

He kicks me in the ribs, bruising them further. My breathing stutters at the pain and I slump to the earth once more.

“Why did you come here?” he asks.

I swallow the sarcastic retort and go with, “because I didn’t want this to happen to anyone else.”

“Your little Pack?” he guesses.

This time I arch off the ground, dislodging his weight as I do so.
I leap to my feet and spin to face him, claws swiping through the air, but an elbow to my temple and a solid kick to the side of my knee and I’m down again, the world spinning and my back cracking as I start to shift properly.

“No,” I spit. “I’m not shifting here.” I don’t say it to him, I say it to my wolf. I try to make him understand although that never really works.

Through sheer force of will I remain in control, limbs quivering with the strain and pain as my opponent circles me.

Predator and prey.

I know how this goes.

I’ve done this a hundred times with my kill in wolf form.

Never thought I’d be gasping for control at the feet of some guy who’s five foot nothing and so freakishly strong he hasn’t even shown a hint of his true nature.

I try for a different tactic because this one’s about to get me killed.

“I’m not a threat to you,” I say, and then I do something I have only done for one person before in my life. I roll onto my back and I turn my head to the side.

It goes against every instinct within me. I close my eyes against the pain of claws tearing at my mind as my wolf yells at me to not submit not submit not submit, but I can’t think of what else to do to make this guy listen.

I lie there for what feels like hours, waiting for the blow to fall, waiting for his decision. Eyes shut, neck bared, stomach uncovered and vulnerable.

Eventually, the guy speaks.

“Not bad,” he says. “Get up, kid.”

I open my eyes and get to my knees, gaze still lowered because that’s what submissives do, right? He doesn’t complain.

“You say you’re not going to be an issue, you prove it. I give you one chance. You blow it, you’re dead. You or your Pack make a move on me, I take off your fucking head. Understand?”

His tone is so sharp and his words so clear in the quiet air that it startles a shaky “yes sir,” out of me. I know I could be dead right now. What’s worse is that he knows I know. He blows air through his teeth in what I guess you could call a laugh. I choke back a growl.

“It’s a full moon. You and your friends are going to go out to the forest and you’re going to stay there. Do your filthy little werewolf thing and stay away from hiker’s trails. You tell them what I told you and you keep them on a tight leash.”

He puts a long, cold finger under my chin and tips my head up so we’re eye to golden eye. As I watch, his pupils dilate and then narrow to slits, like cats eyes. He snarls. I don’t blink. I can’t blink. I can’t tear my eyes away from his. I feel like I’m drowning as he says;

“If you want to share this territory, Jaeger, then you’re going to stay out of my way. Don’t make me come after you or yours.”
“Yes sir,” I say again, without thinking, without question. He hums approval and then lets me go. As soon as our eye contact is broken I feel a cold wash of shame spread through me. I just submitted. Me. To him.

“You can get up now,” he says, turning away. Turning his back on me, like he doesn’t consider me a danger at all. My wolf whines at me to get up, to make him turn and look at me and acknowledge that I’m a fucking Alpha and he should show some respect.

But we all know I won’t be able to do that.

I’ve submitted.

I’ll do what he says.

I have to.

I get up and I watch him walk away, back to campus. Before he reaches the science building, though, a thought hits me. He knew my name.

“Wait!” I yell. He pauses, turns. His expression is flat, bored, like he’s had enough of me and he wishes I would see that already.

“Who are you?” I ask.

He hesitated, then, “Levi.” Voice tired and resigned.

I blink and he’s gone.

Chapter End Notes

Yea? Yea.

(Sorry. It shall all be explained soon.)
Chapter Summary

The wolves go for a run, and Eren deals with the issue that is Levi.

Chapter Notes

Quick reminder you can find me on tumblr as yatojaeger and I’m currently tracking the tags fic: just another werewolf au, and fic: jawau. Come say hi sometime?

I hope you all enjoy this week's update.


I groan and sink back down to my knees.

Why did I have to ask him that? Of all the questions I could’ve gone with, was learning his name really all that important? Why didn’t I ask him what he is? Huh? Or what his crippling issue with werewolves is, for that matter? Fuck sake.

I knee there for a while, catch my breath and try to ignore the fact that I just submitted to a pissy supernatural being of unknown power and abilities called Levi. God fucking damnit. I’m supposed to be stronger than this.

I groan again as I get to my feet, but this time from the twinge of pain left behind by our fight. Not much of a fight really. More like me running head first into a brick fucking wall and that wall then beating my ass into the ground.

At least I didn’t shift, I tell myself, because there would’ve been no coming back from that one, and not only because it’s the full moon tonight.

There is no doubt in my mind that this guy – Levi – could have killed me.

The laugh that startles out of me at that is high, too high not to be hysterical.

I could have died.

It’s sickening that I can think that so normally, like I’m totally aware that death is a very real possibility when dealing with supernatural creatures. Literally, the world I live in could kill me any given day. How fucked up is that?

So fucked up, is that. My biggest concern at this age should be getting my paper in on time, not getting beaten to shit because I just so happen to be a shape shifting monster from a Hammer Horror. I shouldn’t have to worry about crossing a territorial line and getting my head bitten off for
my trouble.

I feel another wave of anger at Levi that he would threaten me and mine like that and my wolf kicks a growl from me.

It’s instinct. It’s the urge to fight and protect and defend kicking in but I have to ignore it now. I submitted. I submitted and I have to obey his orders or I’m putting the others at risk. He knew about them. He could find them easily, that I’m sure of.

_I won’t let that happen_. I can’t.

It takes more energy than I would like to admit for me to get back to my dorm. I walk across campus in a mildly-angry-but-somewhat-resigned haze, not quite sure what I should be feeling but feeling it nonetheless. I don’t pay attention to where I am, just trust my body to steer me in the right direction and get me there without incident. It works. I make it.

I have a couple hours before I should meet Connie and Sasha and head out to the forest by moonrise. Armin and Mikasa are out food shopping in Trost – I told them I was busy today. Not a total lie, all things considered, but it still feels weirdly quiet in the flat without them. I feel a sudden itch to make sure they’re okay and send off a text to Kasa asking what time they’ll be back. I know I won’t be here when they get in but that isn’t the point here.

I distract myself idly as I wait for her reply and it isn’t until I’m changing into a fresh shirt that I notice just how muddy and bloody my clothes are. Right. Fight.

I step into my en suite and check my mirror and yep. Face is a mess. Which would explain the weird looks I got walking back. I have to take shower to get rid of the evidence and the smell of it. I know Connie and Sasha’ll pick up on it anyway, but if it isn’t as strong they won’t worry so much. I can’t have them worrying like that during the full moon. We’re not strong as a Pack yet and my standing as an Alpha has already been in question once today. I don’t want them doubting me tonight with the ridiculous threat of _Levi_ out there.

I stand under the spray, waste the university’s hot water and think about what I’m going to tell my betas.

I’m gonna have to tell them what happened, but I don’t want to tell them _everything_ that went down (i.e. me, on my back, submissive and hating it). They do need to know that we have to be careful tonight. We can’t risk acting out on the full moon run; not when we’re not fully in control of our wolf natures. If we take down a couple deer tonight and draw attention to ourselves and it gets out that the wolf population of Trost’s surrounding reserves is acting funny then he’ll know about it. I know he’ll know about it. Something tells me he’ll be looking for an excuse to bring trouble to us. He seems like the type to go looking for a fight he knows he’ll win.

 Fucking weirdo. I mean, I get that werewolves have a bit of a reputation for acting without forethought, but still. Assuming that’s the rule for every shape shifter is kinda extreme. And assuming I was going to cause trouble for him without being provoked is just rude. I’m not like that. Honest.

Something must have happened to him to make him distrustful to that extent. The next time I see Levi I’ll be getting us all some answers.

_Levi_. What kind of a name _is_ Levi, anyway? Fucking weird name, that’s what.

I sigh, give up thinking about this shit before I actually injure myself, and get out of the shower.
My phone vibrates angrily on my desk. I try unlocking it with wet fingers, give up when it gets me nowhere, find a towel and continue. It isn’t Mikasa texting me as I assumed, but Sasha.

[From Sasha]: What time are you coming over at?

[To Sasha]: ive

[To Sasha]: dive

[To Sasha]: wft. five. i’m coming over at five

[From Sasha]: Having some trouble?

Sigh. You have no idea.

[To Sasha]: had wet hands

[From Connie]: sash said you have issues

Great now they’re both at it.

[To Connie]: yea but not as many as you

[From Connie]: ouch

[From Sasha]: Haha you got that right.

I sigh and shake my head at how ridiculous they can be and then remember I’m standing butt naked in my room, dripping wet, holding a towel in one hand but not actually using it to dry myself off because that would be crazy, and think maybe I’m not one to judge after all.

I throw on whatever clothes I can find without caring what I look like and then pack my bag. I’ve done this so many times before I don’t even have to think as I reach for each item. Spare change of clothes, bottle of water, wet wipes to take care of the dirt I’ll wake up covered in tomorrow, something to eat, wallet, phone. You know. The essentials.

I pull on a hoodie that smells like home and don’t bother tying up my boots which means I trip on the laces as I run down the steps and across the lot to my truck, but I don’t end up with my face in the dirt (again, jeez today has been rough) so I count that as a win and figure they don’t need tying up at all, I’ll be fine. I take the drive down into Trost and over to Connie and Sasha’s place and watch the sun near the horizon line in the rear view mirror.

Nearly night fall. Nearly time to run.

I barely make it past the front door before Connie and Sasha are on me, excited and eager to get going. I somehow manage to get them back into the house using my body as a sort of barrier, hyper aware of the fact that their wolves are already more in control of their bodies than their human halves.

“Guys, we need to talk real quick,” I say in my best Alpha voice, letting my eyes flash gold to show them I’m not looking to be argued with. It doesn’t seem to deter their overall enthusiasm but at least it gets them to stand still for a second. Connie cocks his head to one side in a silent question. I take a deep breath.

_Here goes nothing._
“I spoke to that guy today,” is all I manage to get out before they’re throwing questions at me and ignoring the answers I try to give them. Their voices rise in volume when Connie asks about the blood he can smell and yep I knew I shoulda showered for longer. Crap.

I wait it out, until they run out of questions. Then I turn around and walk into the kitchen, betas practically tripping over each other as they press as close to me as possible, whining in concern that I haven’t explained anything yet.

I take a seat at the kitchen table and give them a second to settle down before I begin, because this is important and I want them interrupting as little as possible. Seriously. It’s one of their shared talents. They’re annoyingly good at that shit.

They settle down to a slight fidget, but I figure that’s as good as I’m going to get.

“We had a chat, okay? His name is Levi and I don’t know what he is but he’s powerful and he knows we’re a Pack. He must’ve spotted you guys around campus or whatever and assumed I was Alpha-ing it over you. Whatever. Thing is, he’ll leave us alone if we don’t draw attention to ourselves.” I look between them to make sure they’re getting this.

“That means we’re going into the next forest over tonight because I’m not taking any chances with this guy. And if he approaches you on campus or in the city you come find me immediately. He has this huge thing against werewolves. Thinks we’re all mindless animals or something. Don’t ask.”

“You had a chat?” Sasha asks.

“Is that why I can smell blood on you?” Connie adds.

Yea they totally don’t believe it was a peaceful encounter.

“Okay fine, we fought. We fought and I wound up bloody and he wound up backing off—” buuuullshiiiit “—and in the end he decided to give us a chance to prove we’re not savages. And we are not fucking this one up or so help me god.”

“Okay,” they chirp in unison. Like that’s just fine. Like any werewolf is fine with listening to the commands of some stranger with personal space issues. I blink at them for a bit.

“Eren, if you think this is what we should do then we’ll do it.” Sasha says it so gently and I don’t know what to do with that. Connie nods agreement, grey hair unstyled because it’s full moon night flopping on top of his shaved head.

And I think of course. Of course they’ll listen to me, follow my lead. I’m Alpha here. I give the orders and they obey. They’re not obeying him without a doubt, no that’s what I’m doing. They follow me because I’m listening to him because I’m shit scared of what he could do a beta if he’s strong enough to floor an Alpha of five fucking years.

I take a deep breath because I need it and it tastes like Pack and it helps soothe me. I nod. Of course.

“Alright. No hunting tonight, just to be safe, okay? Small animals, sure, but nothing big enough to get noticed by a park ranger. Capiche?”

They echo of “Capiche” comes in stereo.
The drive out to Karanese State Forest takes us an hour and a half and by the time we’re there Connie and Sasha have managed to cram themselves into the front of my truck, regardless of the limited space. Sasha has her head out the window for most of the journey (don’t you dare say it, I know you’re thinking it) and Connie spends a good ten minutes bouncing up and down on his seat like he isn’t nearly twenty years old and studying goddamn Math for a degree.

But they’re excited and I can’t hold it against them. The natural pull of the high full moon makes us giddy the closer we are to shifting, and in the past I’ve acted exactly as they are on one of the drives out to the land my uncle owns. Childish and eager and restless to get my wolf on.

The want to shift trumps fear of angry Levis anyday.

I take my truck off road when we’re a good way into the tree line and it is for this purpose that I bought the tough ol’ thing. Headlights shine out on the beaten track ahead although we can see just fine in the dark of the forest without them and I drive until the road is far behind and there’s no fear of our wolves taking us back that way and into the beams of an oncoming car. Here the forest gets thick and unforgiving and this is just what we’re all craving as we kick open the doors and jump down from the truck and start stripping off our clothes.

This is what we wait for the whole month long.

The Shift.

That moment where you don’t have to hold onto your humanity because the laws of the gift don’t allow you to. It is total and unquestionable trust in your wolf to give you what you need; to take away your human worries and fill you up with the satisfaction of instinct fulfilled.

It’s a freedom very few experience and we’re grateful for it like a starved man is for a banquet.

We don’t talk as we lose our clothes. We don’t talk as we walk into the forest, away from the truck and that last link to human society. We don’t talk as we pick up the pace; a jog, a run, a flat out sprint until our heart rates rocket and our breath comes in gasps and those gasps turn to pants and our wolves take claim of our limbs and run with us.

They find the doors to their cages unlocked and they take control as easily as if they are slipping into well-worn clothes.

I feel the claws push from my nail beds, the bones of my feet shifting under skin as they pound into the hard ground of the forest floor. I urge my wolf on, let him have the control he’s been fighting to take for days now, let him push the stress and the worry of my human mind away as he settles into my limbs and twists them into his own form. He falls to all fours and my spine bows, muscle and sinew and cartilage shifting into his. His fur bursts from my skin and he throws my head back as my jaw cracks and lengthens and he howls.

He howls with all the air in his lungs and his back arches as his bones settle and he becomes whole.

The night shatters into the sound of two answering calls from behind us and he digs his claws into the fresh earth and runs. He takes us north, away from the road, away from the distant sounds of engines and voices and music on the highway. He takes us towards the distant mountain peaks and his excitement at being free picks up as he tastes the thick scent of water in the air.

Lake.

He changes course, aims toward it.
Two pairs of golden eyes flash in the darkness on either side of him and he barks in recognition of his Pack.

These are wolves he knows instinctively. He has only ever seen them through my eyes and in human form but he knows the scent of their wolves because they are part of him now.

They follow him, don’t get too close, won’t approach until he lets them. We both know he needs to get further from the city before he can begin to let his guard down. He has to protect them. They are his to watch out for just as they are mine to comfort.

The brown female yips and scrambles to get closer to him as they skitter through the trees, leaping ditches and logs and bushes, dodging branches that sweep too low to the ground. The grey one gets in between them, holding her off. That one knows they can only approach at the Alpha’s bidding. He has been wolf in human form for a long time. He is old enough that he knows how the Alpha thinks.

The lake stretches out before them and finally, Alpha slows. He turns his golden eyes on his betas in the dark and the smaller wolves converge on him, nip at his jaw, his forelegs, shove against his sides playfully. They express their love of Alpha, their trust in him, their acceptance of his ways. He huffs and pins them both to the floor, and they go willingly, allow him to nose at their bellies, lick their muzzles, nuzzle into their necks as they paw at his face, his ears, his shoulders.

This is Pack. This is the bond between Alpha and betas and he lets me see it through his eyes, shows me how well he can care for our betas. The two wolves buck up, wriggle from under his hold, happy snuffles and yips escaping them as the push him to the ground and roll over him. He bats their heads away with little force and they wrestle through the undergrowth, crashing into trees and coating their coarse fur in dirt and leaves.

The brown one’s tongue lolls out, a youthful expression as she bites at Alpha’s foreleg and bounds away, calling for him to chase her, to play. Her wolf is a pup still, and he responds as brother and Alpha, rolling to his feet and leaping after her, the sleek grey wolf snapping mischievously at his tail.

They play.

He lets them sort out their instinct and emotions as only wolves can, physically and forcefully at times. They find scent trails and follow them, race one another to find their quarry, hunt small mammals that are quick but not quick enough to escape the large paws of such beasts. He keeps them away from the deer tracks they come across, heeding my warnings and keeping us protected from the threat I fear.

He lets me watch as each scene unfolds, uncharacteristically open for a change, but as the night progresses and the moon arches up overhead, reaching its peak, he cannot let me stay in his mind any longer, and I close my eyes and let him take the rest of us completely. I trust him to protect my new Pack, our first Pack as Alpha. This is what he was showing me he could do.

I fade peacefully into the recesses of his mind and wait for the morning sun to wake me.

Waking up after the night of the full moon is always an interesting experience.

The usual predicament is butt naked somewhere miles into the forest, wolf still clinging like fog to our tired minds, coated in mud, blood, twigs and whatever else, and often completely starving.
There is also always a Pack pile involved, but this is the first time in my life that I’m waking up in the middle of it. Alpha position. Betas curled around me, still breathing evenly in their sleep. I blink for a moment and try to adjust to the feeling.

We’ve done this before. Piling up. We’ve shared beds and couches and even a kitchen chair one time but that ended badly (don’t ask). What we haven’t done is… this. Waking up under a thicket of low trees, damp moss and pine needles beneath us, skin tingling from the fur it sprouted last night.

Connie’s head is pillowed on my chest, Sasha’s on my stomach where she usually settles. They have their arms hooked around me, legs tangled with mine, leaves tickling our skin as the forest wakes up around us but at least that’s something I’m sorely used to. I try not to breathe too deeply, scared I’ll wake them up but at the same time I want to take in the warm scent of a happy Pack as much as I can because my wolf is smug, purring contentedly and telling me he made this happen. I would flip him off if I could, the moron.

Instead I turn to him, let him invade my senses again, note how close he still is to the forefront of my mind. I wrap Connie and Sasha tighter around me, the motion automatic as my wolf shows me in images of emotion and sense how they meandered through the forest last night. How they played and fought and hunted and did all things a real Pack does. Through the Alpha pride that’s creeping up on me I note one other thing: we held form for a goddamn while. Jesus.

I figure we ran ourselves out at about four am.

Judging by the dim light filtering through the covering of branches above us, I would say it’s not yet seven and I should probably go back to sleep.

But how far did we run?

Usually full moon runs head in an arc, with a start point (the vehicles) and an end point not too far away (the den we wake up in). Last night I was worrying about Levi and how our first run would go and I knew my wolf picked up on that but I didn’t know he would take us quite so far away.

It’ll take far too long for us to get back to the truck, and I don’t know if there are any trails near here. I’m not a fan of running into people when I’m totally naked and covered in fuck knows what and maybe have blood around my mouth. I don’t think anyone is, to be honest.

My wolf rumbles an alternative and I know even before he does so that it’s the best option.

I nudge the others awake.

“So I think we’re totally lost and if you’re up for it we should run back to the truck,” I say when they’ve rubbed the sleep from their eyes and both yawned in my face. Do werewolves have dog breath when they wake up? Yes, yes they do. Do they also reek of whatever they killed the night before and the stagnant puddles they bounded through? Another resounding yes.

The only thing that stops me from commenting is my own state of poor hygiene.

“Mm ‘kay,” Sasha mumbles, eyes closed. Her hair is a mess. I tug a twig from it that doesn’t really improve it all that much but at least I have something to poke her in the belly with. She swats it away sluggishly, still mostly asleep.

“Think you have enough control to be able to shift?” I ask. That wakes her up.

“I thought you meant just run back like this,” she says, panic lacing her tone a little. Connie snorts.
She shoots him a glare.

“Me and you can shift, man, but Sash might lose it if she tries,” Connie says, voice scratchy from lack of use and maybe one too many howls last night. Talk about not drawing attention to ourselves – I think we woke up the entire goddamn forest last night. Fuck.

“So what do I do?” Sasha asks. And this is the moment I am struck with an idea so awesome it has me grinning wide and wild. Sasha gulps. Connie grunts a question.

Oh yes. This will totally work.

My wolf easily disagrees with me.

The plan is for me to shift and let my wolf carry Sasha on his back, but he thinks that’s demeaning or someshit and he kicks up a fuss the whole goddamn way. I tell him to calm down and think of it as him looking out for his Pack – providing for them, if you will – but he refuses to accept that because Sasha’s in human form and he’s stubborn and figures a human Sasha is my problem to deal with and not his.

Sasha digs her fingers into the fur at his neck and hugs his ribs with her knees, chest pushed into his back to keep from getting hit with branches I swear he aims for. I’ll have to apologise to her later if she actually makes it out of here in one piece.

Connie runs ahead of us, our pace slower with the added weight of a passenger. My wolf growls out loud and I wisely keep quiet because this soon after the full moon and he’s got more control over my body than normal and it might not be all that easy to shift back after this if I piss him off.

We follow the trail we left through the forest last night and it doesn’t take us as long as I thought it would, but I guess that’s because we spent so long rolling around in the mud like the animals we temporarily were.

My wolf keeps his ears trained for any sound of human life around us, aware of our need to keep hidden. His eyes he has fixed on the grey wolf ahead who is sniffing out the trail, leading us between trees.

He scrambles up a steep bank and the lake we passed last night glints ahead of us in the pale morning light, impressively wide and deeply tempting for the filthy wolves, but we have a ways to go yet and it’ll only make us more dirty in the long run. So we put the lake at our back and push on. Back to the truck. Closer to the road. He can hear cars in the distance. We’re not too far from the highway. A lot of traffic, a lot of noise. Distant and out of our reach. There is nothing nearby but the sound of the forest. No threat, no danger.

Just the truck.

We reach it and Sasha climbs down from his back and he shakes out his flattened fur and snorts in disapproval. She whines and crouches down before him, eyes searching his golden ones for an answer to a question she can’t verbalise, but we both know what it is and so I hold off taking control of him again as he stretches out his muzzle and licks a long stripe up the side of her bare throat, scent marking, confirming her as his. An apology for being a whiney little bitch about having her cling to his back as he ran, most likely.

Whatever it is, it seems to be a good enough answer for Sasha as he flings herself forward, arms around his neck, face buried in his dark fur. And now it’s my turn to be smug as I watch through
his eyes that quickly become mine again and I shake off my wolf and feel my human form returning rapidly.

My arms wrap around her and she hums and wriggles in closer, both of us still crouching down awkwardly as we hug.

“I like your wolf,” she mumbles, and she’s still sleepy and it kinda makes my heart ache because she’s totally just a puppy in our world still.

And then Connie throws my bag at me and says “Yo Eren, get your hands off my girlfriend,” and the moment is ruined but none of us care.

We clean up as best we can, wrestle out tired limbs into fresh clothes and climb up into my truck, wash our mouths out with the water and inhale the food I brought with me. Sasha lies down in the back and Connie hops up front with me and we just sit there for a while, letting our bodies relax and get used to working as human again. After a while Connie reaches into the back and tugs out my hoodie from where I tossed it. He sniffs it and raises his eyebrow at me.

“This your Pack from back home?” he guesses. I nod. I know the scent is fading from it but it’s still clear enough that I can pick up on it from here. Close to twenty wolves. A large Pack for a northern State.

“I wear it every full moon,” I say, and he nods because he understands. It’s like a safety blanket, I guess. It’s something most werewolves do – share clothes, scent mark one another. Keeps us close. Reminds us of family.

“Doesn’t it fell weird, though?” he asks. “Like, wearing something that smells like your old Pack?”

I snort. Yea, I might have known. He doesn’t like it; his Alpha wearing something that smells like a bunch of other wolves.

“Well maybe you should do something about that,” I say as I reach over and push his head through the neck hole. He grins up at me, toothy and gleaming, and then he’s shoving his arms through the sleeves and tugging the thing down over his shirt and yea maybe something twinges in my chest at the thought of his scent mingling with those of my family back home, overpowering them, erasing them, but he’s my Pack now and this is me showing him that.

Yea. Good move, Jaeger. Smart move.

I nod, satisfied, and then start up the engine. Sasha jolts awake in the back momentarily but as I turn us around and head back to the road she nods off again.

Connie’s stomach grumbles and I laugh.

“Food?” I ask, like there’s actually a question there.

“Food. Yea.”

On our way back to Trost we stop at a diner called Maria’s. None of the staff here are actually called Maria, but I guess that doesn’t matter if they’re willing to serve abnormally large amount of food to three starved and exhausted teenagers with dirt streaked hair at eight am on a Monday.

We order more than we should physically be able to consume and get a few odd looks as we wolf
it all down (pardon the pun, it was just too perfect and startling accurate to pass up on). Sasha moans into her pancakes and bacon and Connie and I agree with every syllable.

“So I have a question,” she says as she’s finishing up on her first plate. I grunt. She continues. “D’you think creepy Levi will let you live now?”

I don’t choke on my mouthful, nope, not at all.

“I fucking hope so,” Connie mumbles, eyes dark. I put my hand on his shoulder and squeeze. He leans into my touch.

“We did what he wanted. We stayed clear of Trost and didn’t do anything an ordinary wolf wouldn’t be capable of. I think we’re good.”

“For now?” Sasha asks, mouth filled with hash browns. I snag one because I can’t resist how good they smell, and shrug.

“For now, yea. If one of you guys shifts in public though, we’re fucked.”

“We’d be fucked anyway, man,” Connie points out. “Werewolves aren’t meant to exist. The authorities’ll hunt us down or put us in cages.”

“Or sell us off to crazy scientists to do inhuman experiments on us.” There’s a gleam in Sasha’s eye that says she saw something cool in a movie once. It’s sad that these outcomes are entirely plausible.

“Shut up and eat your potatoes,” I grumble, nudging her foot with mine under the table. She sticks her tongue out at me but does as I say.

“Science experiments?” Connie teases. “Seriously, Sash? *Science* experiments? When have you ever met a scientist interested in the supernatural?”

Sasha shrugs.

“It could happen,” she says.

And hey, you have to admit, it totally could.

We get back to campus just before ten, the traffic through the city majorly slowing us down. Sasha and Connie each take turns using up the dorm’s hot water in my shower, and then they throw on some of my clothes because they’re way invasive like that. (I don’t mention that it makes me feel all proud-Alpha knowing that they’re basically rolling themselves up in my scent or anything, nope.) When I’m done cleaning the grime out from under my nails and behind my ear and between my toes and from every crease in my goddamn body, we go bang on Armin’s door because we know he’s in there and it’s time for him to wake up now.

“Where were you last night?” he asks as he blinks sleepily up at me with his big blue eyes. I hook my thumb over my shoulder at the double act at my back and he makes a noise that says he totally gets it, but oh boy does he have no idea.

“You have a lecture later, right?” I ask. He yawns and tries to speak at the same time. Doesn’t work. But yea, he has a lecture later.
I ask another question I already know the answer to: “Want to play GTA until then?”

“Fuck yea,” he breathes. “You set it up, I’m getting something to eat.”

He practically runs from the room in his haste.

“And that is how you wake an Armin Arlert up,” I say to my betas. They laugh and flop down onto his bed while switch on his TV and fish the game out of his strategically stacked pile.

Armin comes back with a bowl of cereal that belongs to Mikasa – both the bowl and the cereal – and we make room for him on the unfortunately narrow dorm bed. He sits cross legged and balances the bowl between his thighs as he thumbs through the start menu, Sasha in possession of the other controller and not looking like she’ll relinquish it any time soon.

If there’s one thing you should know about Sasha it’s that she is ridiculously good at video games. There is not one single game I have not seen her play poorly. It’s terrifying and a major source of insecurity for Connie although he’ll never admit it. I can smell it on him, though, as we watch her yell at the screen and smash her car into a police cruiser.

I might laugh a little at his expense. But only because I’m starting to feel the same.

After Sasha runs Armin over twice in a row purely because she can, us boys decide it’s time for someone else to play. Mikasa gets back from her seminar on something (languages? Does she study languages? I don’t actually know) to find Armin and I physically holding Connie back from wrestling the controller out of Sasha’s grasp. I send Kasa a silent plea for help and she magically gets Sasha to hand it over without things turning ugly.

Seriously. How does she do this? What does she study?

By the time Armin and I have to leave for our lectures, the girls have decided to put on Bioshock and things have calmed down. We leave them in the desperate hope that Connie will still be alive by the time we get back and Armin’s room won’t be trashed.

“Want to meet for a coffee after?” Armin asks. “I didn’t see you at all yesterday.”

I agree because I can’t say no to Armin, even though my empty wallet is putting up a pretty loud protest in my back pocket. It’s true I didn’t see him yesterday, or the day before that. I’ve been so caught up in the whole werewolf/Levi thing that I had forgotten the human side of my life is equally important.

I text Armin a blow-for-blow of my lecture and the people falling asleep in it, and he sends me a sneaky shot of what his lecturer is wearing which has me choking back laughter and trying to cover it up as a very unconvincing cough. The guy sitting next to me doesn’t believe it for a second, so I show him the picture and now he’s doing the exact same poor cover up as our lecturer narrows her eyes in suspicion.

[To Armin]: guy next to me is choking cos of that

[From Armin]: Marco’s been crying since he saw him walk in.

I place Marco as one of Armin’s fellow photography students – Italian, from what Armin’s told me. I must admit, the image of a weeping Italian, appalled by the (lack of) dress sense of his middle aged balding lecturer with Armin as his only solace is pretty fucking funny. Man, I bet Marco wears cardigans.
[To Armin]: ask if he wants to get coffee later

[From Armin]: Nooo that’s just going to be us. I need Eren time.

[From Armin]: But Marco says his flat is going to Sina on Friday and we’re going too. K?

I snort.

[To Armin]: kk

[From Armin]: kkkkkk see you later. Might be late. This guy is killing us.

I pocket my phone after that and pretend to know what the lecturer is going on about but I’m so lost by now it’s hopeless. I know it definitely has something to do with child psychology, because that’s the module title, but other than that he might as well be speaking Chinese for all I’m understanding it.

The guy next to me takes pity and summarises what I missed and I at least leave the lecture theatre with half a page of notes so it’s not a total waste of my life.

I head on over to the library, know I’ll get there before Armin anyway because I’m closer, so I don’t bother looking around the third floor café when I arrive. Just head to the window seat I took last time.

Last time.

Oh yea. Levi. Fun times.

I can remember it oh so clearly. He was sitting at a table behind me, glaring at me with pure anger in his eyes.

I have to sneak a look at that table just to make sure he isn’t here again, but it’s occupied with a couple of girls flicking through something on an iPhone, and I’m safe.

Phone. Crap. I check the time. Armin’s lecture should have let out two minutes ago. He hasn’t texted me to say they’re letting him go on time though, so I figure I’m going to be waiting for at least another ten minutes. I sigh. Might as well get myself a coffee and waste time in the queue.

I order for me and Armin – get him one of those mocha latte things with the ridiculous name and multiple components that I swear to god don’t mean anything. It comes in a cup that’s too wide to be a cup. You have to hold the thing with two hands to drink from it. I don’t know how Armin copes, the poor blond thing. Oh well.

I take the tray back to our table which no one else has stolen yet, and as I’m setting the drinks down precariously I feel a presence behind me.

“Hey Armin, I thought you said you would be late,” I say, distracted by the drinks. He slides into the seat across from me and answers;

“And I thought you said you wouldn’t draw attention to yourself.”

Fuck.

“Levi,” I whisper, and I look up and meet his cold grey gaze and my blood turns to fucking ice because there is no mistaking the disapproval and disgust in his expression.
He tuts and looks out of the window, showing off a sharp profile made dangerous by his dark lashes and the shadows under his slitted eyes. I swallow.

“Uh,” I say.

Eloquent.

“We didn’t. Draw attention to ourselves, I mean. We went out to Karanese Forest and everything.”

Are my palms sweating? Yes. Am I freaking out over the fact that he is right there and I am so not prepared for this? Double yes. Should I start running now before I do something stupid like launch myself at him? Probably, yea.

“Then how do you explain this?” he asks, turning back to me as he pulls a tablet out of goddamn nowhere and flicks the screen on.

I blink down at it. Trost News website. It’s an article on a string of deer carcasses found mauled to death this morning in Cedar Park and heading into Trost State Forest. The article says they were attacked by – and I quote—

“An abnormally large wolf,” Levi says, voice low, finishing off my thought for me. I have to bite back a growl because fuck we all know there are actually wolves in Trost State Forest. Why the fuck does he think werewolves chose this university to go to in the first place? Not because of the lovely warm climate, let me tell you.

“So?” I say. “It might just be a freaky large wolf. Who says it’s a werewolf?”

“The fact that this happened last month, again on the full moon,” Levi answers, and yea. That’s kind of condemning.

“Well it wasn’t us,” I say. “We weren’t anywhere near Trost because somebody threatened to make me into a wolf-skin rug if I made as much as a noise last night.”

He actually flinches at that, nose wrinkling. “There is no way I am letting your filthy werewolf ass anywhere near my house, alive or dead.”

“Good. Why don’t you stay away from me all together, if you think I’m that repulsive?”

“Repulsive? That’s a pretty big word for you, isn’t it?”

Oh yea, now I’m growling.

“Considering I’m at least a head taller than you I should hope so,” I say, mentally congratulating myself for slipping a size joke in there. Something flashes in his eyes and he leans over the table slightly, teeth gritted. Aw fuck.

“Listen here you little shit—”

“Um, Eren?”

We freeze. Both of us. Like deer in the headlights. It would be funny if it wasn’t for the fact that we were just in the middle of something pretty heated and we don’t know how much of that Armin heard.

“You must be Armin,” Levi says calmly, snapping out of it first. He leans back in his seat, smoothes out the front of his dark shirt. Armin smiles a little awkwardly, looking from me to Levi
and back again, clearly wondering how he knew his name. _Well, Armin, it’s because I thought he was you until he started threatening me._

I glare at the man across from me as he goes on to say, “I was just about to leave. Sorry for taking up you time.”

Like a right gentleman, not the murderous pain in my ass he really is. Little fucker.

He stands and looks down at me for a moment, contemplating one last parting remark, maybe? But then he sighs and shakes his head, smiles at Armin once more and leaves.

“Who was that?” Armin asks.

“Levi,” I mutter. Like that makes all the sense in the world, and right now to me it does. I watch him walk out the exit and the door swings shut behind him. I start to panic a little.

“You guys know each other?”

“Uh, kind of.” I really didn’t handle that situation all too well, did I? Fuck, what if he goes after Connie or Sasha? “Um, listen Armin. Do you mind if I just…?”

“Go after him? Sure. This coffee mine?”

“Yea, yea. That expensive shit you like,” I say as I scramble up from my seat and weave through the ocean of tables between me and the door, suddenly desperate to catch up with him because _fuck_ I need him to understand it _wasn’t us._

I burst through the doors and take the stairs two at a time, almost send some woman with a pile of books flying.

“Levi!” I yell when I catch sight of his dark hair. He whips round to stare at me, grabbing the front of my shirt when I catch up to him.

“Shut the fuck up, brat. We’re in a library,” he hisses. I nearly laugh because that was _so_ not what I was expecting to come out of his mouth, but then I figure laughing in his face probably won’t help my case and I swallow the noise and nod instead.

“Look, it wasn’t us, okay? So that means there’s another werewolf in Trost and they’re probably violent if they’ve taken down a bunch of deer solo. Maybe an unstable omega,” I explain. The woman with the pile of books passes us by and Levi pulls us to the side as she sneers at how loud we’re (not) being.

“This might be a problem for the both of us,” I say. And shit could it be. An unstable omega with another Pack on their turf is always unpredictable. “We need to talk about this, but not here.”

“You’re right, I guess.” And didn’t that sound like it hurt to admit. At least he lets go of my shirt and I straighten up as inconspicuously as I can because apparently he’s touchy about his height. Doesn’t help that I’m still standing on the next step up from him.

“We could meet tomorrow and talk about it?” I offer. Just get it out of the way fast. Like a band aid, or a stab wound.

“You that eager to see me again?”

I blink. He’s smirking.
“Fuck off,” I growl. He laughs at me and I glare as fiercely as I am able.

“Tomorrow, brat. Meet me here at eleven,” he says, and then he’s turning to go.

“Wait, I have a lecture—”

“Twelve then.”

“But—”

“You’re a really shitty friend, you know that?”

“What?” Armin. Fuck. I huff in annoyance but eventually give up and go. He isn’t going to hang around here any longer anyway, by the looks of things. Not sociable, this one. Clearly.

I take the stairs at a slower pace on the way back up, thinking of what he told me.

An unstable omega. It’s possible. There’s little evidence it actually is a werewolf, but if we’re being paranoid then it certainly looks to be heading in that direction. And it’s always safer to be paranoid where wolves of any kind are concerned.

I shake my head, like I can clear those thoughts away as I push through the doors in the café. Save that line of enquiry for tomorrow. Midday tomorrow.

Who knows, maybe I’ll be able to go a full five minutes without wanting to tear some part of Levi’s body off.

And then again maybe he’ll end up tossing me through the window…
Fifteen Minutes Late With Starbucks

Chapter Summary

Levi happens, pizza is good, and Mikasa won’t go to Eren’s funeral.

He’s not here.

My lecture let out five minutes late and yet here I am. Sitting alone. Because Levi is not here.

Now, I don’t know the guy – don’t get me wrong, beyond the occasional threat sessions and that one time I attempted to fight him and ended up submitting like a goddamn disappointment, we’re as known to one another as fish are to kiwi plants – but I like to think that he’s not one to turn up ten minutes late to a meeting he set up in the first place. A meeting that concerns the behaviours of a werewolf. One that might possibly be unstable and therefore a problem. You’d think he’d at least have the decency to arrive on time. Fuck sake.

I check my phone.

12:13.

Where the fuck is he?

Now I’m starting to get anxious. Mainly because I know Connie and Sasha are on campus this morning and I re-e-eally don’t want them running into Levi of all creatures. Not on such a fine morning.

12:15. Technically an afternoon now.

Levi what the fuck if you’ve stood me up I swear to god—

“What’s with the face, mutt? You look constipated.”

Sigh.

“And you’re late,” I return, deciding to ignore his previous comment as I glare up at him.

He’s wearing red. I don’t know how I didn’t see him approaching.

“I was busy,” he tuts (and yes it is possible to tut words, he just did it right then I tell you) and waves a Starbucks cup at me.

Yea.

“You’ve got to be shitting me. You actually turned up fifteen minutes late with Starbucks.” How is this my life?

“You expect me to drink the shit they’re calling coffee here?” His tone of disdain says he does not need me to actually answer that one. And a good thing too, because my answer would not have
been constructive. Speaking of…

“So we need to figure out a way of doing this without the not-so-veiled threats and body slamming,” I say as he takes a seat across from me and pries the lid of his cup. It isn’t coffee. I can smell from here that it’s some sugary fruity crap. He made me wait for this? Really? Was it really worth it?

“Mmm,” he says as he sips his expensive time waster. It’s not technically a word but I’m taking it as a verbal agreement of sorts. Still, I try again.

“Cos last time we didn’t get very far before the threatening and the leaning-menacingly-into-my-personal-space deal. Call me crazy, but I don’t wanna end up making a bloody scene in the goddamn library. Personally, I think we’re better than that.”

Do you know what he says to that? He says;

“Shut the fuck up, mutt.”

Wha?

Excuse you.

Do I growl under my breath at the insult? *Fuck* yes.

“You might not want to do that in public either,” he says, low and lazy. Leans back in his chair, cup held in one hand. I tell him to fuck off.

“Omega,” he says, like he didn’t hear me. “You can find it?”

Right down to business. (Finally.)

“I can try,” I say.

“That’s not reassuring.” Yea, well, fuck you.

“Well what do you want me to say? I won’t know until I go out to Cedar Park and start tracking them. I might be able to pick up on a trail, I might not. And if the trail is too faint I might not be able to follow them very far. It depends on a lot.”

“But the full moon was only a couple of night ago.” Levi says it like it’s the only thing that matters. I have to roll my eyes at that.

“Yea but Cedar Park is huge, and if the park ranger found the omega’s hunt the morning after it happened, and with enough time for it to make it into the local news, then I would say this omega left his kills close to a hiking trail. Or somewhere the ranger would be headed early in the morning, you know?”

“And?”

Wow. Jesus, gonna have to use baby talk here.

“And if the ranger’s been around there then the scent trail’s gonna be broken up by his and whoever else’s he took out there. Not to mention Cedar Park is popular with early morning joggers and dog walkers and we’ve had a couple days’ worth of activity to cover the trails he would’ve left.

“Basically, I can find him if I can catch his scent and follow it. But it might not be that simple. And
anyway, why are you so scared of werewolves?” Because really, that is the important question here. I know why I want the possible-omega problem sorted, but I still have no clue what his deal is with us.

“Scared?” A pristinely pruned eyebrow is raised mockingly.

“I think I have a right to know, considering you’ve basically done nothing but threaten me and my Pack and still haven’t told me anything about you but your name,” I say, tone harsh because his eyebrows piss me the fuck off. They’re salon perfect. What the fuck.

“You never asked anything else about me.”

“Fuck off, you never gave me a chance.”

“You’ve had ample chance; you’ve just felt your time was better spent trying to piss me off.”

“Did I do a good job?”

“Still are.”

“Wonderful.”

We sit in silence for a bit because I’m having trouble not growing claws and he’s focused his attention back on that monstrosity in his clutches. I stare out the window and belatedly realize that the sky has clouded over. Looks like our summer is coming to an end. Fucking fantastic.

“It’s not fear,” he says after a while, voice calmer now. His eyes aren’t on me when I turn to look at him, but rather staring unseeing out at the world on the other side of the glass. I wait.

“I’m not afraid to face down a werewolf if I have to, kid. I just prefer not having to. That’s all.”

Oh really. That’s all? I call bullshit.

“So why did you threaten me that night in Sina?” I ask, disbelief so very present in my tone it has him snapping his eyes back to me. His pupils narrow to slits my wolf reacts instinctively, flooding me with his energy to face the threat. I swallow.

Fuck. Maybe not the best question to ask. And I was doing so well on the not-wolfing-out front.

“Because I was drunk and you stank of werewolf and in case you haven’t noticed, mutt, I don’t like what you are.”

“Why?”

“Because an Alpha like you poses more of a threat than I am comfortable with, okay? Congratulations, would you like a Scooby Snack?”

I ignore his shitty and, quite frankly, insulting joke. I’m mature like that.

“So you’re just going to let me deal with the omega all by myself?”

“Listen kid. I told you about him—”

“Um, no actually. You assumed it was me and I’m pretty sure you were ready to fight me about it because you’re a huge douche.” Oh yea, look at me setting the record straight and laying down some sick burns. (Sick burns? Who says that? Ugh.)
“Whatever, mutt. You still wouldn’t have known about him if it wasn’t for me, so you’re welcome. And yes, I’m going to let you deal with this, as you put it. You’re an Alpha, aren’t you? I thought bringing stray dogs to heel was your job.”

And ooooh boy does my wolf not like that.

Maybe it’s the heavily mocking tone he hasn’t really dropped since he sat his butt down across from me. Maybe it’s the way his pupils are still slitted like a cat’s and his aura screams of supernatural energy. Maybe it’s the fact that I’ve already submitted to him that has my wolf so aggressively wound up.

Or maybe it’s just because he’s wearing a red jacket and there’s that whole history between wolves and clothes with red hoods.

Either way, my eyes are golden now as I glare at him over the table top.

The skies open up and rain starts to hammer against the glass beside us, muffling the sound of my warning growl only slightly.

“Maybe I’ll deal with it by pointing him in your direction,” I say, low and dangerous. I see his eyes widen by a millimetre or two, hear his breathing hitch minutely. It’s barely there in the air around him but I still catch the smell of…

Not fear.

No. It’s not fear that he’s feeling at the prospect of facing down a crazed omega.

What I’m smelling right now, faint and clouded by the sugary tang of his drink, is not the stomach-drop of flight, but the adrenaline spike of fight.

It’s excitement. Anticipation.

He wants it. Despite what he said before, I know he wants a fight.

And then, just like that, his emotions slip away from my senses and he turns his face away from me, looks back out the window and into the steadily increasing storm beyond and I’m left to mull that one over.

Well fuck, as the saying goes. Why do I always get stuck dealing with the psychos?

“I’m not a psycho,” he says distractedly, and I realise I’ve been speaking my thought aloud. Again.

“You probably are, to be fair,” I say as I lean back in my chair to stretch. Damn, I hadn’t realised how tensed my shoulders were. “I mean, you’re crazy powerful, emotionless and cold, and take pleasure in fighting fucking werewolves. And talking about death openly over coffee.”

He turns back to me with a disdainful curl of his lips.

“This isn’t coffee,” he states, giving his half-empty cup a little shake.

“Yea okay, whatever.” He ignored the point: yet another clue that screams psycho.

Silence.

“So… can I go now?” I ask. Like, I actually feel the need to ask. Swear to god I need to get my head straight, I shouldn’t be asking him for permission to get up and go. What the fuck, brain?
“You really want to walk around in that?” he asks, jerking his thumb to the window.

Ah.

“Not so much.”

It’s fucking storming out there. I’m not wearing a coat. Hell, I’m wearing a tank top because it was sunny earlier.

I tap my fingers against the table top because now I really want to be leaving but I’ve literally just said I won’t and shit. Shit. If he were a normal human I would not be having this problem right now. Although, now that you mention it...

“So can I ask you a question, Levi?” I say it sweetly. Because apparently he likes things to be laced with sugar.

“No.”

“Well I’m going to anyway,” I say, frowning at his bluntness. “What are you?”

He sets his cup down slowly on the table top, swallows, licks his lips, and blinks once.

I’m already tensing and ready to run if needs be.

“You don’t know what I am?” he asks. Now it’s my turn to blink. I shake my head.

He smiles.

Grins.

Laughs.

I’m sitting here wondering what’s so funny and also looking around at the tables near us to check if people are staring because holy shit does this guy have some lungs on him. He doesn’t usually raise his voice above an unimpressed drawl or a mocking sneer usually. I was not prepared for the sudden increase in volume.

“Jesus, kid. You seriously don’t have a clue?” he’s leaning over the table top now, grinning at me and there’s this look in his eye that tells me I’m his new chew toy. I don’t like the chew toy look. It makes me feeling indigent and defensive.

“Well, you’re not a were,” I snap. “Your eyes would be gold or blue, but yours are still grey and the pupils turn to slits. I’ve never seen that before, so I don’t know. I don’t know what you are.”

“I’ll give you a clue, mutt. I’m really fucking old.”

“How is that a clue?” He’s what, twenty five? Twenty six? How is that old?

“Did I say you’d be able to figure it out right now? No. This is a clue. I’ll give you more if you find this omega and take care of it for me. They can be your Scooby Snacks.”

And now he’s snickering to himself again and I have my arms crossed across my chest and my teeth are sharpening in my mouth.

Fuck, I have no control when I’m around this guy.
“I’ll find the omega,” I say. I will. “But I’m not doing it for you, I’m just letting you know this is happening so you don’t freak out and go after my Pack if shit goes bad.”

“Course you’re not doing it for me,” he says with a smirk, and yea. That’s not a tone of voice I like.

My fingers dig into the table as I lean over it, snarling the words, “I’m not going to do a fucking thing for you. Stop approaching me, leave my Pack alone, and go fuck yourself.”

And with that I stand and I leave.

He doesn’t stop me.

I walk back to my dorm in the pouring rain and stand in the shower for a good forty minutes just to block out the noise of the world and calm my wolf down.

I need to do something. Something repetitive that’ll keep my mind off things.

I text Mikasa and ask if she wants to go to the gym later. Then I wrap myself in a hoodie and curl up on my bed and try not to think about how awful all my interactions with Levi have gone so far.

I really wish he’d leave me alone.

I really wish he’d actually answered my questions.

I really really wish Mikasa would text me back now.

I fall asleep before she does.

“So what are we doing out here, again?” That’s Sasha. I have explained the situation to her twice already (once yesterday evening and once more this morning), but both times she selectively ignored all the important parts.

“Seeing if we can find any werewolfy activity in the general vicinity,” Connie supplies. I flash him a grateful look.

“Oh, okay. And after that can we go get pizza? I’m starving.” Sasha effectively whines that last part, and I catch sight of Connie rolling his eyes. I have to chuckle at the dramatics.

“If you can find me an omega in this motherfucking forest, I will buy you any pizza you want,” I promise.

“Dude, do not—”

“Fuck yes!” Sasha whoops, cutting across Connie’s warning. She shifts her eyes to gold and then she’s off, running full tilt into the thick of the forest. Connie and I just stare after her; me startled, him resigned.

“You shouldn’t have promised her pizza, man. She’s going to find your omega and then make your wallet bleed. And she won’t give you a slice because she’ll say she earned it.”

I give him a look that asks him if he’s being serious or not.

“Guys! Come on! We’re losing daylight,” Sasha yells from some way off. I frown because it’s not even midday and I have no clue what she’s on about. “Oh, and I can smell blood over here.”
That gets me moving. Connie keeps pace with me as we skirt through the tall trees, following the sound of her shouts.

“How can she smell blood?” I say aloud. I’m not picking up anything but the undergrowth and the wildlife and us three.

Connie snorts beside me. “Eren, that girl is crazy good at tracking. If anyone’s going to find you a bone yard in under an hour in exchange for a food bribe, it’s going to be Sash. You’ve practically just forked over $40 right there.”

“Forty…?”

He pats my shoulder sympathetically.

Right. Werewolves. We eat a lot.

Damn.

“What took you so long?” Sasha asks, grinning at me in a way that tells me she’s heard everything Connie and I were saying and she’s rising to the challenge of getting this done in under an hour alright. I would sigh, but then again $40 worth of pizza is a pretty decent motivation for anyone.

“Eren was being slowed down by that heavy wallet in his back pocket,” Connie says. I narrow my eyes at him because he is a little traitor.

“Oh, man. We should help him out with that.” She really has the act of innocence beta down to a T. It sickens me.

“We really should, babe. We really should.”

And the twin grins on their faces… Yea I know I’m fucked.

We find the dumping ground and from the scent lying around it, it’s definitely a werewolf that made those kills, but we lose the scent some 100 meters from there. It leads us onto a public trail and although we follow it until it leads us back to the Centre and parking lot, we can’t find it again.

After that we spend hours circling out, marking rings around the dumping ground that turn up nothing but faint trails to and from the clearing, the scent of blood mingling with the scent of wolf and human and hunger and sweat. Obviously the trails between where the kill was made and where he dragged it to to eat. Sasha pales a little after we stumble on the fourth.

“How many deer did he take down?” she asks. Connie and I exchange a look. I don’t know if she’s ever encountered an omega before. From what I can gather, Connie has – or he at least knows enough about them – but Sasha hasn’t been a wolf for that long, and while omegas cause a stir in the werewolf community, they’re few and far between. We all know, however, what an omega is: a wolf without a Pack. An outsider. A loner.

A pretty distinct problem for several reasons.

I explain it to her.

“If an omega is unstable, on full moon nights its wolf can become rabid. Until the sun comes up, it is completely in control and it runs on feral instinct. There’s no way to predict that kind of
behaviour, but things usually end up bloody,” I say. Sasha frowns and moves a little closer to me, eyes fixed on the forest floor as we move between trees and bushes and thick, curling roots. Our pace is slow and steady now, the air cooling as evening approaches.

“It’s why omegas are usually bad news. They have to be strong to control the wolf without the help of a Pack to ground them, and if they’re not then the wolf takes over and they become a danger.” I notice Connie paying attention to me out the corner of my eye, but my gaze is still mainly fixed on Sasha. She’s thinking about something. There’s a question pushing itself around in her mind and I know it’s only a matter of time before she blurts it out, no matter how insensitive or dumb she thinks it is.

I wait.

We walk.

The forest gets darker around us as the sun droops down toward the horizon, setting and leaving and letting the moon take its place.

It isn’t until we find ourselves on the ridge surrounding Atlas Lake and trail-less that she speaks up.

“If this omega is unstable… is there a way for you to fix him?”

They’re both watching me as I think that one through.

“My Alpha back home,” I say slowly, staring down at the water. “He brought an unstable omega into the Pack once. The strength of the Pack helped him to settle and learning from other werewolves helped him get his wolf under control. But that was the choice of the omega. Before my Alpha approached him, he hadn’t had a Pack. He hadn’t even been a werewolf for very long, and it was being thrown into the world of the supernatural without any warning and without understanding what was happening to him that made him so unstable.

“I don’t know what would happen if I tried to help an omega who chose to be alone,” I sigh. As far as I know, it’s never been attempted before. Or at the very least, an attempt to stabilise an omega without their cooperation has never been successful.

“Why would anyone choose to be alone?” Sasha asks quietly.

I shrug.

“Sometimes being made a werewolf isn’t what the human wanted. Sometimes they don’t know there are others out there. Sometimes shit just happens.”

It’s as good an answer as any because seriously, I know what it feels like to be made a werewolf against your will. It sucks. It sucks hellishly. I don’t blame anyone for freaking out about their first forced foray into the world of the supernatural, and subsequently turning tail and running for the goddamn hills. It’s essentially what I did… only with me there was a lot more anger involved.

“We’ll keep coming out here every couple of days until the next full moon,” I say, and my tone of voice says that we’ve done enough tracking (or attempting and failing to) today. The others follow me when I turn to leave, the air lighter and happier now they know we’re going home.

“We should keep an eye on things. Levi says there was another kill like this last month, too. I’m worried about how close these dumping grounds are to public footpaths. The fact that they’re on national park territory is kind of worrying, too,” I muse aloud as we walk. Connie and Sasha are
striding along beside me, arm in arm, heads cocked my way in an eerily similar manner.

“How much do you talk to Levi?” Sasha asks. Of all the things she could’ve picked up from that, it had to be his name, didn’t it?

“I don’t like you talking to him,” Connie adds.

I snort.

I know he doesn’t like me talking to Levi. Neither of them do. When I told them about our library encounter they had adamantly refused to let me go and meet him again. And when I had gone to them after the second meeting (and a much needed gym session that included Mikasa yelling not-quite-motivation at me for two hours) Connie wrapped himself around me grumpily and did not let go. I ended up spending the night because there was physically no way I could leave the house without him kicking up a fuss and dragging me to the floor. Sasha wasn’t much help yesterday, either.

“I’ve only spoken to him like three times, and we don’t really do much talking. We glare. And snarl occasionally. Threaten, too.” Yea, we really need to work on our communication skills.

“And anyway, after this omega business is sorted out, he’ll hopefully leave us all alone.” What I meant there was leave me alone. Because he hasn’t actually approached the others at all. Thank god.

“Good,” they say in unison.

We walk back the rest of the way to my truck in silence after that. I try not to think too much about our resident evil-eyed mystery of a man, and Connie and Sasha are wearing matching frowns.

I begin to wonder if being in physical contact somehow syncs them to one another.

“You guys still want pizza?” I ask. The way their heads whip round and their expressions light up like the fucking sun itself tells me that yes, physical contact does indeed sync them perfectly.

“Pepperoni,” Sasha says. Connie’s favourite.

“And Hawaiian,” Connie says. Sasha’s favourite.

“You guys are disgustingly couply,” I mutter under my breath, fully aware that they can hear. Their laughter says they do not care. My wolf tells me I should not have expected anything less.

As it turns out, Sasha does not earn her pizza the next day either, or the day after, or the day after that. We spend hours each evening and whatever time between lectures and seminars we can up at Cedar Park, cutting paths through the underbrush and letting our wolves enter our sense and hunt with us. The longer we spend without finding so much as a whiff of wolf on the wind, the more frustrated our wolves get. They know we’re hunting a possible threat to the stability of our Pack. They know that the more time that passes, the less likely we are of finding a trail that’s unspoiled and strong enough to track.

“It’s hopeless,” Connie says as we reach the border line between Cedar Park and Red Valley Forest. We follow the invisible line north just because we can, and I hate to admit it but he’s right. We don’t even have Sasha with us today because she’s got some project going on up at the university, and she’s the best of us at tracking by far.
“Not hopeless,” I say, a little out of breath because this far out on the edges of the reserve the ground slopes upwards pretty steeply. “Just really fucking difficult.”

“No, this is so hopeless, man,” Connie insists. “The only way we’re gonna find anything in this place is if we’re seriously freaking lucky.”

I huff a laugh at that because yea, it’s true. We’ve been searching Cedar Park grid square by grid square for days now. Connie’s been in charge of mapping because he’s good at maths and apparently you need maths to be able to plot a trail on a map and figure out where the next best place to look is. I think the word he used was triangulate? But I don’t really know, I’m studying psychology goddamnit. Point is: so far we’ve found nothing but a couple piles of old bones.

“I mean, if this omega’s been getting freaky on the full moon for a couple months now without being found by people, then who’s to say a couple werewolves can track him down?”

I stop walking and lean against a tree. Connie comes and sits on the sloping ground at my feet, wedged between the roots to stop himself from sliding sideways.

“You think we won’t find him?” I ask, because that isn’t something I’ve thought of yet. I just assumed it was only a matter of time before we stumbled on a den or a wolf run or caught sight of the tell-tale markings an omega would leave behind in its territory.

“I think that a werewolf isn’t just a wolf, you know? Yea, on a full moon it is but there’s some dude’s mind in that body too and we all know the wolf can access that.” He runs a hand through his gelled hair, messing it up in a way that can honestly never make him look unattractive damn him. He sighs.

“A human would know how to hide from humans, and a wolf would know how to hide from wolves. If you combine them then…”

“Then you get a werewolf that’s not only rabid, but smart too,” I finish. And now I’m getting what he means by ‘impossible’. I slide down to the dark forest floor beside him and he leans his head on my shoulder.

“Exactly. We’ve been tracking it like we’re trying to catch a wolf. And yea, trail-wise we are, but if it’s smart like a human on the run then we won’t find it so easy.”

“Fuck,” I sigh. He’s right.

“Fuck,” he agrees. He shuffles closer to me so our thighs are pressed together and I pull his hand into my lap, loop my fingers around his wrist and start rubbing circles into his palm with my thumb because I can smell the frustration and the worry on him.

We sit there for a long while, listening, thinking, seeking simple comfort in each other’s presence. When I break the silence, I do it as quietly as I’m able.

“We need a new angle.”

He wriggles until his head slips from my shoulder and lands in my lap and I’m pretty sure there are gnarled roots abusing his hips at this angle but he doesn’t seem to mind. I let go of his wrist and run my fingers through his styled-yet-not hair, playing with it and making it into spikes he never wears. The half-amused, half-annoyed rumble in his chest says he knows exactly what I’m doing and he would complain but he can’t be fucked.

“We could look for records of unusual wolf activity in Trost State Forest over the past few months.
“See if there’s a pattern, you know?” he suggests. I think about it.

“How are we going to get that information?” I ask. Surely they won’t just make it available to the public. State Forest is all about the conservation and study of wolves. Sure, they make a lot of their research publicly available, but I’m imagining they wouldn’t want something like this getting out. I don’t even know how Levi knew about it, but I’m putting that down to his creepy little supernatural senses. Little fucker.

“Well, I’m thinking that if Sash is studying Ecology, Evolution and Behaviour, then she can just say she’s researching local environments and shit for her course. Right? She can probably find out a bunch of stuff for us easy.” He turns to lie on his back and looks up at me, waiting for me to agree with him.

“Fuck,” I say again. “Sometimes I forget you’re the smart one.”

“Whoa! Hey, I’m so totally always the smart one here, man. Just cos you got the Alpha mojo don’t mean you got the brains to go with it,” he teases. I hold back my laugh, opting for a different approach here. I jab him in the ribs, making him yelp. This guy is goddamn ticklish.

“Oh, you think you’d be a better Alpha?” I say. I let my eyes shift to gold and feel my wolf stirring in the back of my mind. “Why don’t you make the challenge official?”

Now my wolf’s awake. From the lopsided grin on Connie’s face I’d say his is too. He lowers into a crouch, eyes glowing a similar gold as he bares his teeth.

“Come at me bro,” he rumbles.

I laugh through a mouthful of sharp teeth we both know I won’t use.

We run back to the truck, Connie yelling hysterically the entire way, me keeping at the perfect chase distance behind him. We trip and stumble and fall flat on our faces multiple times on the way because we’re too fucking distracted by our own ridiculous hollering, and by the time we reach the parking lot we’re out of breath and laughing and our wolves are thrumming in our veins.

Connie leans, bent double and panting, hand clutching at the hood of my truck for balance as I fish around in the back seat foot well for the bottle of water I know has been rattling around back there for days now. I toss it to him and he catches it without looking up, signs me a thumbs up and a give-me-a-moment gesture and I slap him on the back as he takes his first gulp because I’m a horrible, horrible person.

He sprays water everywhere and I scramble to get into the truck and out of his line of fire.

“You asshole,” he growls, but he’s laughing too and there’s water dripping down his chin and I just shrug innocently because I know he won’t do shit.

My phone vibrates in my back pocket now that we’re in a place that has signal and I flick through various texts from Armin that started out with the purpose of reminding me we’re going to Sina’s tonight with his course mates, and ended in him yelling my name in capitals because I wasn’t answering.

[To Armin]: sorry no reception

[To Armin]: but still on for tonite
[From Armin]: *tonight, and you should be.

[To Armin]: toniiiiGHT ugh better princess?

[From Armin]: Don’t call me princess.

I feel a grin coming on as I open up a different thread and type

[To Kasaaa]: call armin princess and i’ll give you money

I wait.

Connie climbs into the truck and I turn the ignition without his prompting so he can turn on the radio.

My phone lights up.

[From Armin]: EREN WHY

[From Armin]: Oh and Mikasa says we need more bread.

I cackle.

“Hey Connie,” I say. “Armin’s new nickname is Princess.”

“Shit yea it is,” he grins. I like Connie. He understands me.

[From Kasaaa]: You owe me money bitch.

[To Kasaaa]: can i use that money to pay for the bread?

Worth a shot, right?

I use the time I wait for her reply to change Armin’s name in my phone to Princess. Out of the corner of my eye I see Connie doing the same and offer my fist as a sign of respect. He bumps it and nods in appreciation of that fact.

[From Kasaaa]: Buy me bread and something chocolate. Cramps are killing me. You on your way back now?

[To Kasaaa]: :( aw poor baby. in my truck now.

The response to that is instantaneous and not wholly unexpected.

[From Kasaaa]: DON’T TEXT AND DRIVE BAKA

[From Kasaaa]: If you die I’m not coming to your funeral.

[From Kasaaa]: Armin says he’ll cry like a little bitch if you die in a car crash.

[From Princess]: I won’t come to your funeral either. And fyi I cry like a man.

[To Kasaaa, +Princess]: IF I DIE ITS ON YOU STOP TEXTING ME I’LL BUY YOUR DAMN BREAD
I decide to pocket my phone and actually start the damn engine.

“You done upsetting your husband?” Connie asks. He has his feet up on the dashboard and a grin on his face. I stick my tongue out at him because I’m mature and he laughs at me until we’re back in Trost and I start laughing too.

I drop him at his place, remind him he’s coming out with us later because him and Sasha don’t know the wonder of a night out with Hannah and Franz, and he tells me he’ll update Sasha on the omega situation.

I know the promise of a night out to get our minds off all of it will be welcome news, and giving Sasha a job she can do no problem will definitely cheer her up. She was stressing out earlier that she couldn’t come up to Cedar Park with us, and my wolf whines at the memory.

They really fucking are my betas, aren’t they. I’m going all protective big brother on them and everything. Damn. My uncle would laugh his fucking ass off if he caught me acting like this.

For some reason, that thought doesn’t affect me as much as it once might have.

Huh.

You’re growing up, Jaeger, I think to myself as I head up the hill to campus. Got yourself a Pack, getting yourself a degree. Now all you need is a job and a life.

Right. Life. That thing that you do stuff with.

Like going out with your friends and having fun and not worrying about the emotional wellbeing of werewolves or whether the violent deaths of deer will mean the violent deaths of said werewolves at a later date. Yea.

I shake that thought from my mind and get my butt down to the campus store before Mikasa comes out of the dorm block and beats it with some freaky martial arts move.

It isn’t too busy inside, the only shoppers being those of us students going out later and using IDs that aren’t strictly real to purchase alcohol that is blessedly cheap.

The bread isle is empty.

I shuffle down the length of it looking for the cheapest loaf, knowing I am running out of money fast and not wanting to beg my uncle for more because he’ll only tell me to go find a job and I can’t be dealing with that right now.

White or brown?

Mikasa like brown, Armin likes white. I stand there for a good five minutes, debating. Another shopper with far less worries on her plate grabs a loaf at random and dumps it into her basket. I watch her walk away, mourning the days when I could be so carefree with bread choice.

“If you keep staring like that, they’ll chase you out with a broom.”

I do not, in any way, jump at the sound of that drawling voice coming from right next to my freaking ear. Nope, don’t even yelp.

“Do you have to do that?” I hiss. Glare. Glare real good, Jaeger, give him all you got.

What Levi’s got are fucking perfect eyebrows that were designed to be raised in the most
“As an irritattingly unimpressed manner.

“Yes, mutt, I do. Scaring the shit out of you is all I aim to do in life.”

“What are you doing here?” I choose to ignore his sarcasm and baiting for now.

“Grocery shopping,” he says, and it’s then that I notice the basket he’s holding in one hand. It is, indeed, full of groceries.

“Oh. Well why are you talking to me?”

“Really kid? Isn’t it obvious? Do you not remember the several conversations we had about the unstable omega?” he asks. I frown down at him. Fuck, he really is short.

“I remember you threatening me and then expecting me to sort it out for you like I owe you or something,” I sneer. Levi rolls his eyes and shakes his head.

“Yea, and now I’m wondering if you’ve actually fucking done that.”

I don’t say anything. I turn back to the isle of bread in front of me and resume the mental debate of brown or white, hoping he’ll understand that werewolf business is not Levi business, and leave.

He doesn’t say anything for a while, then lets out a harsh breath, pulls a loaf from the shelf, and shoves it in my hands.

“Do you need anything else?” he asks. I blink at him, open my mouth to say something inevitably defensive and rude, but what comes out is:

“Mikasa wants chocolate.”

If he thinks that’s a fucking weird thing to say, he doesn’t mention it, just nods and turns on his heel. I follow, slightly confused and betrayed by my own mouth, berating myself for saying anything at all. I find myself standing in the confectionary isle and Levi’s tossing items at me.

“What the fuck. Stop throwing shit at me,” I snap. “Go do your own shopping and leave me the fuck alone.”

“How about no,” is his answer. A back of chocolate buttons hits me square in the face and I swear to god, at this point I am five seconds away from hurling the bread at him and taking him out with goddamn Milky Way.

“You tell me what you’ve found on this omega and I’ll pay for your shit,” he says, and I forget the pleasing image of gouging his freaky grey eyes out with a chocolate bar. It’s true that my funds are running low.

I narrow my eyes at him.

“I also need pizza and a bottle of vodka,” I say, just to test his resolve.

“Fine. Want mixers?”

“Diet Coke.”

“Good choice.”

“You’re serious?”
“I appreciate a man who isn’t afraid to drink diet,” he says, completely straight faced. We both know that’s not what I was actually questioning him about, and I take his answer as a “yes I’m serious, I will bribe you for information if I have to”.

All I say is, “Oh, so I’m a man now and not a mutt?’’

He thinks about that for a second before stepping past me, breezily suggesting “I could just buy you dog food instead, you know.”

And this is how I find myself up one bottle of vodka, two bottle of Coke (because they were on offer and Levi is apparently a huge sucker for buy one get one free and also glared me into submission over it) two pizzas (because I am not above making a scene for more pizza) and have acquired a somewhat large amount of chocolate coated food stuffs for Mikasa, and a loaf of half-and-half bread that really should have been the obvious choice from the start.

“Okay, so we should meet up tomorrow to discuss—”

“I’ll walk you,” he interrupts.

“Excuse me?”

“I said I’ll walk you. To your dorm. You can tell me what you found on the way.”

I stare at him for a moment, torn. On the one hand, I want to spend as less time around this guy as I can, which means not having to spend many minutes in his company tomorrow is always a plus. On the other, I don’t know if my wolf can handle not bursting free and throttling him if I actually allow him to walk back to my dorm. My dorm is my territory. I don’t want him anywhere near there.

“Jesus, mutt, just take your bags and go if it’s that much of a problem. I’ll meet you tomorrow, we can braid each other hair and you can tell me all about your wolfy adventures.”

Oh fuck no, you are not using that tone of voice with me in order to fucking win.

“You can walk me to my fucking dorm,” I growl. A couple of guys leaving the store behind us give us some odd looks, and yea that… that probably sounded weird.

From the look Levi’s giving me he finds it amusing. I growl again, but this time with my wolf, and his smirk turns toothy, looks like a silent snarl.

Good god if I survive this walk I deserve a medal.

“Come on,” I mutter, ignoring the protest my wolf is putting up, now bribing him with the promise of pizza. It doesn’t work quite as well on my wolf half, but he’s been with me long enough that my eternal love of pepperoni has rubbed off on him to some degree. It doesn’t do much to calm him about Levi strolling casually beside me, lighting up a cigarette with deft precision, but it’s still progress of a sort.

I figure I should get this over with quickly, huh?

“So we found the dumping ground that Trost News was talking about,” I say.

“You and your Pack?” Levi asks immediately.

“Look, if you’re going to be interrupting then this is going to take longer than it has to,” I snap. He
blows smoke in my face.

“Apologies. Do go on, dear Eren.”

“Don’t call me that.”

“I make you no promises.”

“Ugh, just shut up and let me talk. Fuck.” I wait for his silence to last a few meters before I being again. “So we found the dumping ground—”

“You’ve already said that.”

“Shut up Levi. There was blood nearby, and there was a trail leading away from the site but it got cut up by a public footpath and we lost it,” I say, swinging my bags of free food as I consider what information is acceptable to give him, and which isn’t. I guess, as a supernatural living in the area of a possible unstable omega, he does have a right to be warned about it. It’s only fair – omegas are unpredictable little shits, and vicious as hell. It’s a consideration my uncle gave to any other supernaturals living nearby us back home.

I have to do the grown up thing here.

I tell him what I can.

By the time I’m finished (no thanks to Levi and his constant interruptions and a brief pause for me to get my wolf under suitable control), we’re standing in the parking lot of my dorm building and have been for several minutes now. I can hear the music from inside, and Armin yelling at Mikasa as she yells back in Japanese. So, drinking has started. That’s good. I’m in serious need of a drink.

“Want me to walk you to your door, brat?” Levi says.

I tell him to go to hell.

“Who says I want to go back?” he asks, and I can’t determine whether he’s joking or not until he smirks at me and my grip tightens on the bags in my grasp, ready to clobber him with them if I have to.

“No seriously, mutt. I’m impressed you managed to actually do something vaguely useful for a change.”

“Fuck. Off.”

“Although I am disappointed you’re in much better control today. I won’t lie, I was looking forward to you turning furry in the middle of campus and chasing a few rabbits.”

Okay, yea, patience running thin here.

“Levi, would you just—”

“Levi?”

The voice startles both of us and fuck, we call ourselves supernatural beings of the night? Pathetic. It worries me that I was so engrossed in trying to sense even the slightest damn bit of emotion from this fucker before me that I didn’t even hear Hannah approaching us. She has her trademark smile
plastered across her photoshop-perfect face, and I want to run away from this encounter but that would be pathetic.

So I stay.

I stay and I watch as Hannah cocks her head in an adorable way at Levi and asks that dreaded question, “are you a friend of Eren’s?”

Because I know where this is going.

Levi flicks his eyes to me and licks his lips in a way that is not innocent in the slightest. For the first time since he (most-definitely-did-not) made me jump in the store, I scent his emotions. And I do not like what I smell.

“Eren and I are besties,” he says, smiling at her, tone sugar sweet and pissing me off. Hannah gives him a look that says she knows exactly what he means, and no, no she really does not.

“I hate you,” I mutter, and I know he hears it because he goes on to say.

“Yea, he just can’t get enough of me.”

Nails. Each of his words are nails in my soon-to-be-physical coffin. I guess Mikasa and Armin get to not go to my funeral after all.

“Oh really?” she asks. Franz walks up, bags of his own in hand. They’ve just come from the store too, then. (Although I say just, it actually took us way too fucking long to walk back, goddamnit.)

“Franz, this is Levi,” Hannah does the introductions as I pray for it all to be over. I need to leave. I need to be away from Levi right yesterday. “Levi says Eren can’t leave him alone.”

No no no Hannah stop. It’s actually the fucking opposite. Stop making my life difficult, read the situation before you, accept that I hate this motherfucker and then go away. You’re a lovely girl, but you really need to go away now.

“Then I’m thinking Eren should invite you to come out with us tonight,” Franz says, grinning at me like this is all fun and games.

“No,” I say, immediately.

Alas, no does not suffice.

“Oh come on, Eren. Everyone’s going. Levi should come get drunk with us and have some fun too, yea?” Hannah’s smile has turned playful and I don’t like it. I don’t like it.

“No,” I say again.

“Yea, I don’t think that’s a good idea,” Levi agrees. Now, I won’t admit to feeling relief when I heard those words coming from him, because that would mean that he actually did something I approve of, but I do feel something that is not unlike relief.

“Oh come on,” Hannah says again, this time drawing out the ‘on’, and taking Levi’s hand and tugging.

“No, Hannah—” I say, but then Franz throws and arm around my shoulders and starts steering me towards the building and I try to crane my neck back to see if Levi has floored her and run yet but he hasn’t and I don’t like that either.
Somehow the two humans manage to get us inside and into the noise and alcohol haze of the flat and I may be having a mild panic attack right now because no.

No. Come on.

This isn’t fair.

“Eren,” Armin drawls, taking Franz’s place and slipping his arm around my waist. “I’m glad you didn’t die in your truck.”

“I’m not,” I mutter. He giggles, cheeks dusted pink from the alcohol I can smell on his breath.

“Did you get the stuff?” he asks, and his words aren’t slurred, but they are slower than usual.

“Yea,” I say, trying not to think too much about the extras I sort of accidentally may have allowed into our dorm. “Where’s Mikasa?”

“Strip Mario,” he says. That explains the yelling from earlier. Also explains why Armin’s shirt isn’t actually Armin’s shirt.

“I need a drink,” I say, and Armin giggles and pulls me into the kitchen and I pray to god that Levi has gone but when he puts his bags next to mine on the counter and tells me to “put his shit in the fridge before someone steals it” I realise that something is not right here.

“You’re not staying,” I say, and it comes out like a question but I meant it as a fact. Me putting my foot down. Alpha on Alpha territory.

“Look, you made me buy alcohol so I’m going to fucking drink the alcohol, and then I’m going out partying with your friends because I fucking want to.”

“What?” No way in hell is he actually serious.

“Don’t say ‘what’. Put my shit in the refrigerator and give me the bottle.”

“Hannah won’t let you leave, will she?” I guess.

The glower he shoots me says that that is exactly what the problem is.

“She told me to get you drunk and take you home.”

I nearly drop the fucking vodka in shock.

“Calm the fuck down. That is not happening. But the mental image alone has scarred me enough that only alcohol will fix it, so give me the bottle, put my groceries away, and stop acting like a window.”

“What?” What is he even on about?

“Your mouth. It’s hanging open. Fucking disgusting. Shut it.” And with that he pries the bottle from my frozen hand and heads back into the fray of sweaty students.

I stare after him, hand still positioned like the bottle’s still in it. I watch as he pushes past an approaching Armin, and the look of confusion and then realisation on his face spells even more trouble for me.

“Hey wasn’t that that guy?” Armin asks as soon as he’s close enough to be heard over the music.
I groan.

“What guy?” Mikasa asks, because of course she’s with him.

“Just some guy I know,” I explain quickly, wishing so very much not to get into this. Hopefully, with the amount of people here tonight, I won’t actually have to deal with him. Hopefully he’s just taken the bottle and is now leaving the premises.

Hopefully I can find someone else to mooch off so that I may drown my sorrows.

I give Mikasa the bag with the chocolate in, literally shove Levi’s shopping in the fridge without taking any of it out of the bags, and then take a deep, steadying breath. I tell my wolf all will be fine. He tells me in growls and grumbles that he highly doubts that and I mentally agree that he should handle a situation if one arises.

“Hey Princess, wanna help me pick out my outfit?” I say, hoping for us to escape to my room so I can at least pretend none of this is happening.

“Oh shit, Eren,” Mikasa laughs, clutching my shoulder as she doubles over. “Shit, Eren.”

“No, Mikasa, don’t,” Armin whines.

“When we were playing Mario Kart, guess what character Armin was?” she wheezes, around drunken laughter and her ever-present gum.

“Princess Peach!” she shouts.

In spite of it all, I laugh.
He doesn’t take the bottle and leave. No, he takes the bottle and he drinks from it and he talks to people I know and they talk back and they all seem to be enjoying it.

I hide from him in the mass of people now flooding our flat, and I keep Armin and Mikasa close because I don’t want Levi anywhere near them tonight.

It isn’t until Armin realises that I haven’t had a damn thing to drink that he drags me into the kitchen with Mikasa pushing me from behind, and I have to actually face Levi. He’s playing ring of fire with Franz’s athletic buddies and I try not to stare at him as Armin escorts me past to a very sticky counter top cluttered with half empty bottles of various alcoholic beverages.

“T’m making you a cocktail,” Armin tells me. “Because you need a cocktail.”

He then proceeds to poor a little of everything into one glass, a frown of concentration etched on his drunk little face.

“He’s making you a dirty pint,” a voice says from behind me and oh my fucking god.

“Stop it,” I hiss, whirling on Levi who is peering over Armin’s shoulder, watching as inch after inch of alcohol is poured into my glass.

“Stop what?” he asks, innocently sipping from a red solo cup that does nothing to obscure his smirk. The table behind us erupts into loud laughter as the game ends, and I flinch at the sudden change in noise level, but Levi doesn’t seem to even notice. He’s staring at me, daring me to make a scene. I open my mouth (probably to make a scene).

“Here you go—oh heeeeyy… Levi?” Armin says, turning and noticing the black haired addition in our midst.

“Armin,” Levi smiles warmly, seemingly unaffected by the daggers I am glaring his way. “Nice to meet you again.” Armin giggles.

And no. Absolutely fucking not. This cannot be happening.

This will not happen.

“Can I talk to you for a minute Levi?” I hiss through a smile that causes me physical pain. He nods his consent and then I do something that sends shivers down my spine: I take a hold of his arm and I drag him away from Armin and Mikasa and Franz and the rest and I shove him through the door.
into my room and I close it behind us.

Well fuck.

Remember how I said I didn’t want Levi anywhere near my territory because my wolf would kick up a huge fuss?

Now take an educated guess at who is currently one wrong move from wolfing out in a flat full of drunk students because he did exactly that?

(Hint: if you guessed me, you guessed right.)

“What do you think you’re doing?” I glare at him as he scans my room and I want to tell him to stop, to just get the fuck out, but he’s doing… something right now and I want to know what it is.

“Well, a moment ago I was talking with your good friend Armin – who I hope you apologised to for interrupting your date the other because that was a dick move – and now I’m standing in what I assume is your room and answering your rather pointless question, considering you were actually present for all of it,” he says, bored and lazy. Then he takes another drink from his cup and I remember that I’m still holding the glass of god knows what that Armin made me.

I march past him and put it down on my bedside table with a small crack.

“That’s not what I meant and you know it. You’re doing something.”

“I’m… drinking?” he says, innocent and arrogant, and waves the red cup in my face. The thought of what is it with this guy and red things passed through my mind, but I shake it out and point my most accusing finger at him.

“Levi, why the fuck are you still here?” I snarl. He walks to my desk, flicks through the pages scattered across it, getting his fucking scent everywhere and then leans on the edge, ankles crossed.

“Because I want to be,” he says.

Oh. Okay, we’re playing this game?

Fine.

“And why do you want to be here, Levi?” I ask, like I’m talking to a child. His eyes narrow minutely at the patronising tone of voice. I count that as a victory.

“Because I would like to get to know your adorably human friends.”

“And why is that?”

He smirks, and I know I’m not going to like this answer, but I still don’t stop him from opening his mouth and saying, “So that I know who I should be threatening the safety of in the future.”

The snarl that rips out of me is sudden and violent, and then I’m in his personal space, crowding him back against the desk with my arms boxing him in on either side, claws digging into the wood and face centimetres from his as I stare down at him, growling with all the force my wolf can muster.

My skin ripples, fur itching to push through.

I see his dark pupils narrow to slits.
“If you put a finger on any of them,” I spit at him, teeth lengthening in my mouth, “you lose the hand.”

“Is this little show supposed to scare me?” he asks, tone even, eyebrow raised in that unimpressed manner of his, but I can’t smell disbelief in the air and I can hear – almost feel – his heartbeat hammering in his chest and I know that yes, he isn’t as unmoved by this ‘little show’ as he wants me to think.

The sound of wood splintering under my claws as they dig further into the desk confirms this. He should be scared. I am not weak. I submitted to him, yes, but that means nothing in the face of him threatening my friends. My human friends. He has no right to over step that line, and I want him to know that.

He glances down to his left, watches as my dark claws make the wood creak. I see his eyes widen ever so slightly.

He hums.

It sounds surprised.

He raises his cup to his lips, ready to drink again, to interrupt this exchange with something mundane and therefore undermine just how serious I am being. I don’t like that.

I pull one hand away from the desk and wrap it around his pale wrist, holding him there. His lips part in what I assume will be some scolding remark, but I beat him to it.

“You won’t hurt them,” I say, and it’s a command. We both know it. We both know exactly what it means for me to be giving him a command, and I can smell the spike of anger that shoots through him before he stifles it, hiding it away from my senses again.

“I won’t hurt them,” he echoes, voice cold, eyes trained on mine again, and I swear I haven’t fucking blinked since the start but I don’t care, I won’t fucking look away now. “If you keep me up to date on what’s happening with the omega. I won’t hurt them.”

I scoff.

“Not happening,” I say, immediately. “I’ve already told you what you need to know; if we find it, I will deal with it.”

“That’s not good enough,” he says, and then he’s tugging his hand free of my grip and leaning forward and up, right up into my face, eyes full of an energy I can’t describe in a better way than purely demonic.

“You will keep me informed, or I will give your little human friends a crash course in the world of the supernatural.”

My hand is at his throat now, and he has one fisted in my shirt, and we’re breathing the same air and I can taste the alcohol on his breath and the flare of something supernatural beneath that, and I know I’ll end up bowing down but only because I fucking have to.

Again.

I should have fought harder to keep him away from here.

I should have fought.
“Look at it this way, mutt,” he drawls, head tipped lazily to one side, ignoring the claws digging into the pale column of his throat. A few strands of dark hair slip loose from the gel’s hold and fall across his gaze. “If I know what’s happening, I can help.”

“I don’t need your help.”

We both know how this is going to end, though.

“And how do you know if you won’t give me a chance?” he asks. Smirks.

I growl deep in my chest, vibrations running into his because we’re still stood so goddamn close.

“Give you a chance?” I laugh. “How about I give you a call when the omega’s taken care of and you fucking accept that as the reasonable compromise it is?”

“And how about I accidentally bump into your boyfriend on campus and we spend a wonderful day getting to know one another? I can think of a number of things I would like to do to that pretty face of his.”

“Alright, enough,” I growl, finally breaking eye contact and turning my head to the side. I take a few steadying breaths to get my wolf to settle down, and then turn back, ease up my grip on his throat a little, but don’t move away just yet.

“You see the point I’m making?” he asks, calmer than before. He knows he’s won.

“I see it,” I mutter.

“And do you agree that it’s a fair deal?”

“No.”

“Listen mutt—”

“I don’t fucking like it, it’s not fucking fair, but I can keep you in the loop if you keep your creepy fucking ass away from Armin and Mikasa. Happy?”

He nods twice, pupils dilating into something more human as he does so.

“I have the right to withhold information if I think you’re going to be a murdering asshole about it,” I say as he lets go of the front of my shirt and reaches for his drink again.

He raises an eyebrow at me.

“And I have the right to kick your ass if that withheld information causes me issues.”

“You already have issues,” I mutter, because I’m a goddamn mature adult.

He snorts, opens his mouth to retort in an inevitably sarcastic manner, but then the door to my room bursts open and we both jump a foot in the air as Armin leans in and yells “WE’RE LEAVING NOW OKAY” and then pulls the door closed after him.

I try to coax my wolf back down out of my throat and Levi clears his own and I take a step back because I’m still leaning over him and that’s so not okay now that we are no longer bodily threatening one another.

“So are you coming to Sina or are you going to do the polite thing and fuck off?” I ask.
“Just for that, I’m coming to Sina,” he says, downs the rest of his drink, picks Armin’s hideous concoction up from my bedside table, shoves it into my hand and tells me; “you’re going to need this, mutt. Fuck, you’re going to need all the alcohol you can find.”

“Because a werewolf is easier to kill when they’re drunk?” I guess.

He blinks at me.

“No, because I’m not letting your furry little ass dump me with Hannah when we get to Sina,” he says. “And you need to be drunk enough that you’ll let me hand with you.”

I drink fast.

As I try to ignore the taste of the worst dirty pint I’ve ever willingly drunk, I wonder if Levi gets off on threatening people and then acting like that’s a perfectly acceptable thing to do.

I ask him as we’re walking out the door.

He looks at me like I’ve just spat on him and says “No, I just get off on threatening you because you make it so much fun.”

And you know what? At this point? I can’t even tell if he’s being serious or not.

Club Sina is packed.

Seriously.

Both floors are fucking heaving with people either dancing and singing to the music blaring overhead, or trying to hear one another speak without much luck.

I pull Armin and Mikasa with me to the bar because I am. not. drunk. and I need to be like right now.

Levi, true to his word, follows us.

I try not to whine too much about it, because I know this is about our brand new deal and I know he’s going to show me just how serious he is about wanting to be let in on the omega thingy. He wants me to understand that he is not fucking around here. I just want him to fuck off, to be honest.

“Why are you so interested about it?” I ask between shots. He seems to hear me just fine over the music and the noise of hundreds of students around us.

He leans in close to my ear and I wonder why until I hear the words “because if you’re adding a new wolf to your Pack I want to know who it is and what it can do,” and I realise it was for the benefit of keeping the supernatural secret and not because he thinks I’m hard of hearing or anything.

“So why not just trust that I can handle it and you’ll find out if and when that happens?”

“Because I don’t trust you, obviously. And because I don’t think you have what it takes to put down a rabid wolf if you need to.”

And with that he’s walking away, over to the dance floor where the rest of our group is.
I watch him disappear into the crowd as his word echo around in my head and I realise he has a point. I’m so convinced I’ll be able to help this omega, I haven’t even considered what will happen if they don’t want my help.

Fuck.

My phone vibrates in my pocket and I pull it out and read

[From Connie]: Queueing outside now

Fuck.

Shit fucking fuck no.

How the fuck did I forget about them?

I start to text him back, to warn him about Levi being here because fuck this isn’t happening, but then a hand is snatching my phone away from me and Armin is saying “Uh uh, mister. You’re not allowed on your phone tonight. You have to dance with us if you want it back.”

I watch Mikasa pocket the device, and with it my last tattered shreds of hope, and then they’re pulling me forward onto the dance floor and moving me with them to the beat and I catch sight of Levi in the crowd with Hannah and Franz and Emily and Gemma and as he meets my gaze and smirks under the flashing lights I realise that I am totally fucked.

Completely and utterly.

There is no surviving this night.

Fuck.

Connie and Sasha arrive and just behind them are Marco and his group of friends, and Armin, Mikasa and I snake our way through the crowd to find them. I take the opportunity to suggest we go up to the top floor where the music is different and there are less people. I don’t know if this is the case, but I do know that if Connie and Sasha are in the same room as Levi, I will end up doing some pretty fucking horrendous damage control, and I don’t think my wolf control can take that tonight.

Luckily for me, everyone thinks this is a wonderful idea, and I smile my way through the introductions as we climb the stairs in the dark, feeling my betas pressed close to me as they follow my lead.

For the second time in half an hour I find myself being pulled towards the bar, but this time by two excited werewolves.

“Okay so Connie told me about the new plan and I think I can definitely do it,” Sasha says. I smile encouragingly at her as Connie nods like the proud boyfriend he is.

“She can definitely do it, man,” he agrees.

“I never doubted that for a second,” I tell them, and the dimpled grin that Sasha flashes me says my words were wisely chosen.

“So when are we heading out to the reserve next?” Connie asks as Sasha efficiently elbows her
way through the mass of bodies blocking the bar from view. Turns out she’s a pro at that.

“We could go tomorrow?” I say, and this is a conversation I do not want to stray into because I know I’ll end up totally spewing out everything that just happened with Levi and I seriously do not want to do that. “We should probably wait until we see what Sasha can find first, though. We still have three weeks until the next full moon, so there’s no big rush just yet.”

“Fair. Sash can go over Monday and wave her course title around and see what she can find. But this weekend I plan to drink and do fuck all else, man.”

“Oh my god, count me in,” I breathe. Connie laughs and Sasha wriggles her way back through the throng of people, three pints balanced in her clutches. We drink them rapidly, eager to get a good alcohol buzz going, and as we meander our way back to Armin and his newly acquired group of dancers (courtesy of Marco the cardigan wearing Italian photography student who I have yet to actually meet properly) I know that Armin will be more than willing to help us out with that.

“Hey,” Mikasa says into my ear when she gets close enough to be heard. “Dance with me?”

So I dance.

I dance and I try not to think too hard about how long it will take for Levi to realise I am no longer downstairs and decide to go looking for me. I dance and I try not to think too hard about what will happen when he finds me here mingling with two betas at my back.

I dance and I dance and I let Armin spend his parents money on me and I let Sasha and Connie press in close to me and I close my eyes and let the music sink into my bones and hold me there, head buzzing, hips swaying, lips parted and lungs filled with the scent of Pack, both human and wolf.

It isn’t until Armin is leading me back downstairs an hour later, and I’m holding onto him in the dark because he keeps tripping, that I remember there was a reason for my earlier anxiety. I feel my wolf stir inside me, but his movements are sluggish and docile and I know he won’t cause me much of a problem after quite so many shots. And the crowd down here is packed in tight, sweaty and hot and thrumming with a single shared movement that merges each body together and blots out individual faces and scents.

I don’t worry.

I tell myself I can’t worry.

Sasha and Connie are arm in arm and tugging one another onto the dance floor, Sasha’s eyes golden in the flashing lights, Connie’s hold on her territorial but loose. I want to go after them because I don’t know where Levi is, but then Armin is pointing him out over the far side of the venue with a group of strangers, and he hasn’t spotted me yet so I let them go alone.

I tell myself I cannot worry.

Worrying never helps at times like these.

Nothing’s happened yet, everything will be fine. It’s half past one and we’ll leave at three and Levi won’t be with us and nothing will have happened.

Armin introduces me to Marco properly, and through my drunken haze I notice he has soft eyes and freckles and straight teeth that flash in the light when he smiles at me. He pulls me into a hug because he’s drunk as fuck, and I don’t complain about it because I’m equally as drunk and Armin
is giggling and talking loudly and saying that he needs another drink when I know for a fact he does not.

Marco and I manage to drag him away and into the heart of the crowd where it is less easy for him to escape from. It turns out that Marco is a fan of dancing and he and Armin get up close and personal and I would be feeling like I’m intruding if I actually gave a fuck. But as it is, I fucking throw my head back like the god I am and fucking dance because I am decidedly not worrying about anything.

I don’t even notice Mikasa approaching until she’s wrapping her arms around my neck and moving her hips in time with mine and my hands are around her waist and her pupils are blown as she laughs and I’m singing to a song I barely know but it’s enough for me to relax into her hold and actually fucking enjoy it.

I figure; I’m drunk, I’ve had a goddamn stressful week, the music is loud and Mikasa is smiling and laughing and I should just stop fucking caring. If Levi wants to start some shit then that’s his issue to deal with. I’m done caring.

My betas gravitate towards me in the crowd and then we’re all dancing together and Armin and Marco are with us and Sasha has an arm around the Italian’s waist that Connie is valiantly ignoring and I don’t care about anything outside of this ring of people.

Mikasa asks me to buy her a drink as one song end and another starts and I take her money and say I’ll be right back, because I’m a good friend and I know she means I can get myself one too, and my wolf thinks that’s a fantastic idea. The fire exit by the bar is open and I head to that end so I can feel the breeze from outside and undo the mess Kasa’s wandering hands have made of my hair.

“Hey Eren.” I turn to see Sasha moving towards me, eyes still glinting gold and fringe pushed back from her face, skin shining ever so slightly with sweat from the heat of the club. I know I probably look the same.

“What are you getting?” she asks, and I tell her I have no idea because I forgot to ask Mikasa that question. Sasha rolls her eyes at me, snatches the bill from my hands, and pulls me forward to the front of the bar by my wrist.

“So that Marco guy seems nice, huh?” she asks as we wait for someone to notice we possess money and serve us.

“Yea, Armin talks about him a lot,” I say. I lean against the bar top, realise a little too late that it’s sticky. “Like a lot, you know?”

“Ooh, think there’s interest there?” she asks, a mischievous grin gracing her features. We turn to peer back at the writhing mass of bodies behind us even though they’re too far in for us to see from here.

“There’s definitely chemistry,” I say, and I don’t even slur those words at all, nope.

“Aw, does that mean your chances with Armin are…” she trails off, looking for the right word.

“Over?” I guess.

“Yes! That!”

“Damn sure looks like it,” I sigh dramatically. She laughs.
“Eh, you’re too good for him,” she shrugs, stumbles sideways a little so I have to reach out and steady her. “I only want the best for my Alpha, you know.”

“Your Alpha?” purrs a voice from behind me, and I swear to god the temperature of my heart just plummeted into the minus’.

I stare, shocked and horrified, as Sasha frowns, peers around me, sees who is standing right fucking there no doubt smirking like the little fucker he is, frowns some more, and finally makes the connection when Levi opens his goddamn mouth and says the words;

“I’m Levi, you must be—”

The only reason he doesn’t get to finish that sentence is because Sasha fucking launches herself at him and his back slams to the floor with an impressive thud and crack as his skull follows.

Around us there is a stunned silence as people realise what has just happened was not an accident, and then I hear the rumble of Sasha’s growl and I snap out of my horrified stupor and start moving.

“Connie!” I yell, confident he will hear me over the music because a beta always hears the call of his Alpha, and then I have my hands hooked under Sasha’s armpits and I’m hoisting her off a stunned Levi and wrestling her to the open fire exit that is mercifully right there.

She fights me the entire way, back arching and writhing, head whipped round, straining to keep Levi in her sights. Her nails dig into my arms and they’re rapidly becoming claws and blood bubbles up as my skin splits and my heart is pounding because she’s starting to shift and she’s drunk and angry and there are so many people around I have never had to deal with something like this before.

I get her out into the cold night air and I drag her round the far side of the building, her kicking and growling the entire way, practically yelling at me to let her go, let her go so she can tear him apart.

“Eren, what the fuck happened?” comes Connie’s startled gasp as finds us and sees how riled up Sasha is.

“It was Levi. He—No, don’t, I need you here,” I say, panic starting to set in as I see him tense and start to turn back, ready to go after the threat. “She’s starting to shift and I need you to help me calm her down. Levi isn’t a problem right now, okay? I’ll deal with him later. Just. Help me.”

“Yea,” Connie says, after a moment’s pause, shoulders sagging with the release of tension as he sinks to the floor beside us and reaches out tentatively to touch Sasha’s burning skin.

She tenses instinctively, and we both feel the shiver that runs through her. I feel her spine start to shift under her skin and I tighten my grip around her, bring her right in close to my body as I begin speaking quietly and soothingly into her ear.

“Sasha, Sasha,” I say, knowing she isn’t paying attention right now. “It’s okay. He’s gone and I’m here and you’re okay. You’re alright, Sasha, you’re safe. I’m here. I won’t let him hurt you, alright? Come on, I’m the Big Bad Alpha. Nothing’s gonna get through me.

“You can stop fighting now, Sasha. You’re not in any danger. There’s no need to fight. It’s okay for you to let go now and let us keep you safe, alright? Connie and I won’t let anything get to you now. You just hold onto us now, and we’ll fight for you, okay?” I say. Her bones have stopped shifting now, but her breathing is still coming in short, sharp gasps that reek of terror and anger and fear and fury, and Connie is running his hands up and down her arms and staring right into her eyes and I know it’s slowly working so I keep going.
“I’m sorry that happened,” I tell her, and really I’m apologising to them both because this was my fault. “I know your control isn’t as strong as mine and I should have thought it through and I’m sorry. I didn’t think you would react like that and I should have. Hell, I should have fought him harder and kept him away for good. I should never have allowed him to get close to you and I’m sorry. I fucked up. This one’s on me, alright Sasha? You don’t have to fight this one; this is my mess to sort out, okay?”

“You knew he was going to be there?” Connie asks, disbelief evident in his tone, and I know that if I don’t patch this over there is a very real chance that I might lose them. We’ve only run one full moon together. We haven’t known each other for too long, and these guys have been bonded together for years now. There’s nothing stopping them from leaving an Alpha that knowingly endangered them.

“I did,” I say, and I meet his brown eyes and I see the confusion and the hurt there.

“Why?” he demands. Sasha is shivering in my grip now, whimpering at the pain of coming so very close to shifting, the alcohol probably not helping with that.

“Because we’ve been talking about him working with us to help find the omega,” I say, and it’s not entirely a lie but nor was it the truth at the time. “He wasn’t here to pose a threat or a challenge, he was just here because he wanted to be. He actually wanted to meet you and I thought the best place would be somewhere crowded and public and I knew you guys would be here tonight so I invited him to come.”

Lying through my fucking teeth here.

“We were going to run introductions later but I guess he didn’t like that idea, and then Sasha reacted and I had to get her out of there. But he didn’t mean her any harm,” I add quickly, when I see Connie tense up again. “You know that if he hurt her I would be in there tearing him apart.”

Connie doesn’t say anything for a time, just mulls my words over in silence.

“Connie,” I plead. Sasha is shaking between us, and she needs him to calm down, to help settle her right now.

“I know you wouldn’t let her get hurt, man,” he says. There’s a frown between his brows and I know he doesn’t like it and he won’t accept working with Levi because of this, but if I can just get him to focus on Sasha right now then we can deal with Levi later.

“I would never let either of you get hurt,” I swear.

“But why didn’t you tell us he would be there?”

“Armin took my phone. I was going to tell you, but then I was really drunk and I forgot because Levi wasn’t with us for literally any of the time we were in Sina until right at the end there. And it was kind of a spontaneous decision that he came along tonight, anyway. We thought it would work, but obviously we were wrong, and I’m sorry. Connie,” I say, “I’m so sorry this happened.”

And then he whines at the back of his throat, distressed and worried, and he’s pressing forward against me, wrapping himself around me and Sasha and kissing her cheek and stroking her hair and I know we’ll be discussing it more later, but right now Sasha is priority.

“Tomorrow we’ll talk,” I say, when Sasha has stopped shaking and has wrapped herself around us, face pressed against my neck and hand clenching and unclenching in my shirt. Connie nods, and I feel the worry lift from him minutely. “We don’t have to accept his help. We can handle the omega
on our own, if that’s what you guys want. But I really think we should consider it, okay? That’s my vote as a third of the Pack. The rest is on you guys.”

“We’ll decide tomorrow,” Connie agrees. “Now we should get Sasha home.”

“Alright. You guys go back in your car and I’ll join you later. I have to go back to my flat and grab a few things,” I say. I know Connie will appreciate the time I give him and Sasha alone before I catch up to them. He nods, stands, lifts Sasha effortlessly in his arms, and she curls up to his chest like she was designed to fit there.

“I’ll text Mikasa and let her know where you are,” he says, and then he’s turning away, but I have to stop him before he can and say “I’m sorry” one more time. As he looks at me the frown falls from his eyes and he smiles softly, saying “I know,” and my heart aches as I watch my betas walk away, knowing that I could have lost them for good.

I run back across campus, beep myself into the second floor of our dorm block and then into the safety of my room.

It doesn’t last for long.

“You’re not bad at lying, mutt, I’ll give you that.”

It doesn’t even surprise me that he’s here.

“Get the fuck out,” I say, and more than anything it’s tired. I don’t want to have to deal with him right now.

“I’m serious, it was pretty—”

“LEVI, GET THE FUCK OUT OF MY ROOM!” I roar, and okay so maybe I can deal with him right fucking now.

I shove him against the desk again because that’s where he’s standing and that makes the most sense.

“I don’t care what you want,” I snarl, “you’re not getting it.”

“I want to apologise.”

I laugh. “Bullshit.”

“I’m being serious. I want to apologise for pissing off your beta. I was aiming to piss you off, but I guess I overshot.”

“You overshot?” Is he serious? “She nearly fucking shifted in a goddamn club because of you and all you can say is “oh sorry, wrong wolf”?!?”

“She nearly shifted?” he asks, and I bat aside the genuine surprise in his voice in favour of some sarcasm of my own.

“Oh, and what did you think was happening, Levi?”

“I thought she was just really fucking angry,” he states.
“Well done. Ten points for Levi. Congratufuckinglations. Of course she was fucking angry!” I’m shouting now and I don’t think I can stop. “There was a reason I was staying away from you, there was a reason I didn’t want you anywhere near my betas. Know what that is? Come on, ten more points if you can guess it right.”

He looks pissed right now, and that gives me a sick sense of satisfaction, that he’s feeling even an ounce of what I am. He opens his mouth to answer but I don’t let him.

“It’s because they see you as a threat. It’s because they know you’ve threatened me and them and they know you’re powerful and dangerous, and they know that if you’re anywhere near their Alpha, then they have a serious fucking problem.

“Of course I didn’t want you near them, Levi, because I knew they would react without thinking because they were drunk and our control is shitty when we’re drunk, and I didn’t want them feeling threatened when they’re around friends – people they feel responsible for – and me – someone they will defend instinctively with their lives if they have to.”

“I didn’t—”

“You didn’t what? You didn’t know? Of course you didn’t fucking know. Have you ever actually had a conversation with a werewolf before that didn’t end in bloodshed and death? Do you actually fucking care about the human side of us or do you just see the monster and think “kill”?”

I scoff at him as he blinks in surprise and anger and confusion, and tries to find words I will not let him get out because now I’m on a fucking roll.

“Don’t give me crap about not knowing, or not understanding. You shouldn’t have been there in the first place. Werewolf business is not your business. If you had asked to be kept up to date on the omega situation nicely then I probably would have agreed because I’m the Alpha in this town and you are another supernatural being that could be put at risk by an omega werewolf and as I just fucking said werewolf business is my business to take care of.

“But no. You threatened and you demanded and you were only at Sina as an extension of that, and therein lies the fucking problem. Because I am okay with you threatening me and pissing me off all you want. I have good enough control that I can take it. But I am not okay with you bringing that shit to my beta’s door because she does not have good enough control over herself just yet. She’s young and she’s innocent, and she does not—should not have to deal with your macho monster bullshit. Neither of them should.

“And don’t even get me fucking started on you thinking it’s okay to threaten my friends’ safety if I don’t comply to your whiney fucking commands. You have no right to do that. They are not a part of our world and you know that. You are only opening yourself up to challenge and allowing me to act on that if I see fit, and you are very lucky that I’m nicer than that and will actually compromise with you and negotiate around it and not grow claws to tear you apart with, because I know a lot of wolves who would do just that if you had threatened the safety of their Pack humans.

“You have no right to bring them into this and I will not allow you to continue to do so. If you want in on this omega thing then I will let you know what we find when we find it, because that is the considerate thing to do, and I’m trying so very hard to be a good Alpha here, and not the murdering bloodthirsty bastard that made me. If you help us out, as I said to my betas that you would, then you will know what we know and this “omega threat” that you so fear will at least not remain an anonymous one.

“But you will not get a say in how we as a Pack deal with things. You will not threaten my betas
either physically or emotionally, you will not provoke them or taunt them or try to piss them off in order to get a rise out of them. If you want to fight a werewolf so badly, you’ve got an Alpha willing and ready standing right in fucking front of you, Levi. And do not forget that I am an Alpha, and that the safety of my Pack is always my highest priority. If you want to work with me on this, then I am allowing you to do so, but you will abide by my rules when you are around my Pack. I am done playing your little games and letting you bully me into agreeing with your every whim because if I don’t someone will get hurt.

“Well guess what, Levi? I don’t care that you’re stronger and faster and something I’ve never dealt with before. I will deal with you if I have to, because you are currently a threat living on Pack territory, until you start behaving otherwise. I have tolerated you up until now but this is the end of that particular road. And yea, maybe I’m only saying all of this right now because I’m drunk and tired and angry and have a hurt and confused beta waiting for me to be finished with your pathetic ass, but I mean every fucking word I’m saying. So listen close: if you want to go on playing this little game of “who’s the scariest monster under this bed” then that’s fine, and me and my wolf will deal with you accordingly; if not, and you actually want to work out a way of cooperating with me and not causing my betas pain and trouble and not therefore ending up as supernatural paste on the sidewalk, then speak now or forever hold your fucking peace.”

And with that I step back and let myself breathe.

Levi just stares at me for a time, and I think yea, that was a pretty long monologue, and was literally my every thought over the past few weeks all condensed into one long stream of hate rant, but it got the message across and now I just have to wait for that message to sink in and for him to reply to it.

What I get is a slightly shaken “so I guess you’re not as weak as I thought you were.”

“Are you kidding? You’re kidding, right?”

“No, seriously,” he says, and he says it like he’s having trouble believing it himself. “You’re a really young Alpha and you’ve only got two betas and I assumed you were—”

“Easy pickings?” I guess, unimpressed.

“New to it. Or at least, new enough that I when you submitted I thought I had you under my thumb and you wouldn’t do…this.”

“Stand up for myself?”

“Yea,” he sighs. Then he chuckles. “I kind of liked the idea of having a pet Alpha to annoy when I wanted.”

“Well this is one Alpha you’re not putting a collar on,” I say firmly. “And you’re avoiding the question. Are you going to work peacefully with me on this or not?”

There’s a pause as Levi looks at his feet and chews on his bottom lip, and the action is so human that I wasn’t expecting it. Not after what I’ve seen of him so far. Then his shoulders slump and he lets out a deep sigh and it smells like the vodka and coke he was no doubt drinking earlier, and he looks up at me with those grey eyes of his and nods.

“I guess I can do peaceful.”

“You guess or—”
“I will.” This time he interrupts me, voice firm and loud enough that I know he means it. “I’ll work with you on this, and once you’ve dealt with the omega, I’ll back off your little Pack. You seem to have them under pretty good control. You know, for a shitty Alpha.”

“You calling me shitty? You really think that’s wise?”

“Well you are standing around here talking to me when your beta is in pain or whatever.”

“I’m fixing a problem I should have fixed a long time ago,” I say, voice dark. I see him flinch a little at that, and maybe there’s something there I should ask about, but I don’t because Levi’s business is not my business and I’m not going to forget that.

“One more thing, though,” I say, as I turn away from him and pull my back pack out from under my bed and start to shove in a change of clothes for tomorrow. “You owe my beta an apology.”

“What?”

“Yes. You freaked her out and nearly made her shift in public and you need to apologise for that.”

“You can’t be serious?” he asks, and it’s not rhetorical. I smile to myself when my back is turned to him and then go to grab my toothbrush from my en suite.

“You think I’m kidding here, Levi?” I ask. “You saw how bad Sasha was tonight. That was your fault. So you’re going to apologise to her in person and do so in such a way that won’t have her shifting again, and if you survive, then we’ll talk about letting you in on the search for the omega.”

He frowns, clearly not liking the sound of that. I try not to skip gleefully on my way back to my bed.

“But you just said you’ll include me if I stop with the threats and the harassment.” Harassment. Didn’t use that word, but fuck does it work.

“Well yes, but I was only speaking for myself. You’re going to have to convince them that you can work peacefully and not cause a fuss, and then if they agree and like your apology, you’re in.”

“This is ridiculous.”

“This is werewolf politics. We live in a democratic community run by all, not just the One. I didn’t make the rules up, so you can complain to me all you want but it won’t change anything. These are my terms. You can accept them or you can walk away.”

I hold my hand out, palms up, as if to say “your choice, Levi”, and he glances between the two of them before tutting sharply, turning his head to the side so he doesn’t have to look at me when he tells me fine, he will apologise for being an asshole to my betas and he will play nicely because now I have my Alpha pants on and I know I can be scary when I want to be.

And apparently, all during that little speech of mine, I really wanted to scare him.

“You can leave now,” I say. And then, “How did you even get in?” Because seriously. This place was locked up.

“Your window was open,” he says, hooking his thumb over his shoulder and oh yea, there it is, open window.

Huh.
Remind me to keep that thing closed at all times from here on out.

“Well you can leave now using the front door like normal people, thanks.” I turn back to my bag, tighten the fastenings, swing it up onto my shoulder and walk past him because he doesn’t seem to be moving. I hold open my bedroom door as a clear sign that I wish him gone.

“Give me your number.”

“No?” I say it like it’s a question, but only because it takes me by surprise that his question was actually a demand and I feel like I should be balancing that out somehow. I clear my throat. “No. Why?”

“Because how else is this going to work? Either give me your number or keep your window open. Your choice, mutt.”

Oh and we’re back to the names. Fantastic.

“Fine,” I growl. He gives me his phone and I punch in the new contact and hand it back to him, feeling like I just lost some crucial part of my soul.

“Don’t expect me to reply for at least three days,” I say as I shoo him out into the corridor without getting too close to him.

“Why not?”

“Because I don’t want to talk to you for at least three days,” I say, like this should be obvious. The scowl he throws me as I open the front door to our flat is quite spectacular and shows just how unimpressed with my maturity levels he is.

I shrug carelessly. Because I do not care.

And then I close the door in his face and stand in the empty hallway and let out the longest fucking breath ever as I grind the heels of my palms into my eyes and think about my life and think about my choices and wonder just how many of these recent ones I will end up regretting.

“At least half,” I mutter to myself, and then I go into Mikasa’s room which is mercifully unlocked because we’re all wonderful people that do not steal things from one another, locate the bag of chocolate I made Levi buy her earlier, and take it with me as I exit my dorm, checking like five times to make sure the coast is clear before I run to my truck across the parking lot and climb in quick.

I remind myself to apologise to Mikasa later, but right now Sasha is in greater need of the healing powers of chocolate, and Mikasa probably won’t even notice through tomorrow’s hangover.

I drive.

When I reach Connie and Sasha’s house, all the lights are on and I can hear them talking inside but I don’t care to listen too closely and find out what it is they’re talking about. When I switch off the engine, they quiet down, and as I walk down the path to their front door, it opens and Sasha stands there, partially hidden behind the door, Connie a solid presence behind her.

My throat is suddenly dry and I don’t know what I would say even if I could speak, so I don’t. Instead, I open my arms.
It’s all the encouragement Sasha needs, and she’s running out of the house and throwing herself at me and I’m the one whining now because she smells so sad and scared and I can’t believe I left her. I can’t believe I left either of them even for a second.

“God I’m such a terrible Alpha,” I say, and I’m choking on the words as tears – fucking tears – start to catch at the back of my throat.

“No, no no no no no,” Sasha mumbles, nuzzling into my chest and against my neck, arms wrapped tightly around me, accessing as much of me as she can whilst I just hold onto her and try to not let my legs give out underneath me.

“You’re not a bad Alpha. You’re the best Alpha I’ve ever had,” she says, and I shake my head because how can that be true?

“Let’s get inside,” Connie says, and I didn’t see him approach but he’s here now and he has a hand pressed into the small of my back and I let him guide us awkwardly, Sasha not wanting to let go of me at all it seems. Once we’re inside I kick of my shoes and my betas pull me upstairs and into their bedroom and we peels off our jeans and shirts and dresses and jewellery and crawl into their bed and curl up together, Sasha cradled in the middle tonight.

“I brought chocolate,” I tell her as I run my fingers through her hair. She looks up at me and I see tears at the corners of her eyes and I think oh god was chocolate a bad call? How is chocolate ever a bad call?

“You’re not mad at me?” she asks, in a small voice, and I’m so taken aback by that that I have to look to Connie to confirm it. He gazes at me, steady and unflinching and I know she’s being very serious about this, and Connie knows that I have to be the one to comfort her now because I am Alpha and she needs my approval, my acceptance.

“No, Sash,” I say softly. “I’m not mad at you, pup. You didn’t do anything wrong. I’m actually pretty fucking proud of how well you held it together back there.”

“Really?” She still isn’t looking at me so I wriggle down the bed until we’re eye to eye and she has nowhere to go.

“Really. You were so strong and brave, Sasha. You didn’t shift, you stayed in control. Fuck, you even knocked Levi on his ass.” As soon as I say his name, I wince internally, but Sasha giggles and I relax again.

“His face was pretty funny,” she admits, and she admits it like it’s a secret I have to keep. I snort.

“Funny is not a strong enough word,” I tell her, and now she’s looking at me and I’m smiling back at her because I can feel her worry rubbing away and my wolf is working his way through the left over alcohol haze and he’s proud that Sasha managed to knock Levi flat when I couldn’t. The smug bastard is actually laughing at me, goddamnit.

“Connie says he’s going to be working with us?” she asks, and I can sense her apprehension, so I start running my fingers through her hair again.

“Only if that’s okay with you, pup,” I say. She hums. “And I’m going to make him apologise to you in person. I’m going to make him grovel for your forgiveness, and then you can tell him to get lost, or we can give him all the gross jobs to do. Up to you.”

“Make him grovel at my feet and I’ll think about it,” Sasha says. I press my nose against hers, because fuck, she’s brave. I know wolves who’ve been living this life for years and wouldn’t be
able to do what she’s just done.

“You want to eat chocolate or go to sleep?” I ask.


Well, I guess that’s settled then.

Chapter End Notes

Fun fact: the first two pages of this are a poor imitation of what I originally had before my computer shut down and I lost it all.

Fun fact #2: I only cried a little bit over losing two pages of awesome writing, and then a little bit more when I realised what I replaced it with was nowhere near as good. I apologise.

Fun fact #3: you are always welcome to come talk to me on tumblr (yatojaeger yes hello people) and I do not in fact bite. I am quite nice. Honest.
Chapter Summary

Levi introduces himself to the Pack, everybody makes Eren proud, and Armin and Eren go to a house party.

It storms. For the whole weekend. I spend Saturday with my betas, moping about the house, cooking so many pancakes we almost make ourselves sick, and going through the cartoon section of Netflix. Sunday, Armin says he wants to do something that doesn’t involve getting drunk or rained on, so we pile into his car with Mikasa and go pick Sasha and Connie up then drive into Trost to see a movie. The wind funnels down through the valley and into the city streets and I can feel it buffeting the side of the car as Armin drives us. Connie and Sasha, who have not experienced Armin’s driving under normal conditions, are understandably terrified. It takes some serious coaxing to get them back into the car afterwards.

Monday morning arrives and with it comes thunder. It rolls over the distant mountains and lightning cracks through the low hanging clouds and I get soaked on my way to and from lectures in spite of the umbrella Mikasa practically glues to my hand. Our flat cooks a meal together that evening and we invite floor three down to eat with us and the sky outside is so dark we can’t tell the time, but the food is good and the company is fine and Hannah plugs her iPod into the speakers Franz brought with him from home and we all have a relaxing evening.

It reminds me of the home cooked meals my old Pack used to do, where as many of us that were able would all converge on one Pack member’s house and bring food and get in each other’s way in the kitchen and then crash out in the lounge with too much beer and too little floor space. Just sitting here in the kitchen with my new friends surrounding me and the smell of chicken and roasted vegetable and the cheap wine floor three brought down, it makes me ache thinking of home. My wolf whines and whines and I know he’s missing his family too.

I give my uncle a call that night, when we’ve all gone back to our own rooms (except Hannah and Franz who are currently fucking in Franz’s). (I try as hard as I am physically able not to listen.) (The sound of the storm raging outside muffles it somewhat, but supernaturally cursed I am and supernaturally cursed I remain.)

“Hey kiddo,” Hannes says when he picks up. The sound of his voice alone is enough to make my throat feel tight. I cough to clear it. “How’s tricks?”

“Fine,” I say, and it comes out sounding all too relieved. “Everything’s fine.”

“How’re those wolves you’ve adopted?”

Yea I should’ve known Hannes would be asking after Pack-related things. Anybody else’s parents would have asked how their classes were going, or if they were enjoying the uni lifestyle, or how they were doing for cash. But I guess, seeing as I called him out of the blue, he would be concerned that something is wrong.
So I smile so that he can hear it in my voice, and say; “They’re good, actually. A bit of a handful at times, but they’ve got good control and they acknowledge me as Alpha, so we’re doing alright.”

“Good, good. Glad to hear it.” And he really sounds like he is. I get more comfy on my bed because I have a feeling this is going to be a long conversation.

“How’s everyone doing back home?” I ask, tentatively, because I know there are always problems with larger Packs and how the power balance shifts, and since I left things would have changed in one way or another.

But Hannes tells me what’s happened and what hasn’t and I find myself relaxing as I listen to his voice and realise that I should have called him weeks ago. Texting back and forth gets the job done, yes, but it isn’t nearly a good enough substitute for picking up the phone and calling home.

“Listen, Hannes,” I say after some time, when we’ve said all we can think of to say and the flat around me is silent with sleep. “I’m sorry I haven’t called sooner.”

“No, don’t be, kiddo,” he says, and I know he’s making a flapping gesture with his free hand even though I can’t see it. “I told you that if you wanted to do the independent teenager thing, then I wasn’t going to stop you. Hell, you know I couldn’t stop you, I doubt anyone could.”

I huff both in mock indignation and begrudging humour, because yea that’s pretty true.

“It’s still good to hear from you, son,” Hannes says then, and his voice is soft and warm and so sincere, and I have to take a moment to come up with an answer to that.

“No excuses,” I say. “I’m a bad nephew. But I promise I’ll call more often.”

“You better. Tom’s been worrying about your dumb ass ever since you left.”

This time I flat out laugh.

“Oh god. Shit, tell him I’m fine,” I say when I can breathe again. Thomas (or Tom, as Hannes insists on calling him) has always been the mother hen of the Pack. Hanne’s Second and the sweetest most gentlest guy I’ve ever met. He’s always been the one telling me to calm down and think before running into a situation, and also the one who gave me the nickname “suicidal bastard”.

“Will do,” Hannes chuckles. “Although I’m sure he’d prefer to hear from you himself.”

“Meh. I might grace him with the sultry sound of my voice… if I can find time in my busy schedule amongst classes and the pressures of being an Alpha,” I say, stretching out on my bed until my feet hang off the end and my free hand is resting against the headboard.

Hannes snorts at that. “Oh the pressure of being an Alpha is it? I have twenty four betas to take care of down here. You only got yourself two. You want to feel some real pressure? You just come on back home any time you feel like and I’ll show you some real pressure.”

I grin.

“As… tempting as that offer may be, old man, I’m actually rather goddamn comfortable where I am. But it is nice to know that you’re all falling apart without me.”

“Been the best damn month of my life,” he mutters. I laugh again, but this time it tapers off into a pretty fucking impressive yawn.
“Please don’t tell me you have class tomorrow,” Hannes says when I’m done emptying my lungs.

“Uh…”

“Jesus. Get some sleep, kid, it’s two in the morning. What the hell was your dumb ass even calling me at one in the morning for? No, wait, don’t answer that. I don’t want you to answer that.” He sighs a sigh that only a parent can sigh, and yea I have put him through some shit in the past, that I admit to somewhat guiltily. “Just get some sleep, Eren.”

“Can’t boss me around anymore, old man,” I say, although I’m battling down another yawn. “I’m my own Alpha now.”

“True, but I’m still paying to put your ungrateful ass through university, so you can suck it up and do as I say just this once.”

“Ugh, I hate it when you use that against me.” I sigh dramatically and roll over onto my side.

“Because I’m right?”

“Because you suck. Worst uncle-slash-Alpha ever.”

“Goodnight, Eren.” He’s laughing at me, the dick.

“Yea, yea, goodnight. I’ll call you again never.”

I hang up, but not before I hear Hannes laughing at me some more. Honestly, I have no idea how I turned out the way I did considering I have him for a guardian. But then again, since mum died and dad left and I got myself some supernatural voodoo juice running through my veins, Hanne’s has really been the only thing holding me together at times.

I curl up into a ball and listen to the rain slashing across my window in waves that the wind makes, and I try not to think too hard about just how much Hannes has done for me over the years. From taking me in after I lost my family, to helping me gain control on the full moons, to dealing with my outbursts and reckless, thoughtless behaviour. If there’s anyone I can talk to about anything, then it’s Uncle Hannes.

“Should have told him,” I mutter to myself. I should have told him about the omega, about Levi, about the crap I’m dealing with. Hannes would want to know, to keep tabs on me. I shouldn’t have told him that everything was fine when it really really isn’t, but I just didn’t want to worry the old man. Not after all he’s done for me. Not now that he thinks I’m off at university for a fresh start, with a little Pack of my own to take care of. No, he’d want everything to be okay. So I told him everything is okay.

Still should have told him, my wolf seems to say as he paces in his cage, tail twitching in age-old annoyance at my antics. I ignore him, growl and roll out of bed, strip down to my skin, grab my iPod and plug myself into it as I crawl under the sheets. It’s half two in the morning and the storm is still raging and now I’m starting to feel guilty because I didn’t tell my only remaining family about the semi-dangerous crap I’m dealing with and my wolf is giving me a headache.

I turn on shuffle and the first song that comes on is Hurricane Drunk, by Florence and the Machine, and I listen to her sing as I close my eyes and try to block everything else out.

Tomorrow (today) is Tuesday and I have a lecture at nine. Sasha and Connie are coming over to discuss what Sasha’s managed to find, or not find. I need to be well rested and wide awake for both of those things.
It still takes me a good half hour to drift off, all the same.

When I wake up, my phone is ringing. I groan and fish it out from the crevice between my bed and the wall where it always seems to end up.

“What?” I answer, voice scratchy and fresh from sleep. My eyes aren’t opening properly and I have to blink several times before the blurriness fades.

“Eren? Can you let us in?” It’s Sasha. I don’t know what she wants from me.

“Sash, I just woke up,” I say, which is my way of saying why the fuck are you calling me at eight in the morning when you know I have class in an hour and am seriously not a morning person.

There’s the sound of something happening on the other end of the line, and the phone must have switched hands because then it’s Connie speaking. He says, “Dude, it’s one in the pm and you need to let us in now. It’s still raining out here, man.”

That wakes me up.

“What the fuck do you mean it’s one pm?” I garble, try to extricate myself from my duvet with one hand but end up kicking my feet into a knot and falling out of bed anyway. I check the time on my phone, realise – to my utter dismay – that it is indeed one in the afternoon, and then toss it aside as I wriggle into boxers and the nearest pair of jeans I can find. I don’t bother with a shirt as I stomp to the front door to our flat and yank it open to the very wet pair of werewolves on the other side.

“Wow,” Connie says as he blinks at me. “You really did just wake up, huh?”

“Yea no shit Sherlock,” I grumble as I stand back to let them in. They leave little puddles on the floor as they walk to my room, and I order them to take their shoes off in the hall and hang their coats in my en suite to drain away safely. Naturally, they also raid my shirt drawer and end up wearing my clothes because they weren’t smart enough to wear anything that’s water proof.

“So I know I made you guys walk all the way up here so we can talk, but I literally just woke up and I’ve missed all my lectures today and I’m really fucking hungry, so how about we drive into Trost and get me an actual proper breakfast to talk things through over?” I say as I finish getting dressed and then find a mirror so I can sort my bedhead out. It still remains a total mess. “How does that sound?”

“Like I could kiss you,” Sasha gasps. Connie puts a hand on her shoulder to hold her back from probably tackling me.

“Dude, if you kiss my girlfriend, we are going to have problems you and I,” he says.

“I have no intentions to kiss your girlfriend,” I say. Sasha mutters a little “I have a name you know” comment that we both ignore because we’re dicks. I shrug. “And besides. I’m like, 75% gay. 82% gay on a good day.”

“You serious?” Connie asks, eyebrows raised in surprise. I shrug again and go hunting for my shoes. “Man, you do not look gay. You have no sense of style.”

“That is ridiculously offensive,” I say, and I am offended. I tug on my biker boots and tuck the bottoms of my skinnies into them. “I have an amazing sense of style.”
“How did you not know that Eren’s bi?” I hear Sasha ask as I’m locking up my door and they’re waiting for me on the stairs outside the dorms. “The amount of asses he’s checked out is astounding.”

Well then.

I pause as I have to think about that one, and come to the very real conclusion that actually… yes. Yes, I do check out an awful lot of asses. But only really in passing. Like, I wouldn’t just stare at some guys tushy for five minutes straight. Jesus no. Come on, I’m not a fucking creep.

“I like to appreciate the finer things in life,” I say to my betas as I join them on the steps and open up Mikasa’s gifted umbrella. “Such as breakfasts at La Recoin.”

“Is that where we’re going?” Sasha asks.

“Only if you get your cute butt moving.”

“Hey! Stop looking at my girlfriend’s butt!” Connie says behind us. (There isn’t enough room under the umbrella for three, he’s taking one for the team bless him.)

“I don’t have to look to know it’s cute,” I call back to him. Sasha outright laughs in his face because that’s the kind of girl she is. Water drips down from Connie’s soaked grey mohawk and into his eyes and he pouts and climbs into the backseat of my truck when I unlock it, and pulls Sasha in after him because he needs someone to mope to. I turn the heaters on full and drive us into town, ignoring the look Connie’s giving me in the rear view mirror all the way.

My phone goes off as I’m looking for the parking meter. My wolf growls at me when I see who it is.

[From Unknown]: Hey it’s Levi. I gave you your three days, like you wanted. Can we do this apology thing now, or do I have to wait some more?

Riiight. I gave him my number. Why did I do that, again? I glance at my truck and the two betas now making out in the back of it (for fuck sake guys) before I type out my reply.

[To Unknown]: a please and thank u would be nice

The answer to that is instant. So he’s a quick typer. Great.

[From Unknown]: Please would you stop being a whiney brat, thank you.

I angrily put money into the machine as I type one-handed.

[To Unknown]: pls would you stop being a demanding asshole

[From Unknown]: Where’s the thank you?

[To Unknown]: thank u for what

The machine spits out my change and ticket and I flip it out of the dispenser before stomping back to my truck (mainly because I’m angry, but also to give Connie and Sasha fair warning that I’m headed back their way).

[From Unknown]: For not being a demanding asshole?
[To Unknown]: oh are u actually going to try and do that? thank u

“Who’re you texting?” Sasha asks as I slap the ticket on my dash.

“No one,” I say, through gritted teeth.

“His ex,” Connie stage whispers. I send him my very best Alpha Level 5 Death Glare. He audibly gulps. As I lead them towards the exit, I hear Sasha whispering back “definitely his ex.”

I sigh.

So at some point along the way, they manage to get it out of me that I was actually texting Levi and that he wants to apologise and beg forgiveness or whatever. Sasha thinks it’s a great idea, much to mine and Connie’s dismay. But then she tells me to tell him that he’s got to buy us all breakfast, and I must admit; food is one hell of a strong motivator for werewolves. I text him a time and place.

Thus, we find ourselves sitting around a corner table in La Recoin (that one French place Armin and I found that one time) ordering anything and everything from the menu and waiting for one Demanding Asshole to arrive.

It is as our waitress is unloading three hot chocolates (with all the extras) onto our table and Sasha is in the bathrooms, that Levi actually turns up, and because he is Levi and a total douche, he takes the empty seat next to Connie instead of the one we specifically left open for him next to me.

I see Connie bristle and I reach out under the table with my foot and let it rest against his, just so I have some point of contact with him in case he decides to get defensive. Or offensive.

“Afternoon,” Levi greets, with a head tilt. He’s wearing red again today. That same red leather jacket I saw him in before. Underneath it he has on a grey hoodie and black shirt, and beyond that I stop paying attention. I hate that it suits him. I hate that it looks expensive. Mostly, I just hate him. My wolf rumbles his agreement as he watches the scene through my eyes, on high alert.

“It’s still morning for us,” I inform him.

“Mm. That explains why I’m buying you all breakfast.”

“You’re buying us all breakfast because you’re a dick with money,” Connie snaps, and while it may not be his finest moment, it’s still a damn good one.

I smirk at him over the top of my hot chocolate because he makes me proud.

“So where’s the other one?” Levi asks after perhaps five seconds of silence. I can smell Connie’s anger from where I’m sitting. I shoot him a look that says calm down. He doesn’t calm down by much.


Levi rolls his eyes at that, and now I’m starting to feel angry too. (Well, more so than I was previously at least.)

“Calm down, I can actually be nice when I want to be.”
“Good to know,” Connie sneers, with visceral sarcasm turning his words into a whip. Oh boy, if this ends well I will eat my umbrella.

We wait in silence for Sasha to return, and when she does I can sense her immediate fear. She quickly clamps down on it, however, although she does slide her chair right up next to mine until our thighs and shoulder are touching. I take her hand under the table and give it a squeeze.

“You can start to grovel any time, by the way,” she says to the man sat across from her, and I would beam with pride if that wouldn’t spoil the moment.

Levi doesn’t exactly… grovel. No, he doesn’t grovel at all. He is actually surprisingly charming towards Sasha, which I can tell Connie is having a hard time dealing with, considering Levi was such a conceited douche to us earlier. But it’s like he’s a whole other person as soon as Sasha sits down and he starts talking.

He’s still remarkably blunt and to the point, but he’s polite and apologetic, and I can tell he’s put some thought into the things he’s saying. After the food arrives and Levi orders something for himself, I notice that I can’t smell a hint of fear or anxiety on Sasha anymore.

“If you could forgive me for being a complete twat to you the other night, and causing you to almost shift against your own will, then I would very much like to help you with this omega problem you seem to be facing,” he says, and Jesus Fuck can he be eloquent when he wants to be. I’m pretty sure my eyes are wide and staring and my mouth would be hanging open if it wasn’t preoccupied with chewing my food. My wolf doesn’t know what to think of Levi’s transformation, other than to continue grumbling to me occasionally about the little things.

“We’re not letting you help,” Connie says at once, like I knew he would. He’s been radiating bad vibes ever since Levi arrived, and has long since kicked my foot away under the table. Honestly, I was expecting for things to have taken a turn for the worse much sooner than this, considering.

“And why not?” Levi asks, turning his cold grey eyes on a fired up Connie, without so much as batting a delicately groomed eyelash at his evident anger.

“But you do need help with finding this omega, do you not?” Levi asks, and he’s speaking directly to Connie in such a way that I would be feeling positively pinned if I were in Connie’s shoes right now.

“Maybe, maybe not. But we don’t need you interfering,” Connie says, stubborn and resolute. Levi tutts and turns back to face me. He raised a brow.

“And what do you think, Mister Alpha?” he asks, smirks, leans one arm on the table so he can get closer to me. I narrow my eyes at the action.

“I think it’s up to Connie and Sasha, and you’ve already scored poorly with one of my betas.” I shrug and lean back in my chair, mostly just to put more distance between us again before my wolf decides to be more than just vocal. Levi tracks the action with those eyes of his and I remember what it feels like to have him stalk around me like I’m prey. I push aside that thought, and say; “I think you’re not doing so great.”
His smirk softens into a small smile and he turns his gaze back to Sasha. She still has possession of my hand under the table. I rub my thumb across the backs of her knuckles as a silent show of support and comfort.

“And what’s your verdict, little lady?” Levi asks softly, and once again it’s like he’s changed personalities when he talks to her. “Do you think you could let me work with you, or do you agree with mop head that—”

And it is at this precise moment that Connie decides he has had enough of Levi (as we all do at some point in our lives) and smacks Levi’s head into the table top.

There is absolute, utter silence in the room as heads turn in our direction and waitresses pause mid-step in shock. All I can do is stare at Levi sitting on the other side of the table and think **this is the second time one of my betas has interrupted him with an act of violence and the look on his face is still fucking priceless.**

A single drop of blood drips down from Levi’s nose, and it is this that snaps him out of it. He’s reaching for a napkin and standing at the same time, and I don’t know what he’s going to do – if he’s going to respond to Connie in a violent and explosive manner or not – and now I’m rising to my feet too, but then Levi mutters an apology and walks past us and away towards the exit and I… wasn’t really expecting him to do that.

Conversations slowly start up around us again, and I’m still just standing there, watching the door swing closed behind a vanished Levi. I blink. Once, twice, three times, and then I turn around and jab a finger down at Connie who immediately stops looking so goddamn pleased with himself.

“What the **fuck** did you think that would achieve?” I hiss, angry at him for reasons I can’t quite explain. I know that I should not be defending Levi in any way – and I’m not, seriously I’m not – but Connie acting out like that does in **no way** help us here.

Connie’s jaw tightens, and then he’s looking down and away, ashamed and submissive at the same time, and I realise a little too late that my eyes are gold and I just went Alpha on him, and that’s a dick move all on its own. I sigh and shake my head.

“What here, okay?” I ask.

“Wait, you’re not going after him, are you?” Connie sounds alarmed, reaching out to stop me as I push my chair out properly.

“Oh of course I am,” I say, walking towards the exit, manoeuvring between people and tables. I know he can hear me still. “I have to make sure he doesn’t do anything stupid, like kill you in your sleep.”

I find Levi not too far away, standing beneath the awning of the jewellery shop next door, keeping dry as he lights up a cigarette between his teeth. The fact that he’s still here is both confusing and hopeful. I move closer to him, lean against the wall about an arm’s distance from him so my wolf doesn’t snap out, and sneak a glance at him out of the corner of my eye. He’s looking at me, a slight frown between his brows, smoke curling up from his parted lips as he opens his mouth to speak.

“I’m not apologising for that one,” he says. I notice the bruising around his nose, ugly and purple already. Accelerated healing factor, I note.

“What are you?” I ask, “Besides a complete dick that gets off to pissing off werewolves.” Oh look,
I have no tact or brain-to-mouth filter. He takes another pull and steps up close to me, blows the smoke in my face. I try very hard not to react as my wolf raises his hackles and bares his teeth in a snarl I want to imitate.

“Wouldn’t you like to know,” he murmurs. Then he laughs, and it’s short and sharp and doesn’t have any warmth in it at all. The rain continues to fall.

“I would, actually.”

“I’ll give you three more clues, mutt. Later, though, not now.” He raises the cigarette to his lips again, pauses, and then lowers it.

“What are the chances that I can convince mop head to give me another chance?” he asks. I can’t tell if he’s being serious.

“Well if you stop calling us names and start taking things seriously, and maybe think about being nice to him, then… I don’t know, about thirty percent? Yea, you got about thirty percent chance of convincing him to give you another chance to convince him to let you work with us.”

“Fanfuckingtastic.”

“I told you not to fuck it up,” I shrug. He snorts.

“Yea you did.”

“You just couldn’t help yourself, though, could you?”

“Nope.”

“Why not?” I ask.

Now it’s his turn to shrug. He takes in another lungful of hot smoke. I wonder if it makes a difference to how he feels on a cold day like today, but I don’t ask him that.

“Because I just simply cannot fucking help myself,” he says, with a fake smile that crinkles the corners of his narrow eyes and simultaneously irritates me, and then he flicks the butt of his cigarette into the gutter where a rivulet of water whisks it away. He pushes off the wall and looks up at me for a brief moment, frowning again.

“Why did you come out here?” he demands.

“I don’t know.” I tell the truth. I don’t know why, and I tell the truth.

“You’re a fucking moron,” he informs me. Don’t I know it.

“And you’re a pain in my ass. Does that make us even?”

He snorts again and looks away, turns his head to the side in a gesture that is very much his.

“Tell me what I should and shouldn’t do?” he asks, and I cock my head to one side in a silent question because I have no idea what he’s talking about, the freak. “When I’m talking to Connie, what should I not do?”

“Oh. Well, like I said; use his actual name, be respectful, don’t piss him off just because you’re good at it. And try not to smile too much at his girlfriend. Also, maybe don’t sit next to him either.”
“Wait, she’s his girlfriend?” Levi lets his mouth hang open, and it’s odd how he can be actually eloquent at times, and then a total sarcastic little asshole that makes me want to punch him at others. “Why the hell would she—”

“And you probably shouldn’t say anything like that either. Werewolves are territorial. He smacked your head into the table because you called her little lady and then called him mop head.”

“Masculinity thing?”

“Werewolf thing.”

“Right.”

“You’re going to fuck this up again aren’t you?”

“Probably. But if they don’t want to hear another word from me, I swear I’ll leave, Eren.”

I blink. He means it. He said my name, which means he means it. Now my wolf doesn’t know what to think. He whines at me to make it all make sense, and I try my best to.

“Uh…”

“Well said.”

“Thanks?” I try. What exactly is he saying here?

“They want me gone and I’m gone. Your little speech the other day…” Oh fuck I had forgotten about that. Crap. Drunk me really doesn’t know how to stop once he gets started. “I realise you’ve got a lot more authority here than I do. So I’m going to try and be less of a demanding asshole to you, mutt.”

“And then you go and call me mutt and it’s totally ruined the moment of bonding.”

“Mutt or brat, you choose.” He says with a smirk. I snarl a little in annoyance. The smirk deepens into a grin.

“How about just Eren?”

“I said I wouldn’t be a demanding asshole, I didn’t say I’d stop trying to piss you off.”

“Just get back in the fucking coffee house and let’s get this over with,” I huff. Yea, he’s definitely not going to stop trying to piss me off any time soon, is he?

But he goes, and we take fresh seats at the table, he and I side by side and me across from Sasha so that there’s as much space between her and Levi as possible. And this time round, Levi uses actual names and holds back the snark when talking to Connie, and doesn’t so much as glance at Sasha for too long.

It annoys me that he can be cooperative when it suits him, but not when it might suit others.

“So what do you think?” I ask, when Levi’s second round of apologies and begging is out of the way.

“I still say he can go fuck himself,” Connie growls.

“I’m sitting right here,” Levi mutters. I nudge his foot with my own before I can think better of it,
and he kicks back with good old fashion inhuman force. I wince, and I know he sees it because he rests his chin in the palm of his hand just to hide his smirk from those sitting opposite. Jerk.

“I still say he can go fuck himself,” Connie repeats. I sigh at his stubbornness, but I don’t blame him for it.

“Sasha?” I ask, tentatively. If she says no, then Levi is no more a part of anything to do with this, and I am free from him. Maybe that’s what’s got me in a more relaxed mood around him today. Maybe it’s because I know with absolute certainty that there is not chance in hell that he will be—

“I think we should involve him.”

I don’t know who is more shocked by Sasha’s admission; me, Connie, or Levi himself. After the huge cock up that has been today, added to what happened the last time that Sasha and Levi were in a room together, everyone it seems was rather convinced that she would want nothing more to do with him.

It is, of course, Connie who snaps out of it first, but all he seems capable of doing is spluttering, so I take the reins from him so he can recover fully.

“Sasha, are you sure you want to do this?” I ask, making it very clear with my tone that I wish she was not sure.

She bites her lip a little, but then sits up straight, squares her shoulders, looks directly at Levi and says; “You’ve threatened my Alpha in the past, and I don’t like that. You almost made me shift and I don’t like that either. But I’m willing to let it go because Eren says you didn’t mean to, and I was drunk, and you didn’t attack me or anything, so it’s kind of both our faults. Also, you bought me food because I wanted you to, and that’s pretty cool.

“My Alpha thinks you could be useful to us as we deal with the omega, and I think so too. After all this rain, there’s going to be no more scent trails to track until the next full moon, and then we’re going to need all the help we can get to search through the forests around here to find whoever it is and help them. I don’t want to trust you, and I know Connie doesn’t actually want to look at you, but if Eren thinks we could use your help, then so do I.”

Well fuck.

Unpredictably, it seems, I have completely sabotaged my own plans to exclude Levi from this whole ordeal.

Well fuck.

“Well then, if Eren thinks it’s a good idea…” Levi trails off, and I shoot him a glare with golden eyes because he’s smirking again the little fuck truck.

“I never said it was a good idea, I just said it’s something we should consider.”

“But I didn’t think we would actually consider this,” Connie says, sounding pained and a little insulted. He looks at Sasha with confusion, and she shakes her head.

“I couldn’t get much information from the park rangers, and what I did get won’t be very helpful, I don’t think,” she says. “I’m just saying that if the worst happens and we can’t find this omega our own way, then we should see if Levi can help us track it down. That’s all, Connie. I’m not saying we have to exchange phone numbers and text at least three times a day. I know that would probably kill you.”
“Probably right,” he mutters, but I can hear the smile he’s trying to force down, and it’s giving me cavities the way she knows how to cheer him up with a handful of words. Ugh. Couples.

“So are we all in agreement?” Levi asks, the pompous bastard that he is.

“Two out of three,” Connie sighs. “Can’t really argue with that.”

“Good,” Levi smiles, leaning forward over the table to direct his next sentence at Sasha. I growl a small warning, a little pissed that this is actually happening now, and he takes the hint and backs up a bit.

“So what is this I hear about park rangers?” he asks. I groan.

We escape the muggy heat of the coffee house some forty minutes later, after Sasha has relayed to us all what she managed to find – i.e. not much. In Trost State Forest over the past few months there have been large animal attacks on the nights of the full moon, and one night outside of that pattern. She says she asked for grid references for these attacks, but let the subject drop when she was asked what she needed that information for, and she didn’t have a viable answer.

Levi suggests we look into the records that environmental authorities might have on the other state parks and reserves around here, so that we can determine whether the omega was locally made (suggesting another Alpha passing through here recently or indeed still being here, and therefore something else we need to watch out for) or if they migrated towards Trost from somewhere else. A neighbouring village or town, perhaps.

I have to admit (as much as it pains me to do so) that it’s a good idea. I know from first-hand experience that sometimes the first shift a werewolf endures can be horrifying and stressful enough for their fight or flight instincts to kick in over time, and they literally run from their homes. If that’s what happened, then there may very well be a trail of sorts for us to follow back to a human source.

Sasha takes his advice as proof that her decision was the right one, and our drive back to the university is much more relaxed on her part. I pull her into a hug when we get inside and out of the ever-present rain because I am so proud of how strong and in control she was today. Connie whines just once before we pull him into the hug as well, and I know we’ll be piling up in my bed tonight because they both stink of unease and anxiety, and Connie still of hurt and anger, and I know that Pack piles help with this stuff.

Seriously. It’s scary efficient. We’re very tactile creatures.

So we pile up and I have an arm full of beta on either side of me, and the rain slowly comes to a halt outside the window as we breathe one another in and reflect on all that’s happened today.

“’S been a long day,” Sasha slurs sleepily. It’s not even five o’clock yet, but it seems like we’ve been out for much longer than that.

“Sure has, pup,” I agree.

“’M sorry if I chose wrong back there,” she says, and I sigh and press a quick kiss against her temple.

“Your choice is your choice. That makes it right for you if you want it to be right,” I say, and I hope that makes sense. ‘I’m not angry or upset. I can’t speak for Connie, but I do know that he’ll
get over it.” Here Connie jabs me in the ribs with his finger tips and I jolt and make Sasha jump in turn. She tries to kick him in annoyance, but ends up getting me instead. My poor shins are very bruised today.

“Still think he should go fuck himself,” Connie mutters into the fabric of my t shirt.

“I agree wholeheartedly,” I wholeheartedly agree.

“Knew I liked you for a reason,” he says.

“Well I liked the way you almost broke his nose.”

Connie chuckles. “Did you see the way it was bruising?” he asks. I have to hold back a laugh, because I had and oh god did it look painful. No wonder he left the building. “It’s a shame that he has supernatural healing. It’ll be gone by the next time we see him.”

“Should have taken a picture,” I sigh. Photographic evidence that Levi isn’t as impervious as he makes out. It would be nice to add something like that to the collection of pictures Armin has slowly been giving me. Just right up there on my wall amongst all the scenery and nature – Levi’s bloodied and bruised face. It would definitely help me sleep easier at night.

Sasha’s stomach grumbles.

“How the fuck can you still be hungry?” the words whoosh out of me on a breath that tastes like disbelief and the huge lunch we had a mere three hours earlier.

“Because it’s dinner time?” she guesses. I close my eyes.

“What kinda food do you have in the fridge?” Connie asks, using my chest as a leverage point to sit up by.

“The kind people eat,” I sigh. “I don’t know. I swear we don’t have anything. There are fries in the freezer but if you want anything substantial we’ll have to go down to the store.”

“At least the rain’s stopped,” Sasha offers, optimistic as ever. We all gaze out the window but make no move to actually get up from my bed.


Guess I’ll be the one to go, then.

“Fine, you guys lounge around here. I’ll be back in half an hour. Don’t break my stuff, don’t have sex in my bed, don’t scare the neighbours.”

“We make no promises,” they say at the same time.

That frightens me.

[To Levi]: ur a dick

[From Levi]: Incorrect.

[To Levi]: ur secretly a gender changing chaos demon
[From Levi]: Chaos demons cannot change gender without changing their hosts.

[To Levi]: so then ur just a normal chaos demon

[From Levi]: Alas, wrong again.

[To Levi]: FUKCKING TELL ME WHAT U ARE

[From Levi]: Why do you spell “are” correctly, but not “you”?

I give up.


I don’t know what he is and he isn’t helping at all. It’s been days since he last made an appearance on campus (or at least, on the parts of campus that I’ve been moving about in) and believe me I’ve been checking over my shoulder constantly, expecting him to jump out and scare the shit out of me like he seems to enjoy doing.

My phone vibrates where I dropped it on my desk and I groan as I straighten up and unlock it. I rest my chin on the back of the chair I’m straddling, and read;

[From Levi]: Have a clue, brat: I can’t turn into a bat.

*What the fuck, Levi?

[To Levi]: did u just say that so it would rime?

[From Levi]: *rhyme, and maybe.

[To Levi]: fuck off

Because I’m mature, yea.

[From Levi]: You could always phone a friend. I’m sure Connie would love to take part in our little game.

Riiiiight. Because bringing up the burning hatred one of my two betas has for you is always a good move, Levi.

[To Levi]: this is not a game this is u pissing me off

[To Levi]: again

[To Levi]: becos clearly u get off on it

[From Levi]: Only because you look so adorable when you’re angry.

I nearly break my phone by slamming it down on top of my desk again.

It vibrates. I ignore it. It vibrates again. I wheel my chair away from my desk backwards, until it hits my bed and I have nowhere else to run. My phone vibrates for a third time.

I go and take a shower.
By the time I get out, I have five unread messages from Levi, which I am guessing are him gloating over making me lose my temper yet again. We’ve been texting for almost two weeks now (or rather, he has been texting me “clues” every now and again, which are really him saying “I don’t do this” or “I can’t do that” or “this is utter bullshit” and then I respond to them until he pisses me off). Over the course of this time, I have become accustomed to Levi’s grammatical corrections (of which there used to be many more, but he’s given up now I think) and his innate ability to rile me up with words without the combined effect of his face, and I have been trying my hardest to piss him off in return, but without much luck.

I check my texts.

[From Levi]: I bet you’re angry right now.

[From Levi]: You are, aren’t you? That’s why you’re not responding.

[From Levi]: Did the puppy have to take a time out?

[From Levi]: Do you have a stress ball? Do you like to play fetch with it?

[From Levi]: I’ll tell you what I am right now if you let me play fetch with you.

See this right here? I’ve had two weeks of this bullcrap. Guy thinks he’s funny. I think he’s going to get himself killed by pissing off the wrong person someday.

[To Levi]: enough with the dog jokes

[From Levi]: Only when they stop being funny.

[To Levi]: NOBODY BUT U FINDS THEM FUNNY

[From Levi]: *you

Oh my fuck.

[To Levi]: tunring my phone off now

[To Levi]: dont talk to me

[To Levi]: i dont care what u are its probably something really lame anyway

[From Levi]: And yet, I still managed to knock you on your ass.

[To Levi]: i was having an off day fuck off

[From Levi]: Big Bad Alpha having an off day? How often does that happen?

[To Levi]: srsly fuck off

After that I do shut my phone down. I know he’ll continue to text it, because he’s a dick, but at least I know it isn’t vindictive or malicious, just plane annoying.

I sigh and it turns into a groan and I rub my eyes in a gesture of utter despair.

Why do I always get stuck with the psychopathic ones, or the ones that have some instinctive drive that forces them to test other peoples’ boundaries until they break? Why? It’s not fair.
I hear footsteps approaching my door and extricate myself from the chair I’m wrapped around to go and open it. Armin’s stood there, hand raised to knock, freshly showered as well and wearing a pale blue button down and grey jeans. He smells like expensive shampoo and average deodorant and cherry cola when he talks.

“Want to come with me to Marco’s?” he asks, and I shrug and say sure, because I’ve got nothing else going on. I glance down at the trackie bottoms I’m wearing and smile sheepishly.

“Want to choose me some clothes to wear?”

“I thought you’d never ask,” he says dramatically, grinning as he shoves me backwards into my room, and then dive bombs my wardrobe looking for a shirt that’s clean.

“So why Marco’s?” I ask, as he throws a pair of skinnies I didn’t know I owned at my face. He isn’t even looking at me. It’s an impressive shot.

“His flat mates have people over,” he explains. He says no more, but because this is Armin (and he does this limited-info thing all the time) I don’t even have to think before I’m prompting him to add, “It’s someone’s birthday, but Marco’s boyfriend can’t make it so I’m going because otherwise Marco might go insane. His flatmates are all with the Sports Academy – like Franz is – but Marco can’t get out of this because he lives there and he’s a nice guy, so I thought we could go too. Free booze. Always good.”

By this point I am hopping on one foot, trying to fight my other leg into my jeans, but I manage to get out some sort of agreement all the same. The look of relief that comes across Armin’s face is totally worth the contorted shape I have woven myself into. Totally worth it.

“Where are we headed?” I ask, some fifteen minutes later, when Armin has styled his own hair and then done something to mine that I’m not going to think about. (It involved glitter. I don’t know where he got glitter from.) We are walking across campus, the sky darkening to dusk around us, the sounds of Club Sina looming up ahead of us as we near the centre.

“Parkwood,” he says. “Their house is right at the back, basically in the wood.”

Oh goodie. Because woodland creatures are always so tame, in my experience.

“Which is good,” Armin goes on, “because they can get away with throwing big house parties like this without anyone calling Campus Watch.”

“Brilliant.” It comes out less sarcastic than I had intended it to.

“It’s not too far, but we might get lost because—”

“Parkwood is a maze,” I finish. Every student that attends Trost University knows that the Parkwood student accommodation is essentially a maze to get around. It’s just a bunch of student houses and a couple dorm blocks like ours, but the place is massive. The main reason Sasha and Connie didn’t sign up for Parkwood accommodation is because it’s at least six people to a house, and eight people to a flat in the dorm blocks. There are just too many people there. It’s crazy.

We meander our way around it in the dark, the streetlights not seeming to work too well here, the trees not helping much with the lack of light issue. I have to guide Armin down the back alley ways between the dorm blocks so that he doesn’t trip on discarded beer cans, or bump into students walking the other way (no doubt on their way to Sina). All around us I can hear voices made loud
by alcohol, vying to be heard over even louder music. This is indeed house part territory.

“How much further?” I ask Armin as we come to another cross roads and keep going straight.

“Literally just another two streets, and then it’s theirs.”

“I hope you actually know where you’re going,” I mutter. He giggles beside me in the dark, and that’s really not encouraging. “Seriously, Princess. If we get lost in here, we’ll never find our way out again. One wrong turn and that’s it. Game over. No restart.”

“Eren,” he chides. “I know where we’re going.”

_Yea, but I don’t_, I think, and it takes me by surprise to think that I have put absolute faith in Armin not leading me astray, and not even my wolf is complaining. Remarkable.

“Okay that house it Marco’s,” Armin says then, and it’s not a comment that really needed saying considering it’s the house with all the lights on and drunk people spilling out the front door onto the grass. We come to a stop on the sidewalk just across the street. We don’t seem to have the heart to get any closer to the madness we can see and hear.

“Sports students,” I say with a sigh of resignation. Armin makes a noise that says he knows exactly what I’m feeling. My wolf shudders in my bones.

“They always seem worse when they’re gathered together like this,” he says.

“If you die in there, I will not drag your body back through Parkwood,” I inform him.

“Just make sure I don’t die then.”

“I can’t promise you that, Princess.”

“Armin thank god,” is how Marco greets us when he finds us in the back yard. We have been directed this way by the drunken rabble out the front, down the side of the house and in through the back gate. Here is where the music is coming from, and there are actual _kegs_ of beer being opened before our very eyes. I thought this shit only happened on tv shows or those really American teen movies that look a little like modern surrealism tinged with testosterone.

“Beer kegs,” I say to Armin, point them out. He whimpers.

“You guys need a drink,” Marco says after he has hugged us both, and I’m surprised that he seems to recognise me, considering how drunk he was last time we met. I also note that he is not wearing a cardigan (this is the image my mind has been supplying me whenever anyone mentions Marco, but alas it is no more) but grey stone washed jeans with a baggy, thin, incredibly hipster sweater tucked into them at the front. It annoys me that he can pull off the hipster look without seeming pretentious or like he’s trying too hard. Goddamn Italian.

“Come on,” he says, and then he starts to pull us through the crowd of bellowing, laughing, horrifyingly drunk sports students and in through the back door of the house.

And that’s when it hits me.

The smell of werewolf hits me like a fucking wall.

It’s so strong in here that I take a step back as if I’ve walked into an actual barrier, and my wolf is
writhing at the back of my mind, growling and pulling forward, urging himself into my bloodstream.

“You guys go ahead,” I manage to gasp out, and then I’m turning away and almost running back around to the side of the house so that I can breathe again. I suck in quick and deep lungfulls of air as I try to calm my racing heart and trap down on my instincts to shift and fight.

I pull my phone out of my pocket and switch it on, curse myself for turning it off in the first place because this thing takes forever to power back up. I punch in my pin and wait a few more agonizing seconds as I try to shake my wolf out of my head and get him to stop panicking because I’m not doing as he’s telling me.

“Fucking finally,” I growl, when the screen loads up. I scroll through my contacts with shaking fingers, find the one I want, and hit the call button. He picks up after the first ring.

“What’s wrong?” he asks. He sounds concerned. He knows something serious has happened for me to be calling him.

“I need your help,” I gasp, the feeling of claws raking down the back of my throat accompanying every word. “I found the omega. Levi, I found the omega.”
Performance Issues

Chapter Summary

Eren and Levi hunt an omega, Connie and Sasha have something to say about that, Armin buys a skeleton, and Eren mourns his pre-un life.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“What’s happening?” Levi asks, a hint of concern in his voice but no panic and for that I’m glad. “Are Connie and Sasha there?”

“They’re not here, they—”

“Why not?” he demands. “Why are you calling me?”

“Because, Levi, I can’t bring Connie and Sasha here.”

“Why not?” he repeats, rapid fire, before I can get anything else out. I close my eyes and try not to let the frustration I’m feeling push my wolf into more of a frenzy.

“The omega is here,” I explain, gritting my teeth as they start to sharpen, my wolf not liking the verbal reminder of our current predicament all too much. “I don’t know who it is, but it’s here. I am not bringing the rest of my Pack into the den of an unfuckingstable omega. I’m not risking them getting involved in this, not when there are so many other people here. I don’t know what the omega will do but I know it’ll end in blood.”

There’s silence on the other end of the line for a moment, and I use it to catch my breath, my stomach practically churning with anxiety, anger, and the instincts I’m forcing myself to ignore.

“So you called me,” he says, voice contemplative. “Because you don’t value me like you do your Pack.”

Should I feel guilt at that? I don’t know what I should feel at that.

I let the air out of my lungs all at once.

“No, I don’t value you like I do them.” Truth. The cold of the wall is beginning to seep into my back. “But you’re strong, and you have some freaky way of hiding what you are from other supernaturals. Between you and my Pack, you’re the obvious choice here, come on.” It’s goddamn obvious, isn’t it?

I take a deep breath. Say; “You said you wanted to help take care of this? Well come help me take care of this, now.”

“Don’t I at least get a please?” he teases.
My wolf kicks me in the stomach and a growl rips out of me before I can stop it.

“You’ll have an Alpha werewolf coming after you with rage in his eyes if you don’t get your butt down here right fucking now,” I grit out.

“Hmmm. You make a compelling argument. I’ll be there in fifteen minutes. Text me the address, mutt.”

He hangs up.

I text him where I am with now-steady fingers, the initial pulsing adrenaline dying down some now that I know help-slash-back-up-of-some-sort is on its way.


[To Levi]: hurry the fuck up

[From Levi]: You really should learn how to say please and thank you. It’s just good manners.

[To Levi]: i was raised by wolves what do u expect

After that there’s no reply. I hope to god he’s actually in his car and that’s the reason why.

I shift to get comfortable against the brick wall of the house, thrumming as it is with music and voices, close my eyes and listen to the beat and try to calm right the fuck down for a bit. I nearly shift then and there when someone nudges into my shoulder, but it’s only Armin, and he has two cups in hand.

“Hey,” he says. He smells concerned. I try to smile for him. “Why’d you run off?”

“Phone call,” I say. Wave the phone I’m still holding.

“Anything important?”

“Oh. Uh, Levi might come by for a bit, if that’s okay?” I don’t particularly care if it’s okay or not; he’s coming, end of story.

Luckily, Armin breaks into a huge grin that can only really be described as utterly disarming.

“Yea, get him to come! Hey, this drink’s yours. You might need it.” I find a cup being pushed into my hand, which I accept with a mumbled “definitely.”

“You coming back in or are you going to wait for him?” Armin leans a little more heavily against me and I have to plant my feet firmly so I don’t topple sideways.

I find myself saying “I should probably wait out here” because holy fuck an actual acceptable excuse not to go into the house? Sign me up right now.

“I’ll keep you company,” Armin says, his words obscured slightly by the cup he’s drinking from. I sniff suspiciously at my own. Vodka and coke. I drink, promptly discovering that it is more than half vodka, and likely to strip my sobriety from me like paint.

I lower my cup.

“So what is going on with you and Levi?” Armin asks, frowning up at me. I huff a laugh.
“I have no idea,” I tell him. Truth. “It’s pretty complicated.”

Armin nods like he understands, although I know he’s missing basically all of the major facts here. He says, “Say no more.”

So I don’t.

I wait an agonising seventeen minutes before the sound of a car approaching has me moving around to the front of the house. Armin follows, first cup emptied and his refill in hand. I’ve barely touched my drink.

Levi’s car is red and of course it is. Like it would be any other colour but Big-Bad-Wolf-luring red. He gets out and saunters over to us, hands hooked into jeans pockets, calm and confident and in charge although I get a taste of the nervous rush of adrenaline that hangs in the air about him. I can see his pupils are slitted, but in the low light I know Armin will miss it.

“Raised by wolves indeed,” he says, a smirk forming as he looks me up and down. “Wolves who apparently have a thing for glitter?”

“Shut up,” I grumble, but there’s no malice in it. No conviction. Two weeks back and I would not be okay with Armin and Levi this close, but now that there’s an omega in the house behind us, suddenly my wolf is looking at Levi in a whole new light. Good to know that’s all it took to get him to shut up about the black haired fucker. Fantastic.

I shake my head and try to shed some of the glitter Armin had dusted me with earlier.

“I thought it looked cute,” said human pouts.


“Armin, don’t encourage him. Levi, you’re here for a reason.”

“Reason?” Armin asks.

“To ensure he gets drunk,” Levi says before I can panic about my minor slip up. “Lead the way to the alcohol, Almond Cake.”

Almond Cake? Really? I shoot Levi a look and he winks at me this time. I realise I’ve calmed down an awful lot now that he’s here. I don’t know if that’s a good thing or not.

Armin turns and leads us back into the house, and as soon as his back is to us Levi’s whole disposition shifts into one of seriousness. His grey eyes, as they bore into mine, are narrowed and searching. He speaks quietly enough that only I will hear as we weave through the miscellaneous bodies filling the back yard.

“Are you sure this is the omega we’re looking for?”

I don’t think I’ve ever heard him so serious. I don’t know if I prefer him this way or not.

“Yea,” I say. “This place stinks of wolf, and it’s a wolf without a Pack.”

“You can tell something like that just from the scent?” he asks, surprised. I crook a smile, but it’s not amused.
“I can tell a lot from a scent. Just like I can tell that right now? Right now, you’re excited.”

I see his eyes flicker with recognition that yes, he is excited. Anxious, maybe, but not nervous. He smells electric. Giddy. He’s looking forward to the outcome of this night. I break eye contact and step past him, up over the threshold and into the house. He follows, finger tips pressing lightly against my back in silent agreement and warning.

I don’t shake him off. He doesn’t say a word.

We mingle.

It’s literally all we can do.

There are so many people packed into this six bedroom student house that the only way for me to pinpoint who the werewolf is, is if I get up close and personal with them. Close enough to single out the scent. Close enough to get a good look at them. Close enough that they’ll know what I am in return.

Alpha.

I really have no idea how an omega would respond to an unknown, unwelcome Alpha werewolf on their turf. At least when I turned, I was approached by an Alpha I knew – my uncle no less. It wasn’t a particularly calm encounter, but because he smelled familiar, like home and family and safety, my wolf didn’t react too violently. (I mean, it still ended with me lashing out and getting blood on my hands, but it could have been a lot worse and don’t I just know it.)

“We’ll have to draw him out of the house when we find him,” I say to Levi, voice raised to be heard above the clash of music, shouting, singing and laughing. My head is literally throbbing right now. But at least it’s somewhat drowning out the growling my wolf’s got on a loop at the back of my skull.

“I don’t know how he’ll react to me, but chances are he’ll start to shift.”

“Well that’s comforting,” I hear Levi mutter with his usual levels of dripping sarcasm. Swear to god, I could collect that stuff in a jar if I wanted to, and it would keep for years.

“It wasn’t meant to be comforting.” Mature. Go me.

“So do we split up and look for clues or what, Scooby?” He raises an eyebrow.

We’re standing in the middle of what I believe to be the living room. There’s a couch with a bunch of couples making out on, surrounded by the thick scent of arousal and the glisten of alcohol. A tv unit has been pushed up against the far wall, beer cans and cups and empty bottle already littering the surface. People stand in the door ways, talking and laughing. There’s a mass of dancing bodies spilling out through the open back doors and into the garden, making use of the music outside and the light from inside so they can actually see who they’re dancing with.

I tear my eyes away from the sight.

“We stick together. If we find him, it might take both of us to keep him under control and contained.”

“So I’m stuck with you all night? Is that what you’re saying?” Levi asks. It sounds rhetorical, but I
open my mouth to answer anyway because I’m a dick. He rolls his eyes and slaps a hand over my mouth before I can say anything. “Don’t bother answering that.”

I lick his palm. He tastes like coconut and leather and old, rich wood and I don’t know why. I pull a face at him and he mirrors it.

“That’s gross. Did your owner never teach you not to lick strangers?” Levi quips, wiping his hand off on his jeans overly dramatically, if I do say so myself. I huff.

“It worked, I’m not a fucking pet, and you’re not a stranger; you’re an asshole and you don’t get special treatment.”

“Oh, so the puppy has standards,” Levi mocks. “Won’t lick a stranger, but will lick an asshole. Is that your animal side showing through or are you just kinky at heart?”

“Enough with the dog jokes,” I growl at him, eyes flashing gold because I can’t quite hold that back. I watch Levi swallow in what I know to be anticipation, pupils thinning to those cats-eye slits that make him look dangerous and ethereal. My wolf bristles and gets ready to lend me his strength should I need it.

Goddamn, this is so not what we should be doing right now. Not when there’s an omega somewhere in this hell hole and we have yet to check every room and find him. His scent is hanging above our heads taunting me, and it’s driving me crazy enough that I’m actually seriously getting ready to fight Levi right here and now if he pushes any further.

I don’t realise I’m up in his space, glaring down at him, until someone stumbles into me from behind and I take a half-step forward to balance myself and I collide with him. His hands come up automatically to grasp at my upper arms and keep himself from getting knocked over, and I have a hand on his chest to steady myself, and his eyes have flickered back to their usual dark, round pupils and I can feel his heart beneath my palm pounding away. Strong. Unhurried. His chest rises in.

It feels so human.

My wolf retreats, the anger gone. I swallow.

“Well this is cute,” Armin’s cheerfully drunk voice says loudly from right fucking next to us and Levi and I jump apart like we’ve been electrocuted. “I thought you two were going to kiss.”

“They did look like they were going to kiss,” Marco says, and yep I just noticed that that’s Marco standing right behind my friend and—Wait. What?

“We were not going to kiss,” I hiss, just to clean things up here.

“Yea, and even if we were, you two just totally ruined the moment so…” Great, Levi. Thanks for your utterly unhelpful input.

“Oh, Armin giggles. If he were anyone else, I would strangle him. I realise I’m looking anywhere but at Levi. Out of the corner of my eye I can see that he is also ignoring my presence.

“So Marco,” I say, probably a little louder than the situation really calls for. The Italian flashes me a smile that would make the gods weep with jealousy. “Who else lives here?”

Levi face palms.
“That was smooth,” he mutters ten minutes later, jabbing me in the ribs as I attempt to pour myself a mug (yes, mug. I gave up looking for disposable cups and started riffling through the kitchen cupboards instead. Shut up) of beer. It spills on the counter top and I send Levi a glare that tells him I would like to concentrate without interruption right now because alcohol is the only thing I care about fuck you.

Levi either does not get the message or – more likely – elects to completely ignore it in favour of listening to the sound of his silky smooth voice some more.

“I mean, you could have gone a more subtle way about asking the kid who’s been wolfing up the joint. Pour me one?”

“Pour it yourself, dickwad.”

“Charming.”

“Fuck off.”

He jabs me in the ribs again, but this time with his surprisingly sharp nails. I hiss at the stab of pain, and send him another glare that again goes straight over his head.

“Well sorry for not wanting to stay in this house for any longer than I really have to,” I mutter.

“What, bored of my company already?” An amused little smirk. Fucker. “I guess I’ll have to try harder to please, then.”

“Fuck. Off.”

“You’ve already said that and I’m still here. Do you really think that pausing between those two words will make me suddenly want to obey them?” He rolls his eyes and plucks a half-empty bottle of vodka from the side, puts it to his lips and swallows it down, like he’s drinking water. He doesn’t even blink, just keeps his gaze steady on me as he does it. It terrifies me a little. A lot. My heart might have lurched in my chest ever so slightly.

“What are you?” I breathe. And yea, it comes out equal parts disgusted and intrigued, and Levi obviously finds it amusing because he laughs loud and long and proffers me the bottle which I decline like a sane, sober person.

“I am way out of your league, babe.” Like that answers a thing. The look in his eye tells me he’s fucking with me and I growl, lips parted, teeth locked and bared. His gaze flickers down to them, as if expecting them to sharpen. I figure he still wants to find out what my breaking point is. Joy of all joys.

“We need to check out everyone who lives in this place,” I say. Like, yea. That’s going to happen easily. Marco said that two of the guys are outside, one is probably upstairs with her girlfriend, and the other two are “around”. (Like that helps us at all.) I also managed to get a brief description of them all during my ten minute mini interrogation that Levi stood through with an unimpressed stare levelled right at me without flinching.

“Start upstairs?” I ask.

“Start by drinking that, and then two shots of this, and then I’ll consider following your ass upstairs to find a couple of possibly supernatural lesbians.”
I blink at him twice, and when I realise he is being serious and that those words did just come out of his mouth and in that order, I chug my drink and don’t even complain when he gives me the bottle.

Two shots. Two mouthfuls.

Same difference, right?

Upstairs is just as crowded as downstairs and also just as noisy. As if that wasn’t bad enough, there are no big open doors leading into the outside world here, so the air is stuffy and thick with scent that’s messing with my head.

“What is it?” Levi asks as we stand on the top step, not quite committed to manoeuvring through the rabble before us, but close enough that we can’t back out now.

I shake my head. “Nothing.”

“Well obviously it’s something or you wouldn’t be all tense and growly right now. Are we close? Can you smell him more clearly?”

“Fuck—no, Levi. That’s the problem. Everything’s all mixed up. There are too many people up here.” I shake my head, like that’ll work to clear it some. Of course it goddamn doesn’t. It just makes the room spin.

“Oh so we go with plan Get Close And Sniff ‘Em,” Levi says, taking another long pull from his stolen bottle. I try not to stare as his throat bobs with each swallow.

To distract myself, I say, “Since when did we have that plan?”

“Since you called me here in a state of panic and clearly have no clue what you’re actually doing. How long have you even been an Alpha anyway?”

“Uh... Maybe two months?” I guess. Fuck it feels a whole goddamn lot longer than that. Fuck.

“Jesus, kid.” Levi actually laughs, but it doesn’t look like he wants to. It’s more of a you’ve-got-to-be-fucking-shitting-me laugh. He tugs my shirt sleeve as a sign to follow him as he begins to wind his way between the too-warm bodies packing the hallway. “Remind me again why I’m actually listening to you and following your lead on this?”

“Because I’m still an Alpha and I’m still awesome?” I say it like it’s a question, like it should be the obvious answer here and how dare he not instinctively know this. I can practically hear his raised eyebrow of displeasure.

“I think you’ll find it’s because out of the two of us, I don’t have performance issues when drunk,” he says, coming to a stop outside an open bedroom door, the room inside full of laughter and music that’s clashing horribly with that from downstairs.

“I do not have performance issues,” I huff in response. A girl to my left gives me a look which I bravely ignore.

“Uh huh. Sure.” He sounds like he’s smirking. He turns to look at me and yep, he’s smirking, the bastard. He gestures to the open door, the room full of people who could potentially be the droid we are looking for, and his smirk turns into a feral grin, sharp teeth shining in the light. “Shall
“Like I said,” Levi groans as we trudge back down the stairs. “Performance issues.”

I don’t even bother answering that one because yea, maybe when I’m drunk I start to lose a little of my werewolfly potency. And yea, maybe when I’m drunk it becomes slightly harder for me to “feel out” any supernatural presence. And yea, maybe when I’m drunk some part of me thinks it’s totally acceptable to just approach people with the sole purpose of catching their scent in a very sniff-and-run manner.

Maybe.

“I still don’t understand,” he says, dumping the now empty vodka bottle on a nearby horizontal surface, “what you were planning to do if any of those girls turned out to be the omega.”

“Run?”

“Run.”

“Yea. Run. Pretty sure they would’ve bitch slapped me across the room if they were the omega and they had an Alpha just casually sniffing them.” God, Levi, how slow are you?

“You wouldn’t fight back?” Actual amusement in his voice. I have to roll my eyes.

“Fighting back not really an option when I’m drunk off my ass and having a hard time not falling on it.” As if to punctuate this point, I walk into the kitchen doorframe, rebound, and stumble into some sports student that feels more like a brick wall against my back. The brick wall grunts and I flash him a dazzling smile that takes me maybe a second too long to pull into place. I have a feeling I just blinked at him in confusion for a moment before realisation hit me, but it’s always difficult to tell how slow your reactions really are whilst drunk.

When I turn back to Levi, smile still in place because now my face is apparently stuck that way, he just looks at me for a time, hair slicked back from his face for the most part save the few dark strands that have worked their way loose from the gel due to the heat of upstairs. He pushes them back into place with both hands and shakes his head.

“You are a truly bizarre creature,” he says.

“Well if you hadn’t made me drink so much vodka…”

“I didn’t make you drink anything—”

“You actually held the bottle to my face and threatened to beat me bloody with it if I didn’t help you finish what was left.”

A slight pause as Levi considers this. “Point,” he concedes.

We walk into the kitchen without incident this time.

Levi heads straight for the beer keg that someone has somehow managed to fit on the counter top amidst the general mess and that one couple over there who are making out kinda disgustingly. Drunk making out is really not attractive to witness. I try not to let the scent of arousal that’s slowly flooding the room get to me too much. (Other peoples’ arousal is, unfortunately, something I’m
used to smelling. I hate it. It kinda makes me want to gag, but I’m a big brave werewolf and I ignore it like all the other big brave werewolves I know.)

“Drink?” Levi asks. There is a voice in the back of my head saying no, this is the reason why you haven’t found the omega and why your wolf has gone and fucked off and left you with performance issues here.

…But then there’s that other voice that’s saying actually, being drunk is probably the only thing keeping you from having a lack-of-wolf-control induced freak out because you can’t find the goddamn omega, and I like this voice much better.

I accept the full mug.

“Good boy,” Levi says with a wink as I take a mouthful. I promptly choke on said mouthful.

“So I may be a little drunk now,” Levi sighs as we slump down on the back porch step. I swivel my head to shoot him a look, and my whole world sloshes around inside my skull.

“You don’t say.”

“I wouldn’t be so drunk if we could just find this shitting omega already,” he grumbles, dropping his head into his hands. His hair is now a complete mess, but mine does have glitter in it so I’m not really one to judge.

“I don’t think he’s here,” I say. Levi’s shoulders roll as he summons up the strength to lift his head enough to look at me.

“You don’t say,” he mimics. I shove him over. My body follows through with the momentum and I end up slouched on top of him. He sighs again.

It’s almost four in the goddamn morning, and I honestly gave up actively trying to sniff out the omega at about two. We’ve circled the house multiple times; made an utter nuisance of ourselves by intruding on peoples conversations just to catch their scent and rule them out; got dragged into a drinking game that showed me just how competitive and sobriety-sacrificing Levi can be when faced with imminent loss and failure; found jack shit other than an actual bottle of Jack which we shared after Armin and Marco found us again and insisted we dance with them to music that definitely wasn’t English or messing about.

“’M exhausted,” I slur. Legit slur. I’ve reached the slurring stage.

So much for supernatural metabolism trounces alcohol and keeps me from getting totally shit faced. I peer up at Levi. I realise I’m still pretty much lying on top of him but he hasn’t shoved me off yet and that’s progress, right?

“Yea progress,” he replies, eyes slipping shut and one hand coming up to pat the top of my head. He ends up poking me in the eye by mistake. It occurs to me a little too late that I was speaking aloud.

“If you count drunk paralysis as progress,” he mumbles.

“Not paralysed,” I argue, lifting my head up and thumping it down onto his chest because I can because I’m not paralysed. He doesn’t react and I think maybe he can’t feel much from the neck down.
“Should pro’ly move before we are, though.”

“Pro’ly?” I snicker. He opens his eyes only to narrow them at me as I struggle to raise myself back into a vertical position. The world shifts slightly on its axis, gravity threatening to be a little bitch all over again. I resist its alluring pull.

“Pro-bab-ly,” he enunciates. He tries to sit up as well. He gets as far as flailing like a stranded turtle, and then growls out a little irritated “for fuck sake kid help me.”

I help. Somehow. In some way. I drag us both to our feet and then back toward the house so we can lean against the wall.

“Seriously don’t think the omega’s here,” I say. Or try to. It doesn’t come out sounding much like that, but from the grunt and whoozy nod Levi gives me I guess he got the message.

“Give up and go home?” He asks.

“Yeaaa.”

“You know what this means, don’t you?”

I turn to look down at him. He pushes his beyond-redemption mop of hair out of his eyes and pulls himself up to his full height (which isn’t very tall).

He says the words I was fearing: “It means we need to go get Armin.”

We both turn to look back down at the garden, bathed in odd colours from the various lights people have strung up and hammered into the ground. We can see Armin plainly from here, dancing with the sports students, two of whom actually live here with Marco (I know this because I have already eliminated their sniff tonight by also dancing with them… and then drinking with them because that’s the polite thing to do apparently). He seems to be enjoying himself. His hair style also seems to be holding out far better than Levi’s did, but then again Levi did end up being facially groped by one of the girls upstairs (hence the initial dire need to drain that stolen vodka) so perhaps that’s the reason why.

“If I shove the others out of the way,” I say, slowly and clearly because this is important stuff. “Do you think you have enough hand-eye coordination left in you to grab him and get out of here without ending up in the dirt?”

“I think I’ve got enough room in me for one more drink,” is Levi’s answer. Which isn’t really an answer, but I don’t deny him his last request. In fact, I join him in that endeavour.

It is, perhaps, thanks to that last drink that somewhere on the way back to our dorm, my memory blanks out. I actually think I did pretty goddamn well for not having blacked out before then, considering just how much I drank last night at other peoples (mainly Levi’s) urging.

I open my eyes to find myself in bed, under the covers, curtains closed against the light of actual day. I pat myself down and realise I’m still wearing my jeans, which would explain why my legs feel weird and uncomfortable. I shift onto my side a little and the material turns into a death trap with the sole purpose of cutting of the blood circulation to me feet.

I groan and try to shift back the other way, but that only seems to make matters worse. Ugh.
An arm flings itself across my hips as I go in for attempt number three, and the words “Quit moving,” filter through my semi-conscious haze.

I quit moving.

“What the fuck?” I say instead. Loudly.

The arm retracts with a drawn out groan and I ignore the discomfort of the jeans strangling my legs in order to turn onto my side and stare at the guy lying in bed next to me with his face buried in my pillow, dark hair obscuring the rest of his profile.

“Levi what the fuck are you doing in my bed?” I hiss. Mainly because I can’t actually breathe right now for some odd and probably worrying reason, but also because I don’t want my flatmates hearing me yell that at some ridiculous hour of the morning and—no. Wait. It doesn’t matter what time it is. All that matters is why the fuck what the fuck how the holy no dear god.

“Stop panicking,” comes the mumbled words of my bed fellow. I’m literally too angry and confused and speechless and confused did I say confused to do anything but emit a high pitched meep at that. Panicking. Riiight. Now why on earth would I be doing that?

“Your virtue remains intact or whatever.” He blindly reaches out a hand and pats me with it. Pats my chest. My bare chest.

It is this contact of skin on skin that finally snaps me out of it and I throw myself backwards out of bed with a strangled yelp, immediately landing in a heap on the floor.

The floor sits bolt upright and head butts me in the face.

“Armin?” I ask, groaning as I rub my forehead and squint down at my startled blonde friend.

“Armin why are you on my floor?”

“Why are you on me?” he asks. I blink at him and then look back up at my bed in time to see Levi lean over the edge of it and shoot us an amused grin.

“Why are you in my bed?” I gape, pointing. It’s really all I can muster.

Levi’s grin widens and he pulls himself back away from the edge and out of my line of sight. Gods I am so glad my wolf appears to still be sleeping off the bucket of alcohol I drained last night. Had I accidentally wolfed out in front of Armin first thing this morning – as well as waking up to find Levi in my goddamn bed – I don’t know how I would have come back from that.

“I’m gonna go take a shower,” Armin says through a yawn. He doesn’t seem bothered by the fact that I just woke up next to Levi of all people. Nor does he really seem bothered by the fact that our skulls just collided hard enough that I’m still blinking stars out of my vision. I breathe in his alcohol laced scent as he extracts himself from under me and stumbles over to the door, and figure he’s probably still drunk.

Wait.

Scent.

The omega.

“Please please please tell me we didn’t do what I think we did last night?” I beg Levi as I drag myself into an upright position and collapse against the support of my bed – my bed that he is
lazily spread out on. Jesus *fuck.*

He lifts his head and purses his lips at me. “If you’re asking whether I put my dick in y—”

“Whoa no! Nope. Stop right there. Don’t even want to think about that okay? Okay. I’m just gonna—wow nuh uh.” I screw my eyes shut tight and try not to think about it try not to think about it I know it didn’t happen just don’t fucking picture it Eren.

“So I’m guessing your totally vague and kinda cliché question was not about the two of us fucking?” he asks in that bored and unimpressed tone of his, and I let all the air out of my lungs in one long whoosh because well crap now I’m picturing it. Fuck sake. I cross my arms on the mattress and hide my head behind them.

“Did we or did we not get ridiculously drunk last night instead of finding the omega like we set out to do?” I mumble. He taps me on the top of my head.

“Speak up, brat.”

“I said ‘did we or did we not get ridiculously drunk last night instead of finding the omega like we set out to do?’” I say, maybe a little louder than our (still way too close) proximity should require.

“Pretty much, yea. He wasn’t there, anyway.” Levi yawns and stretches, then starts tapping the top of my head again. “You know I can actually sense a werewolf before I enter a building, right?”

That gets me to raise my head. I stare at him, letting that offhanded comment sink in. My wolf rolls over in his corner of my mind and cracks his eyes open, perks his ears. Aw crap.

“Are you trying to tell me, Levi,” I say, in an overly sweet tone that has him turning onto his side to look at me properly. “That you could have told me straight off that he wasn’t there but you chose not to?” Speechless. Actually speechless.

He shrugs.

“There were a lot of people around. There was a lot of energy. It was hard to tell and you were pretty positive he was in there getting drunk with the rest of them, so I figured he might be.” I can feel my wolf shaking out his limbs, waking up one live wire at a time. Crap crap crap crap crap crap. I try to reassure him that everything is fine and I have it all under control and that we don’t need to overreact to this.

Levi keeps going.

“But then we got inside and upstairs and I knew he wasn’t actually there, it just smelt like he’d been there recently. So yea, I got us drunk because you seriously need to relax more, kid. Come on, you’re a uni student. You’re meant to not give a flying fuck about shit that isn’t alcohol.”

“Levi,” I growl. “I will tear you apart if you don’t get out of my room right now.”

He sits up and the duvet shifts and I’m pretty sure he’s wearing less than I am, which is *not helping the situation here.*

“I did you a favour,” he says. Like I should be grateful that he wasted my time and let me freak out over a possible threat to myself and Armin and Marco and my Pack and then got me drunk and then decided fuck it I’m going home with Eren to sleep in his bed because I’m a Mega Douche.

“And I’m doing you a favour right now,” I shoot back, wolf woken up nicely and adding his own
growling tone to my voice. “I’m letting you walk out of here without a chunk of flesh missing from your neck.”

“How kind of you,” he sneers. Sarcasm. It’s like a laser beam for my wolf. Fucking zeroed in and focused like he’s prey. Goddamn this is gonna end bloody if he doesn’t start moving.

“I’m pissed at you. My wolf is pissed at you. My Pack’s gonna be pissed at you. Three very good reasons right there for why you should be getting your skinny butt out of my bed.”

Just count to ten. Count to ten. Come on, Eren, count to ten.

Breathe.

“I don’t think it’s that skinny,” Levi says with a frown.

That’s it.

I snarl at him and stand, hands grabbing at whatever part of him is closest, and I heft him into the air and fucking carry him to the door.

“Get out of my room,” I growl as I dump him on the floor. He looks up at me in utter indignation, like he can’t believe I just did that despite the warnings I had sent his way.

“Don’t I at least get my clothes?” he asks, getting to his feet.

“No. You can walk back like that.”

“Can I take a shower first? I smell like a bar.”

“No. You can walk back like that.”

“Can I—”

“No.” My claws are sliding out to get in on the action, my eyes shimmering gold as I try not to react like a wolf that just woke up to find him in its bed. (Oh but that’s exactly what I am, aren’t I? Yippee. This’ll be fun.)

Levi takes a deep breathe that smells like… well… a bar, and then rushes out, “If you let me take a shower and get dressed I’ll tell you what I am right here right now and will also buy you breakfast and even include your dumb Pack in on that offer.”

I hesitate. Look to the door leading to my en suite and then back to him again. My wolf is telling me no this is a bad idea you tool, but my innate curiosity is telling me do it learn something from him get free food and answers at the same time, and then the other bit of me that I don’t really listen to all that often is telling me fuck you fuck him fuck this don’t do it.

Two against one.

“Okay,” I say, and I’m pretty sure I’m going to hell purely for being an idiot.

Levi grins, teeth sliding down into sharp points.

“Eren Jaeger,” he says, “you just made a wise choice. I am a vampire. And now I’m going to use your shower.”
It is ten minutes later when I am lying on my bed (duvet on the floor because Levi’s scent is all over it) that I actually begin to come to terms with what just happened.

I fish my phone out from the gap between my bed and the wall.

[To Hannes]: do vampires exist?

I laugh to myself kinda hysterically. I’m actually asking this question like there’s the possibility that it could be true. I’ve totally lost it. Levi and his fluctuating personality of controlling-and-demanding-douchebag, cold-yet-bored-asshole, and fucking-with-you-for-fun-shithead has finally managed to drive me insane.

My phone vibrates in my hand.

[From Hannes]: No, they got wiped out years ago.

Hahaha. Of course they did.

(I’m crying on the inside.)

[To Hannes]: cool cos i got a friend who says hes one and i think he might be for real

[To Hannes]: just wanted to check

That’s it, Eren, play it cool. I hear Levi knock a bottle over in the shower and laugh in the hopes that he’ll hear me. I hear a muffled “fuck you” from the en suite and I laugh at his misfortune because it’s either that or panic some more. Oh today is off to a flying start.

[From Hannes]: I don’t even want to know who you’re hanging out with. Could be telling the truth. Just don’t let him bite you. I’m not driving up there to save your dumb ass.

[To Hannes]: gee thanks my only living relative thats so supportive of u

[From Hannes]: Just doing my job, son.

[To Hannes]: actual worst guardian i’ve ever had

[To Hannes]: and my dad LEFT

“Hey Eren,” I hear Levi call from the en suite. “If I jerked off in here would you be pissed?”

[To Hannes]: how do i kill a vampire?

Breakfast is an unusual and somewhat twitchy affair. Levi has made himself at home. Apparently he and Armin became fast friends last night whilst we were all drunk and in my bed. I don’t remember a thing, hence I’m twitching ever so slightly as I watch them attempt to cook.

“Thought you said you were buying me breakfast,” I grumble. Levi looks over his shoulder and smirks. Fucker. So I sound like a petulant child, so what?

“Armin can’t cook for shit. I’m taking you out after,” he says, like that’s a reassurance. Like everything is okay now and I can stop worrying. My stomach rumbles for the second time in as many minutes and I heave a sigh before pulling my phone out of my (fresh) jeans pocket.
[To Connie]: levis buying breakfast

[To Connie]: ill pick u guys up in a bit

I rub my eyes and wait for the inevitable negative response at that. I don’t have to wait long.

[From Sasha]: Why is Connie growling at his phone?

[To Sasha]: becos levis buying us breakfast ?

[From Sasha]: You know I have no objections to free food.

[To Sasha]: cool ill text u when we’re on our way

I put my phone down, but then have a thought and pick it up again. I can feel Levi watching me off to my left. I ignore him in favour of my beta.

[To Sasha]: tell connie we have info on the omega

[From Sasha]: He’s still growling.

Yea okay. Connie doesn’t like Levi. I honestly don’t blame him.

“Hey, kid. You want one egg or two?” said asshole asks, spatula and plate in hand. I can feel just how conflicted my wolf is right now, and I let out a little whine of my own as I watch him ladle food onto my plate. I no longer have control over this situation and I do not like that.

(But food…)

“Two eggs it is,” Levi answers his own question after hearing the pathetically conflicted sound I just let out. “Because I’m feeling super nice this morning.”

“I feel super hungover,” Armin moans, holding out the next plate as Levi transfers food.

“That’s generally what happens when you get drunk,” I tell him. He nods forlornly as he shuffles his way to the table. He smells a lot like regret, but it’s a half-hearted thing and masked with the orange-scented shower gel he uses. My phone vibrates.

[From Connie]: It better be worth it man. I got Cinnamon Toast Crunch over here.

[To Connie]: i got a hungover armin over here. i need to get out while i still can

[From Connie]: Free breakfast with dickshit it is.

I laugh. Levi narrows his eyes at me as he places a plate of steaming fried food in front of me.

“What’s so funny?” he asks. I grin at him and cram a piece of bacon in my mouth.

“Connie called you dickshit,” I tell him. He snorts.

“Tell him I like his attitude.”

Yea, like that’ll happen.
Levi insists we take his car into Trost. Mainly because he lives in Trost and wants to go home at some point in his own goddamn car, which is understandable but not happening because no. I tell him I will not get into a vehicle with him that I am not in direct control of. I also tell him I don’t like his scent and if I have to spend forty minutes cramped into a metal box with wheels that smells of nothing but him, I will likely tear the upholstery to shreds. Not technically true, but I can smell the flare of fear on him when he hears that.

We take my truck. Armin tags along. They sit in the back and chat and giggle and I get to put up with my wolf whining at me to make it stop because Armin is very much our human and not Levi’s to be making giggle. I’m so glad the steering wheel is used to me squeezing the ever living fuck out of it.

When we pick up Connie and Sasha, Levi wisely and tactfully jumps up front with me. I think it might have a little to do with the fact that Connie slammed his head into a table top and Sasha tried to tear his throat out and yes he’s probably a little cautious of them, but it might also just be him wishing to annoy me some more. It’s hard to tell when he does that on purpose and when he doesn’t.

“I swear to all that is unholy in this world, if you do not stop drumming on my dashboard I will eviscerate you,” I hiss. He stops drumming. The kids in the back are laughing at something on Sasha’s phone so I take this opportunity to glare at Levi and say the word “vampire” like it’s the worst possible thing I can call him. He smirks at me. I focus back on the road.

Yea, so I might have just about accepted the fact that he seems to be an undead blood sucking creature of the night, but I still retain some modicum of doubt until I see some real proof.

When we park up in Westgate and Armin goes off to “shop for supplies” (which he says in a tone maybe a little too ominous for such an innocent young adult, but I’m not looking too far into it), Connie and Sasha put me between them and Levi and give me that expectant look that says I better start talking soon or they’ll gang up and puppy dog eyes me into an early grave.

“So we found the omega’s den.” I start, and yes I shouldn’t have started there because oh boy now they’re yelling in disbelief in the middle of the parking lot and there are people over there and oh god.

“Calm the fuck down,” I tell them, and they listen the first time round which I’m still not used to. Alpha authority. It’s kinda weird how strong that shit is.

“I was at a party in Parkwood and I caught his scent. So I called Levi because I didn’t want you guys getting into trouble,” I raise my voice above theirs to get this very crucial point across because I can see the arguments building in their lungs. “We went through the whole place but none of the guys that live there check out, so maybe it’s a close friend who spends enough time there that the place smells like him. Whatever, we only really know who it’s definitely not at this point.”

We leave the echoing dimness of the underground parking garage and cross the street, heading towards La Recoin. Levi remains blissfully silent along the way.

“So what do we do now?” Sasha asks, as Connie grumbles “I can’t believe you called him.”

“We go get breakfast and think things through,” I say, sidestepping Connie’s remark altogether because I am not getting into an argument about whose life I was willing to sacrifice to the cause in the middle of Westgate. No thank you. I’ll save that one for later.
As it turns out, I have to repeatedly save that one for later as we eat breakfast and revise our Omega Hunting Plan of Awesomeness (named thus by Sasha, as you can probably tell). I can smell Connie’s discomfort and annoyance from across the table. It’s strong. Radiating. He really has an issue with Levi and I’m starting to think that maybe I should actively do something to try and ease that up a bit. Maybe.

“Need to piss,” Levi says as he finishes the last of his pancakes and pushes back from the table. I watch him go, ever so aware that as soon as he’s out of sight Connie is going to start up with complaints of betrayal. So I speak before he has the chance to.

“Connie, I’m sorry for not calling you last night, but I made a choice to keep you out of it and nothing you can say will convince me that that wasn’t the right choice.” I give him The Look; the one that says I’m being completely serious and I need him to understand and believe me here.

“But Levi,” he whines, because Levi. I pat the now-vacant seat next to me and he rounds the table to slide into it so I can wrap my arms around his shoulders and comfort him like I know he needs me to.

“I know you don’t like him,” I say. He puts his head on my shoulder and whines high in the back of his throat. “I know you don’t trust him to not fuck things up or hurt one of us, but I need you to trust my judgement, okay?”

He whines again and I smooth a hand down his back, wonder briefly how we must look to the other customers in here, but then shove that thought aside because it’s unimportant right now. Everything but my beta is unimportant right now.

“Sasha, the same goes for you,” I say. She nods. I reach my other hand out across the table top and she takes it with both of hers. I know they’ll be coming back to my dorm to pile with me after this. I can feel their worry and their upset.

“There were just too many other people there. If we had found him, I didn’t know what he would’ve done. I didn’t want to risk you two getting hurt.” There’s so much truth behind my words that my chest pinches a little just to say them out loud. The omega’s scent – the anger in it and the fear – said a lot about what kind of guy we’re up against here. I couldn’t bring my betas into that kind of environment without knowing that they would have been safe. I couldn’t. Not after how my wolf reacted the moment I stepped through that door and smelt it.

“If it’s any consolation,” Levi says, doing that sudden silent appearance trick of his again. “Your Alpha only called me because he doesn’t give a shit about what happens to my pretty face in a fight. He’s looking out for you.”

I feel Connie tense up next to me at the mention of a fight.

“It’s not because I thought you guys were incapable,” I tell him, because it strikes me that maybe that’s how this seems to him. He’s my Second. I’m supposed to rely on him and his strength in a fight, and last night I literally kept him out of it altogether. Fuck. “I’m just going to be real selfish with your wellbeing for a while, okay?”

“He’s like a worried mother,” Levi offers, and Connie tenses again at the sound of his voice, face still hidden in my shoulder. “He’d go fucking apeshit if either of you two got hurt.”

Sasha snorts. I raise my eyebrows at her and watch as she struggles to keep a laugh down. It’s an
impressive effort on her part. Connie lets out a little snicker against my shoulder, and it’s like a spark igniting a blaze. Sasha bursts out laughing, body thrown back in her chair so it rocks onto its back legs. Connie lifts his head from my shoulder and grins at her, obviously incapable of reacting to her laughter with some of his own. Soon the two of them are cackling away, and I’m sat there wondering just what happened. I exchange a look with Levi and oh thank god he’s just as bemused by the sudden shift in temperament as me. We go back to raised-eyebrow-staring at my shortling betas.

“Are you—?” wheezes Sasha. Connie nods.

“Eren in a dress—” he says. Sasha throws her head back and laughs even harder, one arm flailing out to hit Levi, who jumps and looks to me for help. I shrug in the most unhelpful way I can.

“Fighting the omega—” she manages, a tear rolling down her cheek.

“And with the face—” Connie answers.

“And the voice—” Sasha adds.

“What did I say?” Levi asks, voice tinged with a fear that is very real.

“I have no idea,” I murmur.

Sasha falls off her chair.

We don’t actually get thrown out for the uproar in the end, but mostly because Connie and Sasha settle down once milkshakes arrive (because it’s impossible to drink a milkshake whilst laughing). Connie seems much more relaxed now, and he’s smelling a hell of a lot calmer, much more like his usual self. Sasha, too, is less tense. She actually steals the last of Levi’s drink, and if that’s not a sure sign that she’s okay with me using him to keep her hide safe and sound I don’t know what is. (It also might mean that she could possibly be totally fine with him working with us, but that’s a conversation for another day methinks.)

“Our resident Princess wants us to go pick him up,” I say as Levi’s paying. Maybe I should feel bad about making him pay for the vast quantity of food three werewolves can consume, but then again he did use my shower and piss me off, and this is just recompense for that.

“Where is he?” Connie asks.

“Fuck knows,” I sigh, shooting off another text to Armin. “Oh. Other side of Westgate. Waiting in the cold.”

“Back to the truck, then?” Connie guesses, standing up with a groan.

“I don’t think I can walk,” Sasha admits. “Too many pancakes.”

“I told you to go easy on them,” Connie reprimands. Sasha looks sheepish.

“And I told you to not let her have your fries,” I say.

There’s a shout of “yea!” from Sasha at that, and Connie shoots me a look of utter betrayal and heartbreak. I stick my tongue out.

“Mature,” Levi says, re-joining us. I glare at him because whoever said I was mature? “We good
“To go?” he asks.

“Yea, just help Sasha find her feet and then we’re off to hunt down a stranded Armin.” I push myself out of my chair and sigh in satisfaction because I feel full and it feels wonderful and I didn’t have to pay a dime. (Oh yea, so don’t feel guilty about that.)

“Oh she can find her feet,” Connie mutters to me. “It’s just using them that’s giving her issues.”

A split second later Connie feels just how little of an issue using her feet is for Sasha when one of them connects with his ass. He yelps. Levi snickers and offers Sasha a high five which she grants him, looking smug. Connie pouts.

I shake my head and fucking leave because I’m so done with dealing with this weird shit for today.

Of course, when we find Armin and see what it is that counts as “supplies”, I realise that “weird shit” is pretty much the only constituent of this current stage in life and I should really be used to it by now.

“What is that?” Connie asks as Armin shoves his bags into the back of my truck and climbs in after them.

“That is a fake skeleton,” Armin informs him, like it’s the most natural thing in the world to be cramming a fake skeleton into the back to my truck between himself and the werewolf girl with a look of confused shock on her face.

“Why?” I ask.

“Because it’s Halloween!”


“Hey, so you do know how to say please,” he says with a growing grin. I scowl at him. The grin narrows to a satisfied smirk that I’m feeling the need to wipe of his pale face.

“I’m throwing a Halloween party,” Armin says, ignoring us up front. I can sense the burst of excitement from Connie and Sasha in the back and I know what they’re thinking.

“Is it fancy dress?” they ask in unison.

“Duh,” is Armin’s only answer. All Halloween parties are fancy dress. It’s just the rule.

“We’re coming as werewolves,” they say. Armin laughs. I shoot a glance at them in the rear view mirror that none of them catch because they’re both focused on Armin like he’s the greatest thing they’ve ever seen. (Which hurts because I’m sitting right here fuck you very much.)

“Hey, Eren,” Levi says to me as the three in the back start bickering back and forth about just what should constitute a “proper” Halloween party. “Guess what I’m coming as.”

“If you say a vampire I will wring your cliché little neck,” I warn. I can see the asshole grin from the corner of my eye as I take a left.

“An Alpha werewolf,” he says.

Oh how I mourn for my pre-uni life.

Oh how I mourn.
So I’m actually super excited right now because this fic just gained its first piece of fan art, drawn by the wonderful hypermanica on tumblr, which you can find here. Go check it out and then freak out with me over this because woooow omg okay wow. A thousand thank yous to hyper (you are amazing).
Chapter Summary

Levi hangs out, Eren stresses out, Armin throws a Halloween party, and the omega makes himself known.

So over the next week Levi lets me grill him a little on his whole… uh… condition. (You know; the vampire thing.) It goes a little something like this:

[To Levi]: u dont have fangs

[From Levi]: I’ve shown you my fangs before. I have a whole mouth full of them. They’re kind of hard to miss.

[To Levi]: yea but vampires only have 2 fangs

[From Levi]: Oh so you’re the expert on vampire dentistry now, are you? Good to know.

[From Levi]: We start out with two. The older we get, the more we grow.

[To Levi]: so how old are u?

[From Levi]: Very.

Gee, thanks Levi, that’s so helpfully accurate.

You see? He lets me grill him “a little”. I’m really not getting much out of him, and what’s worse is that I find myself texting him at odd times of the day. Such as over breakfast, as I’m doing circuits with Mikasa at the gym (yes, much to her annoyance), whilst I’m playing video games with Armin, and oh yea during lectures. Like the one I’m in and ignoring right now.

Sigh. It’s becoming a problem, but I really just don’t care. Perhaps I do have dog-like traits – I see the exciting new toy, and I just wanna play with it some. (Levi being the exciting new toy, in case that wasn’t clear enough to you from the previous few paragraphs.) Swear to god, I have so many questions about vampires and what happened to them (all Levi will say is that “shit happened, and now we’re mainly fictional characters”, which is so informative. Am I using too many brackets? I feel like I’m using too many brackets here). And I mean, considering we’ve got an omega to deal with and the full moon coming up in two days’ time you’d think I would be focusing my attention on anything but the guy who’s aiming to make my life a living hell by his mere existence.

But I’m not, am I?

No. No, instead I am throwing invasive questions at said guy and hoping I get something useful and interesting out of him to show for it. For no valid reason.

I give up and tune back into my current surroundings and realise my lecturer has completely
changed topics and is now exploring the depths of YouTube for an example video. I shoot a glance at the guy next to me and he catches my eye and gives me the same shrug he’s given me every other time I’ve lost track in a lecture. It’s a look that says “yea no me neither mate, I’m not taking notes and I’m probably not going to pass finals this year because of that”. I.e. completely and utterly useless to me, as I am in the exact same boat here.

My phone vibrates against my palm and I unlock it to read:

[From Levi]: So I have a question, mutt. Would you die if I fed you chocolate?

I try not to roll my eyes too hard at his ever-worsening dog jokes, because they’re really not funny. Really. He’s an asshole.

[To Levi]: no but u can still feed me chocolate any time

[From Levi]: On second thoughts, you’re fat enough as is.

[To Levi]: aw levi dont lie. i have a fit body. u wish u looked as good as me

[From Levi]: I wish I was as easily distracted as you. This lecture is killing me.

I actually snort at that.

[To Levi]: thought u were already dead?

And then I snort again at my own lame joke because I am also lame and don’t give a fuck.

It takes him a full two minutes to reply, which in Levi’s Language means he’s probably smacking his head against a table top a couple buildings over.

[From Levi]: I’m not even going to correct you. I’m just going to stop texting you, because talking to you is actually proving to be more painful than art history.

[To Levi]: bet u cant go til the end of the lecture without texting me

His lack of response to that says that he’s taken me up on that like the predictable little douchebag he is. I slide my phone into my pocket, sit back in my chair, and listen to my lecturer try and teach me stuff I should probably care about.

He manages to go twenty two minutes before his persistent need to annoy and correct me kicks in.

[From Levi]: Okay, first off: I’m not dead, dipshit. You don’t have to die to become a vampire. Sometimes it helps, but there are other ways out there. Secondly: you should be paying attention to your professor, because you don’t seem to be the brightest of kids and I think you need all the help you can get with that. Thirdly: you are not as funny as you think you are, Eren Jaeger.

[To Levi]: i dont think i’m funny, i think i’m adorable

[From Levi]: I think you’re asking to get punched tomorrow.

I laugh quietly to myself, because yea I probably am, but I’ve already warned Levi that if he turns up to Armin’s party as a werewolf he will be the one getting physically assaulted. And goddamnit now I’m laughing at him.

I cross my arms on the desk in front of me and lower my head onto them. Leave it there for the
remainder of the lecture and ignore the three texts that come through in the meantime.

Fuck.

“You’re a werewolf?” Armin says, like he can’t quite believe it. “For real?”

“Yea, Armin. This is what a werewolf looks like.” I roll my eyes and then shove his shoulder playfully so he staggers a step backwards. “I’m not wearing my costume yet, Princess. I’m just saying that I will be a werewolf later.”

Armin’s face lights up with a grin. “Do you have those furry fake paw things?” he asks.

“I’ve got something better.” Real fur. Real paws. Well-practiced control.

When we walk into the kitchen and join the others in their early morning (and seriously, we’re all up and it’s not even nine o’clock yet, what gives?) pumpkin carving session, Armin demands to know what everyone will be dressing up as, to which Hannah and Franz says “zombie” and Mikasa says “your mom” with a face that just dares us to ask her again. It frightens me, so I panic and announce I’m a werewolf. Those words. Right there. Words that on any other day of the year I would be sweating (or crying) over uttering out loud. I can’t tell you whether I love or hate Halloween.

(I mean, carving out pumpkins in your pjs and then eating candy for breakfast is a plus, but the fact that people dress up like you because they consider what you are to be a “monster” is kind of a turn off for me ta.)

I take a seat as Hannah passes me a pumpkin and a set of tools and asks, “Are you going to be wearing a mask?” disappointment and disapproval hanging so heavy in the air around her that I can smell it from the other side of the kitchen table, despite the overpowering scent of the pumpkin slush that sits before us. “Because someone with a face like yours really shouldn’t wear a mask.”

“Thanks?”

“Oh you’ll thank me later.”

Right. The table falls silent, Armin puts on a playlist on his phone, and we all go back to the tradition of decorating large, tough-skinned produce.

“Hey, Kasa?” Franz asks from the far end of the table. Mikasa doesn’t look up, but does grace him with a semi-curious noise. “What’s yours supposed to be?”

“It’s a tengu.”

“It’s a what now?” I ask.

“Something Japanese,” Armin murmurs, brows furrowed in concentration as he carves the mouth into his pumpkin. I kick his shin under the table and mouth “no shit” because really. The Japanese girl talking about something Japanese? Shocking.

“It’s a kind of demon. They can make you blind and drive you mad, and they have wings and sharp beaks. I used to really like them.”

“Oh,” is Franz’s response to that. He looks a little put out as he tries to grasp at a decent response.
What he settles for is; “that’s… nice?”

I catch Mikasa’s eye and she winks at me. I smirk. She’s totally fucking with him, and has done every time he’s tried to initiate conversation with her. I find it hilarious. Franz finds it confusing and unnerving. I’m pretty sure Armin finds it morally unjust, but otherwise amusing. He hasn’t told her to stop, at any rate.

Franz tries to include her in conversation three more times this morning, but to no avail. Every time she shuts him down, I start up a different topic and she jumps in immediately. I enjoy seeing the look of betrayal and loss on his face, because I am a horrible person and my wolf disagrees with how much product he puts in his hair (although he hasn’t complained about Armin or Levi’s hair yet, which is interesting). Hannah comforts Franz by patting his shoulder and dragging him into one of those “couples” conversations that kinda make you feel ill or maybe homicidally inclined on a bad day. Thankfully, today is not a bad day for me.

No, today is a good day. The only day of the year that I can let a little of my wolf out without the general populace freaking out or someone trying to have me committed. The thought of it alone is enough to send a thrill right through me, and I smile to myself as I cut into the flesh of the pumpkin before me, eyes nose and mouth coming together to make a classic nightmare monster.

“Alright, mine’s done,” Armin says, putting down his tools and pushing back his chair. He wipes his sticky hands off on his apron (don’t even ask me where he gets these things from) and puts the top on his pumpkin.

“Are we putting these out on the steps?” Hannah asks, evidently also finished. Hers is a rather traditional – and somewhat unadventurous, if I do say so – skeleton face. The mouth does have stitches, however, and I think that has something to do with Mikasa and me showing her The Nightmare Before Christmas last night, but that’s neither here nor there.

“I have those fake candle things,” Armin says, hefting his pumpkin up into his arms and leading Hannah out of the kitchen. His voice carries back to us from the hallway. “But they’re pretty shit so we’re going to have to put like five in each.”

Mikasa sighs. “I’m going to be smelling like pumpkin mush for days.”

“Tell me about it,” I say. It takes me another ten minutes to finish up, which Mikasa helps me through by flicking wet seeds at my head. I end up growling at her in annoyance, and it comes out sounding a lot more wolfish than is probably acceptable, but Mikasa just blinks at me for a second before bursting out laughing.

“Holy crap, Eren. Do that again!” she wheezes. I flick a seed at her as I give her the finger. That makes her laugh all the more.

“Mikasa, please. You’re ruining my concentration,” I huff, trying to sound like the art snob I am so not. The thought of _I wonder how much of a snob Levi is when it comes to art_ crosses my mind, but then I shut it down before I end up diving down that particular rabbit hole. I tell myself that he’s a total ass who’s studying art history, of all things; of course he’s a snob. Right. Question answered.

I end up texting him and asking as soon as my pumpkin is finished, anyway.

[From Levi]: No I’m not, and I’m taking that insult as an open invitation to come piss you off for the rest of the day.

[To Levi]: whoa no way
[To Levi]: stay where u are

[To Levi]: do not come near me blood sucker

There’s a pause as he types out his reply and in that time my phone screen blinks out and I realise I was typing with mushy fingers and now my screen is fucking filthy. Thanks Levi.

[From Levi]: That was a terrible insult. I should teach you how to offend someone properly.

[To Levi]: im sure ur a pro

As sure as the sky is blue, Levi, you are an asshole among mere mortals.

[From Levi]: Damn right. First lesson starts in half an hour.

No no no no no no

“Hey Eren?” I hear Armin shout from the hallway. “Levi says you said he could come watch shitty horror movies with us.”

“I didn’t say that,” I shout back. “He’s just being an asshole.”

There’s a moment of silence before Armin says, “Oh…Um…” and I heave a sigh because well fuck. “I said it was cool.”

“Cheers, Princess,” I grumble.

Armin appears in the doorway looking sheepish. “But on the plus side, horror movies?” he tries. I huff and turn my head to the side to hide a smile. His face lights up when he catches sight of it.

“Horror movies? Big yes,” Mikasa says. “Tell your bitch to buy us all popcorn and we’ll maybe let him in.”

“This is why I love you,” I tell her. She has a wonderfully demanding mind.

And so, this is how I find myself wedged in between my two best friends and my vampiric frenemy on Armin’s bed, jumping and cursing and laughing at a selection of the worst horror films of all time.

“I’m gonna make some more popcorn. Kasa, you can come help me because you ate practically half the bowl last time,” Armin says as the credits roll. Mikasa groans and slides off the bed and onto the floor.

“You’ll have to carry me,” she mumbles into the carpet, waving an arm above her head. Armin sighs as Levi and I laugh, and grabs her hand and drags her halfway across the room before he gives up and just leaves without her. She lifts her head as she hears him walk away and has to part her hair to see. “What, you aren’t going to carry me?”

“Kasa, get back up here,” I sigh. Levi’s still snickering next to me. I’m glad he’s enjoying himself, at least. (Note: sarcasm.) Mikasa picks herself up, bows her head slightly to Levi who gives her a polite round of applause, and then flops down onto the mattress beside me, legs thrown over mine, limbs outstretched, taking up as much space as she can so Armin will have nowhere to sit when he comes back in. She kicks Levi’s thigh with her foot.
“Hey, did you see our pumpkins outside?” she asks.

“Hey, I did,” he answers.

“Who’s was the best?”

“I liked the vampire,” he says, eyes sliding to meet mine, a smirk-in-the-making tugging up a corner of his lips. Damnit.

“Aw, Eren,” Mikasa coos. “He likes yours the best.”

I shoot her my death glare and she laughs before heaving herself into an upright position.

“Alright bitches, I’m going to go make sure Armin doesn’t burn stuff. Pick a film and put it on. Levi,” here she points a finger at him, “make sure Eren doesn’t go for anything Stephen King. I hate Stephen King.”

“We’re totally watching The Shining next,” I say, reaching for the laptop.

“Mikasa’s totally going to kick your ass,” he snorts. I stick my tongue out at him, and then realise that’s really immature and turn back to flicking through putlocker because I don’t want to have to deal with the sight of his superior smug smirk.

“So,” he says in an overly-casual tone of voice. I know what he’s going to say and I kind of hate him for it, although I hate myself even more for carving the dumb thing that way in the first place. “That’s a pretty accurate vampire you carved. I wonder who your inspiration for that one could be?”

I reach out and shove his shoulder before I can think better of it, and he shoves me back twice as hard in retaliation.

“Don’t be a dick,” I say. “It’s a work of art and you know it.”

That gets a surprised laugh out of him, and he leans forward and snatches the laptop from me.

“Mikasa said no Stephen King,” he reminds me, and then smacks the back of my hand when I try to take back control.

“Since when do you actually listen to what people say?” I grouse. He rolls his eyes at me.

“I listen to you all the time, mutt. I just don’t actually care about half the stuff that comes out of your mouth. There’s a difference.”

I growl at him and he grins, big and feral, and I can smell how pleased he is with himself.

“You’re an asshole,” I grumble, trying not to laugh or smile or give any indication that I actually found his words funny.

“And you’re the one who let me in the front door,” he returns. “Fucking moron.”

“I did not let you in. You invited yourself, and then made Armin let you in.”

Levi shrugs. “Same thing. My point is, don’t complain to me for being me. I know it’s a lot to ask.” He’s leaning towards me, eyes glimmering with a mischief that I do not want to invoke. I glare. And then it occurs to me; something I have been pondering for some time, but have always managed to forget to actually ask him.
“So how did you get in here the first time? Cos I didn’t invite you.”

He rolls his eyes. “Sorry to disappoint, but I don’t need a verbal invitation to walk through a door. Who the fuck even came up with the idea that vampires have to ask to enter someone’s home? How pathetic is that? No. I could break into any building if and when the need arose.”

“Do you think the need will ever arise?” I ask, purely for the sake of saying the word “arise”.

“It has arisen before,” he says, looking at me out the corner of his eye in a way that says he’s done some shit he’s pretty sure would scar me for life if he felt like sharing. I don’t push the subject.

“What other myths are bullshit?” I ask instead.

The answer is instantaneous. “Garlic.”

“Garlic?”

“I love the stuff. Can’t get enough.”

Honest to god, I can’t tell if he’s fucking with me or not. I go to answer, but Mikasa and Armin reappear with food and a large case of beer that I must admit my whole face lights up at the sight of, despite it only being midday (so sue me, I’m a student).

“So what film did you gays choose?” Mikasa asks, slumping down next to me and leaning over to look at the laptop screen. “Dracula?”

I shoot Levi a look that he returns innocently, because I hadn’t been paying attention to what he was choosing in the slightest.

“I figured we could do monster movies. You should get Connie and Sasha to join us,” he says, directing the last bit at me. “We can watch Van Helsing and talk about how cute the werewolf is in that.”

“Or you could go fuck yourself,” I say, at the exact same time Mikasa and Armin exclaim (yea they exclaim) that that would be a great idea!

Levi raises his eyebrow at me.

I refuse to break eye contact as I pull out my phone.

Connie and Sasha think it is a great idea too.

The three of us get ready together that evening, after a whole day of movies and beer and - in the true spirit of Halloween – candy, which Levi behaves himself for, thank the lords above. And by three of us, I mean me, Connie and Sasha. And by get ready together, I mean we let our eyes shine gold and our teeth sharpen and our claws slide out. We rip up some old clothes and throw them on and bam, three werewolves good to go and looking so damn slick oh man.

We listen to people begin to arrive and crowd the kitchen, the hallway, and spill onto the steps leading outside. Franz’s linked up his speakers in the kitchen as usual and my floor is vibrating under our soles with the beat of music intended to be danced to mindlessly. It’s loud and consuming and the kind of noise that will fade into the background once you get a couple drinks in you. The three of us – buzzed on a steady intake of alcohol already – can’t be fucked just yet to leave my
room, but we’re psyching ourselves up for it. Sasha is pretty much vibrating on the spot she’s so excited and nervous.

“You’ll be fine,” I tell her.

“But the full moon is tomorrow,” she says, clutching my forearm. “What if I lose control?”

“You won’t,” I try to soothe her. I cup the side of her throat with my hand and she leans into the touch. “I have faith in you.”

“That’s cheesy and dumb,” Connie says, trying to sound laid back and calm as ever, but I can see the nervous tension shivering through him as he looks between me and Sasha.

“I have faith in you too,” I tell him, all mock sincerity, and he snorts. “Seriously, guys, it’ll be fine. If you think your control’s slipping a bit, just come back in here. Door’s open.” It’s a reassurance I know they need to hear, like telling someone it’s not their fault if shit goes bad.

“Okay,” they say in unison. The tension drains out of Connie and Sasha bounces a little on the balls of her feet, golden eyes wide, canines digging into her bottom lip as she tries to contain her excitement. And yea okay, let’s not make her wait any longer or she might rip my door off its hinges in her impatience.

“Alright, let’s go,” I say, and we leave the sanctuary of my room and enter into the costumed madness of the world beyond.

And oh boy is it madness.

Half an hour.

That’s how long it takes for shit to go bad.

*Half. An. Hour.*

I mean, I don’t exactly expect a lot from my life, considering just how fucked beyond hilarity it is at this point, but *come on.*

One minute I’m pushing my way through the crowded corridor and into the kitchen to find where Armin has got to, peering under masks and ignoring the smell of plastic and fake blood, Sasha in one hand, Connie leading the way; and the next thing I know Sasha’s gripping my hand so hard her claws are threatening to burst the skin. She smells *terrified.*

“Eren,” she says, voice shaken, and I’m turning to face her with a question on the tip of my tongue, only to realise she’s not looking at me. The question dies before it’s been voiced, because I know the answer as soon as I follow her line of sight.

A pair of golden eyes gleam back at us from the other end of the corridor, the air between us crackling with a wave of unmistakable energy. I freeze, wolf snapping himself into my bones, ready to run and fight and defend. Connie stands at my back, body pressed as close to mine as he can without touching me. Sasha takes a step back and I wrap my arm around her, put her behind me, put myself between my betas and that pair of golden eyes.

I can *feel* him; a supernatural presence that screams anger and fear, outnumbered and alone.
Pressure builds in my ribcage as my wolf begins to take hold, and I don’t warn him off. No, I urge him on. I let him into my lungs and my legs and the full moon is so close that I know I won’t be regaining control if I let him out tonight, but letting the wolf take over is the only thing I want to do. Gone is the fear of before; now I control the situation. This boy is on my territory without my permission, and we all know that that’s an open challenge I’m going to take him up on.

I grin, eyes never leaving those of my prey.

I know how this night’s gonna end.

“Find Levi,” I say through a growl, and Connie hesitates for a split second before he’s tugging Sasha away from me, pushing his way through the throng of innocent, unsuspecting people in search of the one other being I know is strong enough to hold his own against an out of control beast. I send them away so they won’t come to harm if this gets messy, so that I can hopefully get the omega out of here without anyone else getting in the way.

I blink, and it is within that beat of a second that the omega turns and runs.

Big mistake.

I give in to my instincts and follow.

I catch him on the steps just outside and there are people out here smoking and laughing and none of them have any clue as to what is about to happen as I reach out with clawed hands and grab a hold of the omega, spin him and slam him up against the wall. We’re halfway down the stairs and I press in close to him, keep his arms pinned to his sides as he squirms.

“Get the fuck off me,” he growls, voice deep and gruff and I squeeze the meat of his forearms to let him know that I have no intention of taking orders from him. My wolf laps up the little spike of pain and fear in his scent, and I feel my face split into a feral grin.

“I said get off me,” he tries again.

“So you did,” comes Levi’s voice. I can see him out the corner of my eye, walking down the steps to my left, calm and unconcerned, expression bored and chin held high. I know this mask well enough by now that I can see under it to the glee of the monster at his core. He’s loving this, the sick fuck. It should scare me that I’m loving this moment of power, too. It doesn’t. Guess that makes me a sick fuck as well, huh? Oops.

“Who the fuck are you?” the omega demands. I pull him back from the wall a bit, only to slam him into it again. I hear his pointed teeth clack together, and I know from personal experience that he’s just bitten through his tongue. Sure enough, I catch the scent of blood permeating the air, and my wolf surges forward to claim control of me.

Not yet.

“We might ask you the same question.” Levi’s talking for the both of us, and to be honest, I’m totally fine with that. Usually I wouldn’t let anyone in on something like this, but Levi isn’t a werewolf, so he can’t truly challenge my authority here, and besides I’m not feeling hot enough to talk sense right now. I’m afraid that if I open my mouth the only thing that will come out is a howl. Not so good when there’s people standing about and giving us some choice glances.

Levi slowly descends the last few steps until he’s on my other side, looking up at us, blocking the
omega’s exit so perfectly and coldly that the grin slips back onto my features, and I see a similar smirk grace Levi’s pale lips. The omega squirms, but this time in uncertainty.

“Look, I don’t know who the fuck you think you are—” he starts, but Levi and I both cut him off with a snarl. I don’t have to look to know that Levi’s fangs have come out to play. I hear Connie and Sasha race down the steps to join us, and I wonder what took them so long. The omega’s head snaps up at their approach, golden, wild eyes zeroing on them with a focus I don’t much like the look of.

“Hey,” I snarl, bringing his attention back to me with another squeeze of his arms. He glares at me, kicks out. I let him go and step back, crouching low, ready for the fight this idiot’s just signed himself up to.

“You freaks are gonna regret getting in my way,” the guy says. Levi snorts.

“You’re one of us freaks, too,” he says, and then, “and you’re going to regret pissing this Alpha off.”

The omega’s fists clench, bones sliding under skin so close to shifting, and I can tell by the way his stance alters ever so slightly that it isn’t me who’s going to be taking the first punch.

He launches himself at Levi, and I don’t even have time to react he’s that fast.

Levi, however, spins with the omega’s momentum, letting the taller boy fall past him, clawed hands slicing harmlessly through the air as he tumbles down the last of the steps and to the ground below. He jumps to his feet immediately, turns and growls up at us. I can see the bones shifting underneath his skin and that omega mentality must be kicking in because this guy is dangerously close to shifting right here right now.

I know I can’t let that happen.

“He’s all yours, paws,” Levi says to me, eyes still fixed greedily on the twisted, crouching body before us. If I could, I would hurl some of my patented sarcasm at him, but as it stands I can’t do much of anything but jump the last of the stairs and land in front of the twitching omega, ready for the fight I was expecting a week ago.

“You don’t wanna do this,” the omega says, and the words come out mangled and half-animal, but I get the gist from the rage and bloodlust in his eyes.

I answer by letting out a rippling growl, something akin to a laugh or a taunt that could make your skin crawl if ever you heard it. “Bring it,” I say, in true cliché’d fashion.

The omega brings it.

We clash, claws punching into flesh, dragging, cutting, hacking as we slice at each other. Teeth bare and jaws open as we move in close. He goes for my throat and I have the presence of mind to duck, come up under his swinging arm and wrap my own around his waist, push my shoulder into the soft flesh of his stomach and ram him backwards, lift him and tip him as he yowls and slashes at my back, and then he’s hitting the floor, stomach up and facing me. And oh boy, he does not like that.

He writhes and bucks and shoves me back, claws raking down my face, splitting the skin in hot, ragged lines of searing pain. Blood drips down and seeps into my mouth as I open it and lunge forward, clamp it down on the exposed skin at the base of his throat, aiming to force him to submit.
He roars instead, and his bones creak as he lets go of his humanity.

It’s deafening and stifling, dragging my own wolf to the surface like a magnet clamped to my chest, not letting me breathe with my own lungs because they’re not mine anymore – they belong to the monster that thrums in my skin. But amidst the haze of animal rage, and the writhing of my wolf and the pounding of my heart, I know that we are too close to people for this to be happening. If he shifts here, I will have to shift as well to bring him down, to make him submit to me the only way possible. If he shifts here, who knows what might happen, who might see, who might get hurt.

*Enough,* I tell my wolf, beg him to stay in his cage just a little longer, just until we’re safe to let him out. He obeys the command even as the taste of blood in my mouth makes him hungry for more control, and it is enough for me to be able to loosen my jaw and let go. Let go of the omega, who turns, squirms free from beneath me, scrambles to his sneakered feet, and runs.

“What are you doing?!” Levi yells as he stalks over to where I’m kneeling, anger lashing out at me despite the distance between us, and I don’t know if it’s because I’m so close to shifting that my senses are more my wolf’s right now, or just because of the extenuating circumstances, but that is the most emotion I have ever been able to sense from him.

“Why did you let him go?” he demands, and my wolf kicks off again in anger. I glare up at the guy and I’m *shaking,* trying to get a grip on my body and mind and claim back control of my limbs enough to be able to stand and face him properly.

When I can, I take several deep breaths and answer; “because I can’t have him shift on campus.”

“But now he’s gone and you don’t know where to.”

“Scent,” I say, shaking my head. “We’ll follow. You stay here.”

“Like shit am I staying here after you just let the bastard get away,” he growls, and it’s not as impressive as a werewolf growl, but it’s still impressive enough that I should read the threat between his words. He whistles over his shoulder at Connie and Sasha, and I feel a flare of protective anger at that, but I push it down in favour of pulling my wolf back further, grappling with a control I haven’t had to test so much since I met Levi. (And yea, I get the irony of the situation, thanks.) “Hey, pups, we’re going on a hunt.”

I’m starting to feel more like myself, the overwhelming need to defend and fight dying down the further away the omega gets, the more my wolf grudgingly accepts that Levi’s here to help, and I say; “If you can keep up, of course.”

Levi smirks at me, pupils changing as he lets a little more of his nature out to play, and I envy his superior control so much right now Jesus *fuck.*

“Kid, I could outrun you any day,” he says, and I decide to put that to the test without haste, letting my senses take over as I latch onto the omega’s scent and run after him, my Pack and our unfriendly campus vampire in tow.

We track him across campus, swift and eager and being as quiet as we can be despite not having any need for stealth tonight. Our quarry knows we’re following. He knows he’s only got so much time until we catch up. And I know we *will* catch up before long.

“He’s going to Parkwood,” Connie says from my right as we cross the road that cuts through campus, heading into the northern half.
“His own territory,” I say, agreeing without actually agreeing. “Safe ground.”

“Push him into the woods,” Levi suggests, voice smooth and without a hint of exertion. So I guess he did mean it when he said he had no trouble keeping up with us. Interesting. “He’s unstable. He’ll shift. We can corner him in there and keep him from attacking anyone.”

“Full moon’s tomorrow,” Connie reminds us, just as I’m flashing Levi a look that say plan accepted. “Omega won’t change back until after then.”

“Then neither will I,” I say, as much as the prospect of spending two nights and all the very many hours in between in the form of a huge wolf displeases me. My wolf, of course, grumbles to me that he is more than capable of handling the situation, and I know that Connie and Sasha won’t leave me there with an unknown variable also in huge wolf form for any amount of time.

*I’ll be fine.*

We don’t have to herd him into the woods in the end; it’s where he ends up, either seeking refuge under the trees there or simply planning to keep on running past the boundaries of the university campus and onwards into the forest beyond, I don’t know and I don’t care. I tell Sasha and Connie to stay close to the divide where the Parkwood student village stops and the nature of northern Minnesota begins, and they stay, albeit reluctantly. I keep Levi with me, not even sparing him a glance as we continue to close the distance between us and the omega.

“Don’t interfere,” I warn him as I leap over a pair of discarded shoes and a t-shirt balled up and tossed to the floor. “If you value your limbs, don’t get involved after I shift.”

“Is this a Strictly Werewolf thing?” he asks, making it a joke, and why does everything have to be a joke with him? I grunt an agreement and he doesn’t speak another word on the matter other than “Okay,” so maybe it wasn’t such a joke after all. Maybe he just doesn’t know how werewolves handle their shit. Well, Levi, you’re about to find out first hand.

A howl rips the air open up ahead, and my wolf bucks and writhes inside me so violently that my knees hit the earth and my fists close tight around my claws until my palms split and spill stinging, hot blood down my forearms. I don’t realise I’m growling until I hear Levi speaking to me through it.

He says, “Hey mutt, snap out of it. Get off the fucking floor and go get that bastard before I tear him apart. You know I will.”

It’s enough to make me throw a more refined growl of annoyance at him, and he takes the hint to back off as I push myself unsteadily to my feet again.

“He’s shifted,” I say; rather, choke. My throat is tightening, muscles clenching as my bones start to move. Fuck. I’m about to shift, too. I toe my shoes off and toss them to Levi who catches them with a frown on his face, and then I start running again. Faster this time. Pre-shift adrenaline courses through me and I let it spur me on. I hear Levi panting behind me, struggling to keep up. We must’ve passed from the woods and into the forest by now because it’s pitch black with how thick the foliage is. I wonder if Levi has night vision like we do, and I focus on that and not the pull and strain and tear of my tendons as I refuse to give into the shift properly.

I pull my shirt over my head and leave it for dead – it’s wrecked anyway, why should I care?

And why should I care about anything but the hunt and the kill. I’m a predator. I could let my wolf free right now and let him chase down our prey and sink in our teeth until our jaw aches and bones...
grind – ours or his, it doesn’t matter. I could let go and give into the basest of urges to tear apart
the weaker animal. I could…

No.

I stay in control tonight. It’s not the full moon just yet. I can stay in control and make sure this
omega doesn’t hurt anyone. I can make him see me as Alpha, like my uncle did to me. I can make
him submit, become one of my betas, part of my Pack. If I can stay in control, I can give him some
control over his own wolf.

I stop abruptly, Levi skidding through the dirt and the leaves as he tries to do the same, and tug my
torn jeans and underwear down in one swift move.

“Whoa, what are you—” Levi starts to protest, and I flick him an irritated look that says seriously?
Do you need more time to figure out what’s going on here? and then I let the wolf out and the pain
of holding back the shift floods out of me, replaced by a relief so strong that it almost brings me to
my knees again.

I hear Levi murmur an “Oh,” off to my right, but then I’m closing my eyes and blocking out
everything but the natural ecstasy that comes with shifting outside of a full moon, when the urge
isn’t a forced, driven need, but a choice made to feel free. I realise, as my back shudders and
ripples and bows out, that I do not do this voluntarily enough. And maybe I should.

Levi steps back as my fur pushes through my skin, and I can scent his apprehension, his anger and
unease, and underneath it all a twist of fearful wonder. My wolf preens at that, at how powerful it
makes us feel knowing that we have that kind of control of a vampire’s emotions, and as we shake
out our fur, feeling the shift complete and settle, our mouth opens wide in a wolfish grin that’s
aimed right at him.

He steps back further.

I remember our first proper encounter, and how angry he had been at me. How much he had hated
what I was. My wolf moves us forward a step, closer to the man with the dark hair and the grey
eyes, and I know he is trying to classify whether or not Levi is a threat to us right now. All the
information I have supplied him with up until this point would state that he is strong enough to be a
very real threat. I snap at my wolf that he is not the problem right now; that his is not the challenge
I let him out to answer.

He growls and turns away from the man at my asking, and then he slips into my mind and I retreat
just enough that his senses become mine and I let him run, let him hunt, let him take us to where
we need to be.

We find the omega waiting for us in the shelter of an old river bed. Its teeth are bared, ears pressed
back, golden eyes trained on us in the dark of the forest as we jump down into the damp earth and
prowl closer to it. We smell its anger, its fear. It stands its ground, unflinching as it snarls low and
long, fur on its back standing on end in warning. My wolf urges us to attack, to dig our paws into
the mud and leap at it. But I’m cautious to. I know that a cornered animal is a dangerous one.

We take another step forward, and the omega’s snarl kicks up a notch, tail twitching from side to
side. We can see the ripple of muscles in its shoulders as it hunches down, defensive like hell, and
we stop moving for a time, just stand there are watch and wait. If it runs now, there’s nothing I
cannot do to stop my wolf from taking the challenge for what it is, and treating this omega as any
other wild beast. If it fights, however, I hope it’s over quick enough that my wolf doesn’t rip my
control away from me and finish things in a way I do not want.
The omega comes straight at us, after another few seconds of deliberation, and we rise up on our hind legs and meet it in the middle, teeth tearing at its shoulder, front paws finding purchase on its soft belly, claws digging in to hold it as we wrench our head to the side. We throw our weight into the action, and the flesh beneath our teeth gives, dragging a yelp from the omega in our grasp.

We wrestle it to the ground, shaking and thrashing and bucking up against us. But we are bigger, and we are stronger, and we are not afraid of this pup. We are Alpha, and we will have it submit to us, like it should. A growl rumbles up from our chest, muffled by the wet fur in our mouth. It is a growl of warning, telling the omega to lie still, to bare its stomach and throat to us, to show us it knows we are in charge. All the omega does, however, is struggle harder. Paws bat our face, our legs, scrabbling and desperate and angry and scared. Blood surges up into my mouth as the omega twists again, skin tearing as my teeth hold him still, and now we are starting to panic.

A fight against another wolf would be over by now. They would see our strength, our confidence and pride and power and they would submit without such a fight. We would not have blood in our mouth if that were the case. But this wolf is unstable, and alone, and utterly an animal beneath us. There is no human mind behind those eyes; only the animal, too strong for its own good.

We know it will not submit willingly. We start to feel fear of what we might have to do if the human half of the omega does not regain some control.

Blood and pain and a whining, writhing, hot body of matted fur and the stench of fear and the flickering gold of dying eyes as the coldness creeps in and the fur fades away to pale human skin stained with dark red—

I pull my wolf back and try to think. I try to remember what my uncle did that day to save me from a similar fate. I try to recall how he pushed through the barrier I had created in my own mind to shut the monster out even as it walked with my legs and howled with my voice.

Wait.

Howled.

That’s it. That’s how he got through to me.

He howled. He roared. He used the oldest Alpha trick in the book to push the wolf back, and it worked.

It worked.

I let go of my stolen control, and as the omega finally gets a grip with its back paws, pushing the jagged tips of its thick, dark claws into my belly, I let my wolf snap back into me. We open our jaw wide, lift our head up, air heavy with the stench of blood and pain filling our lungs as we drag in a breath as deep as it can go.

And then we howl. We howl with as only an Alpha can; with absolute power and absolute authority. The omega falls silent as the sound drowns him out, echoing through the trees around us for miles as I pour every ounce of submit to me submit to me I am Alpha into this one guttural noise as I can. And when we have no more breath left in our lungs to roar with, we bare our teeth and growl down at the omega lying in the mud as it whimpers and closes its eyes and turns its head to the side and it submits.

We bend down, move to nose at the wound on its throat, the blood we drew as it struggled. We flick out our tongue; lick the blood from the fur as the omega whines in its ruined throat and
wriggles closer, and we know it will not fight back again. We nose down to its stomach and nip the flesh as a warning nonetheless, and then we step back, move off the omega and let it stand. It takes a second to realise that this is what we expect from it, and we wait patiently for it to roll upright. My wolf calms, soothed by the sense of satisfaction that is flowing through us, and he allows me slowly to take back control of our limbs, our lungs, our mind. I thank him – I kinda have to – as he retreats, trusting me to keep this situation in hand.

The omega stares at me, and for a while we just watch one another, neither of us making any move to leave. I wonder just how much of that uncertainty and guilt in those eyes is human, and how much isn’t.

I like to think that the balance between man and monster has tipped back in our favour, but I suppose we won’t really know until after tomorrow night. If we both make it through tomorrow night without incident, then we’re in the clear and I’ve achieve what my uncle did once before.

If we both make it through tomorrow night, this omega won’t be an omega any longer.

Of course, that’s what I thought.

However, when tomorrow night comes and goes and my betas join us in the forest, the four of us running far from the campus and from the town without any real plan on how to get back (because what are rational thoughts when you’re a giant quadruped supernatural beast?); when we wake up totally naked and so far from home, we have to deal with the very real and slightly more pressing problem that this guy we essentially just abducted into our little Pack…well, he isn’t too fond of the idea that he may or may not belong to our little Pack.

“Dude. What do you mean, you don’t want to be one of us? You are one of us!” Connie is finding this whole thing ridiculous and hard to understand. Which is completely understandable.

“I am not one of you,” the guy hisses, angry beyond belief.

“But you are a werewolf,” and yea, he spits the word, “it doesn’t mean I want any part of your Pack.”

“Why not?” Sasha asks, stepping forward so she’s beside Connie as they argue with the newcomer. I’m content to stand off to the side and let them bitch it out, not gonna lie. I’m tired and my head is throbbing and I have no idea where the fuck we are or how we’re getting back, and I blanked most of what happened last night due to the extended period of time I spent in wolf form, but we all ended up un-mauled and wrapped around each other, so I guess things went sort of okay at least? Right?

Ugh, who the fuck even cares any more.

Oh, yea, right. Me.

Fuck. (I hate having morals.)

“—does Eren think.” I catch the last part of Sasha’s sentence, but only because it has my name in
“I think I want something to eat. I think we’re totally lost and we’re all exhausted and hungry. I think it’s too fucking early in the morning to be discussing whether or not someone we don’t actually know wants to run with us on full moons or not. I think we should just head back and find our clothes – wherever the fuck they are – and then talk this through after food. Sound good?”

“Sounds fine to me,” the omega says. And yea, I should probably figure out his name.

“Great,” I say, and then I step up and offer him my hand. “I’m Eren. Jaeger. Sorry about your neck.”

“Jean,” he answers hesitantly, shaking my proffered hand like a good guy. “Jean Kirschtein. And I’m sorry about your face.”

I laugh and shrug at the same time and somehow manage to pull the gesture off. I flick a nod at my betas, arms crossed over their chests as they sulk because I’m not arguing for this guy to stay like they wanted me to.

“Those two morons are Connie and Sasha. Their bark is a lot worse than their bite, trust me.” Indignant huffs from the both of them. “I guess they want you to stick around, and I know I sure would feel safer if you did, but if you really don’t want to I won’t stop you from lone wolfing it again.”

There is a chorus of “What?” from all three, albeit at entirely different levels of disbelief. I shrug again and turn, start walking back through the woods the way I can smell we came.

“Your choice. Can’t force you.”

“But Eren—” Sasha begins, but I cut her off because I know what she’s going to say and I’m really not ignoring the issue here, I’m not, okay?

“But man, you weren’t in control. You’re a wolf without a Pack and you’re a danger like that. I don’t wanna be “that guy” or anything, but when you’re on your own and out of control of your wolf like that you’re a lot more likely to wind up in serious trouble. And trouble for you means trouble for all of us.

“You don’t want a Pack, you don’t have to have one. But can you guarantee me that on a full moon you won’t be out in these woods as a mindless animal hunting down whatever wanders into your path?”

There’s silence from the guy – Jean – and I shoot a glance at him, see he’s staring straight ahead with eyes that don’t seem to be seeing what’s really in front of him.

“I started out an omega,” I say. “I know what it feels like to be running from something, from someone. I know what it feels like to not be in control of what’s a part of you, of what’s—”

“You don’t know anything,” Jean hisses, rounding on me fast. Connie and Sasha take threatening steps forward, growls rising in their throats as they curl their hands into fists. I lift a hand at my side ever so slightly, let them know it’s nothing to worry about, it’s okay I’ve got it under control. They cut out the growling but they don’t relax or step back. Fair enough, I’ll take what I can.

“I came here to get away from all of this,” Jean continues. “I don’t want a Pack. I don’t need a Pack. When I shift on a full moon, I go out to the mountains so no one can get hurt in case I lose
control—"

“You lost control the other night,” Connie points out, and Jean glares at him.

“I panicked,” he grits out. Then he looks back at me, obviously realising that he’s pretty much just turned his back on an Alpha. A very tired, very naked Alpha, but an Alpha nonetheless thank you very much. “I didn’t know that was your territory. I saw you guys there and I panicked. That close to the full moon…”

He trails off and we start walking again, looping through the trees in the meandering path our wolves took the night before. We are all so used to taking these walks by now that no one complains when we double back on ourselves, the route taking so much longer for all the circles and the scattered trails.

“I wouldn’t hurt anyone,” Jean says, sounding angry and defiant, but his quieter tone and his dancing emotions tell us what he’s really thinking. He wouldn’t hurt anyone, but his wolf might. I side eye him, try to figure out whether or not it’s worth keeping this conversation going here or if it would lead to another shouting match. Choices, choices.

“We’ll talk more after breakfast. You can get to know us a little better, at least.”

No one argues with me. No one says anything, in fact, for a good couple kilometres. It’s Sasha that breaks the early morning silence, and she does so in a way that has all of us freezing on the spot.

“Do you guys smell that?”

“Smell what?” Jean asks, and yea he might be the demanding type as well as the quick-to-argue type. We’ll see.

“That…It smells like….” Sasha squints between the thick trunks around us, swivelling in a circle before starting off to the left.

“So what?” I say, moving fast to follow her. “Sasha, what is it?”

“Just let her do her thing, man,” Connie says to my right, and he sounds like this is something she does all the time (and it’s true Sasha is always following her nose) but I know from the look in his eye as he watched Sasha’s pale back weave through the undergrowth ahead of us that this is not something that happens all too often.

I almost run right into her when Sasha stops short.


And what I see lying before us on the forest floor, propped up against the broken stump of a large fir, I shall never forget the sight of.

The body is mangled, ripped right open down the centre and scooped out clean, the legs torn off and gone. Bones lie scattered around in the blood soaked dirt, too many to belong to just one animal. On closer inspection, there’s another carcass thrown in with the mix of deer, but it’s too far beyond recognition that I have to stop looking too hard before I make myself sick.

Sasha whines, Connie pulling her into his arms so she can hide her face against the side of his neck and turn her back to the gore spread out before us.

“This is fresh,” Connie says. He looks at me over the top of Sasha’s head, and I meet his eye.
We’re both thinking the same thing. *This happened last night.*

The stench of it is so strong, so *putrid*, that I can’t breathe properly. It’s like it’s sapping the moisture straight out of my chest, my lungs drying up as I try to take shallow breathes and not put too much stress on my wolf.

Sasha mumbles against Connie’s bare chest, and Connie asks her to repeat it so we all can hear, because we’re all struggling to focus on anything but the mass of broken and bloodied fresh kill before us.

“I said, it smells like werewolf too,” she says. She looks at me, fear and confusion in her eyes. “But it wasn’t any of us.”

I turn to Jean, the words “you weren’t the omega tearing animals to shreds in Cedar Park?” already tumbling from my mouth in something close to an accusation, and he stares back at me, eyes wide and classically handsome face looking mighty pale. He shakes his head, swallowing tightly.

“No, man. I’ve been going all the way out to the base of the mountains to shift. I stay away from the parks and the city,” he says, voice shaking a little. “And I don’t kill like this. I’ve never killed like this.”

There’s silence as I take that in. I can smell the fear and uncertainty – the *panic* – begin to cloud around my betas as they wait for me to say something. To make sense of this. To tell them what to do, how they should be thinking. But I’ve got nothing for them, nothing to make this all okay. All I’ve got is one question:

“If you’re not the omega who’s been ripping up animals,” I say slowly. “Then who the fuck is?”
I don’t recall much of the run back to Parkwood. At some point along the way, we stop beside a large jagged hunk of rock and my betas tug out packs with clothing and wipes and water in them. They even thought to bring clothes for Jean, too – mine, though I don’t have the heart to complain about that – and he accepts them without argument.

We don’t talk. Not a word. We just run in silence and keep our thoughts to ourselves, and if I’m honest I’m a little concerned that Jean just seems to be taking this all in stride, but then again I know my personal werewolf history isn’t exactly innocent and bloodless, so maybe he’s seen shit like this before.

On the edge of campus we stop, breathe for a bit. I know we have to talk about what the hell it is we just saw. I know we have to catch Levi up (and oh fuck he is not going to like the news that the omega we thought was the omega was not in fact the omega at all). I know we have to discuss the whole “Jean” thing with Jean. I just don’t know which topic to tackle first.

“Alright,” I say, instead of actually making my mind up. “Let’s get back to mine and we can talk some things through.”

“Not me,” Jean says immediately and yep there are the twin scowls from my betas, disapproving of his obvious lack of concern for all things Pack. “I’m going home.”

And what do I even say to that? It’s not like I can stop him.

Connie beats me to the punch. “You can’t just leave, man,” he says. “We’ve still got to talk about stuff.”

“What stuff?” Jean growls.

“Like you joining our Pack,” Sasha says, and yea that’s probably the last thing this guy wanted to hear right now, judging from his expression.

“Like what the hell that was back there,” Connie adds.

“Yea, because if you aren’t the omega then there’s another one out there and they’re…” Sasha trails off, looking a little pale, and I know she’s thinking over what we saw in the forest. The blood. The bodies. The bones.

Right. Time to get them somewhere safe and familiar.
“Well you know where my dorms are if you change your mind about that,” I say to Jean, and I can smell the relief wash over him as he realises I’m letting him off the hook, if all but temporarily. I know I need to have a nice little chat with him about control and his lack thereof, but right now my betas are my priority. Sasha most of all. Her eyes haven’t stopped glowing gold since she caught that scent. So I take her hand and lead her back onto campus and Jean parts ways with us in Parkwood with my cell number and a scowl etched onto his face.

I don’t say anything more about him, even though the others question me, try to get a rise out of me. I just keep my mouth shut, don’t say anything more than “he’ll be back” because I know his wolf won’t let him stay away for long now (I know first-hand that’s how this’ll play out) and eventually they get the picture that I don’t particularly want them doubting my judgment.

My wolf quiets down a little once we get back to mine, stops that anxious growling that’s making me jumpy and nervous. Sasha’s wolf seems to settle some as well, and Connie looks decidedly less freaked out as soon as we step through the door and I push him towards my en suite and tell him to take a goddamn shower he looks like he’s been dragged ass-up through the mud.

I put three pies in the oven and try to ignore the fact that it’s not even eight in the morning yet.

“Pie?” Sasha questions dubiously. I shrug.

“We need something to eat. I’m not fussy but I’m not cooking you breakfast either.” I turn to look at her hovering in the kitchen doorway. She’s looks about as shitty as I feel, and I’ve been stuck in wolf form for the past two days, wrestling with an out of control omega. I open my arms for a hug and she comes to me without any hesitation and I can feel her stress ease out of her as she leans against me and lets herself go limp. I take her weight and rub between her shoulder blades as she sighs out a shaky breath.

“Exhausted?” I guess. She nods mutely. “Me too.”

We stand like that until the pies are done, and then we dig through drawers for acceptably clean cutlery and take them back to Connie who’s now wearing my hoodie and face down on my mattress. Sash practically inhales her food right off the plate, not caring how hot it is, and then I send her for a shower and nudge Connie over closer to the wall so I can lie down too.

And god I did not know how sore I was all over until I didn’t have to support my own weight anymore. I groan, long and loud and hear Connie snort beside me, muffled by the duvet. He turns his head and blinks bleary eyes.

“Dude what did that guy do to you?” he asks, and I know he’s talking about Jean. I answer around a mouthful of meat and pastry and offer him the single knife we found.

“Threw me around. Fought back.” I swallow and sit up some to look at him a bit better. “I had to force him to submit,” I admit. “And I hated it.”

“He was out of control, man,” Connie says, and I nod because I know he’s right. I look down in shame all the same, because suddenly I’m not pie I’m tasting Jean’s blood. This time I can’t swallow.

I know I was right, that I had to get him to submit. I know from personal experience, okay? Being an omega without a Pack and without any control like that—it’s the shittiest thing there is. Worse than being turned against your will and having to just deal with it. When I turned for the first time – when I shifted and let the wolf out – I completely lost myself, and when I woke up in my own skin covered in blood from whatever animal I’d torn to shreds, I felt like a monster. Like I wasn’t
me anymore. Like the wolf had won and I didn’t have the right to be walking around in my own skin.

It’s so easy to lose yourself to that feeling, and I know what it feels like for someone to drag you back from that edge and give you back control and tell you how things are. How things should be. 

_I know._

Connie doesn’t say anything more, and by the time Sasha joins us again, barely dressed but too tired to care, I settle down between them in my bed, pull them close and shut my eyes and let that Alpha-beta bond work its magic at soothing them. They don’t complain an inch.

“Sleep now,” I tell them. “We’ll talk about all that shit later.” I smell the jump of adrenaline from Sasha as she remembers the woods all over again and run my hand over her back. She wriggles around until her face is pressed into the crook of my neck and she has both arms around me. Connie does the same on my other side so they’re touching, and finally they begin to drift off to sleep.

Exhausted as I am, I don’t join them just yet. I lay there and stare at the ceiling and listen to their breathing even out and wonder what the fuck I’m supposed to do now.

On the one hand there’s Jean. Jean Kirschtein. Not the droid I was looking for but one I have to deal with nonetheless. What was it he’d said? He came here to get away from “all that”. He doesn’t want a Pack, thinks he doesn’t need one. So I’m thinking he’s had some shitty Packmates in the past, maybe turned against his will. Either that or he’s done some stuff he isn’t proud of. He didn’t seem particularly distressed by the sight of the animal carcasses, and I know that’s yet another thing I should be worrying about.

Jean Kirschtein is definitely going to be a problem of migraine-inducing proportions if not handled with caution. Which is, of course, exactly what I need right now.

Then on the other hand there is the unstable omega that is mutilating animals and still a complete mystery to us all. It’s feral and aggressive, that much is obvious. Oh, and it’s getting closer to campus and therefore the larger human population of which I am at times a part, probably drawn in by the other supernatural activity in the area. I have no idea who it is, and the only way I am finding out is if I go back out there and track it the fuck down before it rains again or something even more awful crops up. That means my betas will be stressing – Sasha especially – and that is something I am oh so eager to avoid after the earlier events of today.

Oh god, I am so crazily out of my depth here. I’m just a kid; I’m not meant to be dealing with this level of shit. My biggest concerns should be midterms and having enough money to food shop this week, not out of control omegas and werewolf politics and second-hand stress on top of my own considerable supply.

Just then my phone, which somehow still has life in it, vibrates. I reach over Connie, careful not to move and wake him, and dig down the crack between my bed and the wall, where sure enough my phone is lodged. It still has trace amounts of pumpkin mush on it from the other morning, and Jesus doesn’t that feel like it was a week ago.

I have a text from Levi. Actually, I have several from him, a couple from Armin and Mikasa asking me where the hell I am, and one from Hannes asking me how my full moon runs are going. I ignore all but Levi’s most recent text for now and attempt to push down the twisting feeling in my gut as I try to figure out what to tell him about Jean and our recent discovery.

_From Levi:_ Are you alive?
[To Levi]: ish

[From Levi]: Ish? If you’re texting that means you’re alive.

[From Levi]: What happened?

Oh boy. How the fuck am I even meant to start on that one? (Considering I can’t remember much of last night besides the odd flash of animal intent and base emotion.)

So I kinda back out a little.

I postpone.

I avoid the immediate situation and say:

[To Levi]: meet outside mine in an hour?

That gives me an hour to maybe nap and definitely figure out what I’m going to say to him. The thought of why should I tell him anything at all? crosses my mind, but I know that’s not the right route to take here. Keeping the potentially dangerous and definitely volatile vampire on my good side right now is the best course of action. Pissing him off by withholding information would be a hell of a lot worse that pissing him off by admitting that the omega situation is a little more complicated than we originally thought.

I mean, pissing him off in general (although usually fun) is not ideal today of all days, but it’s probably unavoidable either way, let’s face it. The least I can do to save myself is be honest with the guy baring his teeth at me.

[From Levi]: You better have some good news for me, mutt.

I most definitely do not whimper at that.

An hour’s worth of sleep later and I regret it, like I do with most decisions I make in life. As I wait for Levi to get his butt here I take a seat on the slightly damp stone steps and try not to dose off again. When he arrives I give him the basics of all that has happened over the last couple nights and try not to worry about the fact that his pupils have gone all slitty and vamp-like when I start to talk about the blood and the body parts and the fact that things have essentially gotten so much worse on my watch.

“So we have yet another problem on our hands,” Levi says after a while of him standing there in front of me with his arms crossed and me sitting on the steps with my shoulders slumped. “No, actually we have two; the feral wolf tearing up the local wildlife and the one you collared but then let go.”

“Pretty much,” I mumble around a yawn. Fuck I need more than an hour’s worth of sleep. I scrub a hand across my face and try to wake up some.

“So why did you let him go?” And yea, there is that clipped, disapproving tone that means I’m about to be yelled at if I say the wrong thing. I lift my head slowly to look at him. I see his jaw twitch ever so slightly beneath that pale skin. Fuck.
I take a breath and go for the truth in the least defensive tone I can muster. “Because after talking with the guy for five minutes it became real fucking clear that he’s been through some pretty tough shit. Whatever it was, it pushed him to be an omega by choice. The last thing he needs right now is an Alpha ordering him around.”

“But he is under your control, right?” Levi asks, taking a step forward and frowning at me.

“Ugh,” I say, because using the word “no” right now is probably not the best idea. “It’s not a case of control. It’s more like his wolf recognises me as its Alpha, and that gives Jean control over it. So really, if anyone has control here it’s Jean.” Wow rambling now okay.

Levi’s frown deepens and he takes another step towards me and I don’t know if it’s meant to be threatening but my wolf is taking an interest and that is not what I need right now, nope.

“What?” Levi says, clearly confused.

I feel like whining.

“Jean was an unstable omega with an out of control wolf,” I explain. Pause long enough for Levi to nod that he’s with me so far. “When I forced him to submit, his wolf accepted me as its Alpha and that forced it back, gave the human side more balance. Having an Alpha to keep the wolf in check will give Jean more control over his wolf. That’s how I know he’ll be back sooner or later.”

Levi’s frown, which had been lifting slowly throughout my coherent explanation, now comes back full force. “How?” he demands.

“Jesus, would you just sit down? You’re making me nervous,” I say as Levi moves further still and I find my wolf and subsequently myself reacting to the man prowling towards me.

He grimaces at the stone step but obliges, taking a seat beside me although there’s really not much room.

“How?” he repeats, head cocked to one side, and this close I can see that his pupils are human again and that there are some flecks of blue in those grey irises and he smells vaguely like citrus and I really need more sleep.

“Because being given control over your wolf again isn’t something any one of us would willingly walk away from,” I say, letting my eyes flash gold to show him what I mean by control just because I can. Levi drops the conversation at that and looks away. I am very glad, although I can’t tell if that’s because he isn’t probing further or because I’m no longer staring at his eyes like a moron.

“So our second problem,” he says after a brief pause. My wolf wakes up a bit, suddenly alert. We both know that this conversation is skating towards the thinnest point of the proverbial ice. Levi and his trust issues are a thing to contend with and why did I think it was a good idea to make him sit down right next to me oh fuck oh fuck did I ever have a sense of self-preservation or have I always been like this? Well, I did end up getting bitten and turned into a freaking werewolf, so maybe I’ve just always been this way.

“The other omega,” Levi says, bringing me out of my weird moment of reflection-slash-panic, and I realise I hadn’t actually given him an answer.

“Right,” I say, like an intelligent fuck.

“Why didn’t you track it?”
I don’t even have to think about the answer. It just comes to me: “Because the safety and the comfort of my Pack takes precedence.” It’s a line my uncle has used on many occasions, and one all members of his Pack know by heart. Saying it now, however, it has a whole other meaning. For the first time in my life, it’s my Pack. Truly.

“Connie and Sasha were freaking out, we had a prissy new guy with us, we were all buck naked and in the middle of nowhere and shifting to track down a potential threat wasn’t what any of us needed.”

Try to argue with that one, fangs.

“You could have found its den,” Levi says. “You could have followed it back home and dealt with it.”

“I could have, sure,” I say, irritation starting to seep in, “but the others were in no fit state to be doing that. I would have been on my own against an unknown threat in unfamiliar territory, having just spent two nights in the form of a giant wolf, kinda low on energy and with a fuck ton of Pack problems stressing me out. You know what that set up says to me?” I wait for Levi to raise an eyebrow in answer. “It says—no, screams—disadvantage.”

There’s a moment’s pause in which Levi appraises me, eyes flicking back and forth between mine as I try to get my wolf to quit with the growling already. After a while, Levi nods. “Okay,” he says.

“Okay?” I echo, not quite sure what that’s even supposed to mean.

“Okay,” he repeats. “I’ll let you off for letting it get away.”

“Gee, thanks,” I mutter, rolling my eyes and trying not to let my simmering anger show.

There’s no point in rising to the bait, he’s just being a prick as always, keep a level head Eren, I tell myself.

“So what are you going to do now?” he asks, and I want to snap back with something like why is up to me to do anything? I’m tired and still kinda famished. I need to get the dirt out from under my nails and make sure my betas are feeling okay.

“I’m going to go back to sleep,” I say, and the scent of his anger and disbelief hits me like a fucking car. I know he’s going to open his mouth and say something that’ll make me hate him, so I add; “and then I’m going to have something to eat and send my betas home, and then I’ll do the dumb reckless thing and go back out into those woods alone to track down fuck knows who to fuck knows where and see if I can actually help them or not. Satisfied?” I ask sweetly.

“No.”

Alrighty then.

“Tell me where you found the kill and I’ll go out there myself,” Levi says, eyes narrowed and determined, and I take a second to count just how many ways that scenario could end oh so badly for all involved before giving him my answer.

“No way. You’re not going out there on your own to deal with a—”

“Feral werewolf?” Levi finishes for me. He stands, fists clenched and jaw set. “If I’m strong enough to knock you on your ass easy and hold you there, I’m pretty sure I can take a filthy feral mutt.”

I stand too, not liking how he’s referring to my kind one bit.
“If you go out there – if you find it – you’ll kill it without even giving it a chance. Won’t you?” It’s not a question so much as a dare of denial and we both know it. The vampire certainly isn’t denying it. My wolf is back up in arms right now, battering against the bars of his cage and calling for me to let him out, let him *in*. I hold steady against the both of them.

“Fighting against a feral omega isn’t the same as fighting a wolf with control,” I say, hoping to talk some sense to this guy. “A regular werewolf with a Pack at his back thinks before he acts. An out-of-control omega like this – who is, I might add, bloodthirsty as *fuck* from what I’ve seen of those carcasses so far – won’t think, it’ll just act. It won’t ever back up a step. The only thing that can get it to back off would be an Alpha, like me. A threat like you would only make things twice as worse.”

“What are you trying to say?” he sneers. I growl at him, wolf snapping his jaws like he wants a taste.

*What I’m saying* is that if you go out there hunting it down, you’re going to bait it into a fight you won’t let it win, because you’ll have to kill it to subdue it.”

There’s a moment of silence between us again, and Levi tilts his head to one side, a question forming in that little dent between his eyebrows.

He opens his mouth and says; “And that’s bad because…?”

The noise that tears from my throat isn’t human, it’s full on monster. I don’t even register I’m moving until I have a hand gripping the front of his shirt and I’m in his space breathing down on him, seething fury.

“That’s bad because you said you’d let me deal with this. Werewolves are my problem to fix, remember?” I shake him and breathe in a lungful of broiling rage as a result. “You’re not killing it. Not if there’s a chance that I can help—”

“It’s dangerous,” Levi hisses through clenched – very sharp – teeth. “I told you I can’t have anyone’s attention being grabbed by a werewolf going psycho on the wildlife. Would you rather we wait and play this your way until oops someone gets *mauled*, or do you want to let go of me, get over yourself, and tell me where I can fucking find it?”

“I’m not letting anyone get hurt—”

“Fan-fucking-tastic,” Levi interrupts. “Now point me in this bastard’s direction and I’ll solve all our problems for us.” I shake him again and this time he grabs my wrist and squeezes til it aches and I’m forced to let go.

“I said I’m not letting anyone get hurt, *omegas* included,” I growl. He laughs at that, low and humourless and deep.

“Oh well aren’t you just the hero. Do you honestly think this is going to end with anything but blood?” he asks, and this guy is really giving a whole other meaning to the term “biting sarcasm”.

“Yes,” I state.

“No,” he says, shaking his head. “No, you’re going to go back to sleep and then you’re going to have something to eat and send your betas home and put off dealing with the danger until you feel more zen or whatever, meanwhile I am going to go out there and I am going to do your fucking job for you.”
I try to argue but he cuts me off, eyes flashing with an anger that shuts me up so fast that even my wolf chokes on his tongue for once. “You had your chance,” he hisses. “I told you before that I was letting you deal with the omega, but now you’re taking too long. So you have a new beta to play with and I have a feral beast to hunt down before something else happens that ends up with more trouble for all of us involved. And then once this is over, we don’t see each other again. You keep your pups in check like a good little Alpha, and I’ll keep the fuck away from you. How’s that sound?”

He waits for me to answer, but by the time I realise that’s what he’s actually doing it’s too late to say anything and he’s turning away, tutting and muttering to himself “I can’t believe I actually thought I could work with a dog”, and then he’s walking away from me and I’m still trying to catch up and process exactly what he’s just said and the slew of emotions that were flaring out of control between us, and I watch him get into his car and drive away and then I slump down on the steps and groan into my hands until the cold starts to seep into my skin and I go back inside and sleep and try not to think.

I last all of two hours before I’m woken by a growling stomach and clingy betas and it pains me to do it but I send them home. The argument I had with Levi keeps turning itself over in my mind and I need time to breathe and think this through and probably talk myself out of doing something dumb as fuck.

Connie and Sasha go with much moaning but a promise from me that I’ll stop by theirs tomorrow with whatever left over candy we have from Halloween still lying around. It gets them out the door, at least, and I let myself drop onto my bed safe in the knowledge that I am probably the worst Alpha to grace the face of this planet.

Too young. That’s my problem. I’m too young and I have no fucking clue what I’m doing.

Levi’s right; the omega is dangerous and needs to be dealt with right now, before someone gets hurt. But chances are an encounter between me and said omega will not go smoothly or end peacefully. Which sucks.

Things went okay with Jean (or as well as was to be expected considering, ya know, Jean wasn’t all that present). I got a hold of him, managed to pull his humanity back to the surface even under the influence of the full moon. Jean wasn’t too far gone that his wolf was feral, just reactive. What he said about sensing us all at the party and losing control, that was true. It would happen to any one of us – accidentally wandering into an unfamiliar Pack’s territory and then literally locking eyes with their Alpha across the hallway would send any of us into a panic. The fact that he couldn’t stop himself from shifting isn’t surprising either, it was just the anger and the not-backing-down part that needed sorting.

But this omega… Not good. It’s far beyond anything I’ve seen up until now.

Bone yards aren’t really that unheard of. I mean, I’ve stumbled across a couple of those, done either by Packs out on a run or by omegas marking their dens. They’re rare, yea, and usually harmless. Just bones piled up kinda neat, and as long as we mind our own business, nothing comes of it.

But the frequency and size of this omega’s kills is worrying, and I have no clue what it means.
So I do the thing I probably should have done weeks, if not months ago. I give my old Alpha a call and hope he has some gem of wisdom to share with me that just might save my ass.

“They’re running,” my uncle says, once I’ve finished telling him about what’s been going on. (And then freaked out some because hellow stress.) (And then listened to him lecture me about not coming to him with Alpha-related issues sooner when I clearly need help in this very volatile, potentially dangerous situation.) “The omega’s running from something, probably has been since the beginning.”

“What?” I say. “How’d you figure that?”

There’s a sigh from the other end of the line, and I can picture my uncle running his hand over his face as he searches for the right words to use.

“Because bone yards are usually all about marking territory,” he explains, and duh I knew that bit. “But this omega’s territory is changing. They’re not marking one spot, they’re jumping all over the place. You said the latest one was closer to the uni, right?”

“Yea.” It sounds more like a question when I say it.

“The university where a bunch of other werewolves, among which is an established Pack, are studying. Right?”

“Yea?” Definitely a question this time. What’s he trying to say?

“And the bone yards aren’t just bones this time but fresh kills, from the sounds of it arranged to look pretty messed up?”

“Uh huh.” Now I’m sounding lost and concerned, which is not new for me, I’ll admit, but still not a good tone to use whilst talking Alpha-to-Alpha.

“Kid, do I seriously need to spell it out for you?” At my silence of confirmation, Hannes sighs. “Okay, look. It sounds to me like this omega is on the run, just the wolf telling him that he needs to keep moving. It’s not unheard of, omegas moving through Pack territory—”

“Wait, it isn’t?” That’s new.

“No, now will you let me finish? Thanks. Usually it’s the ones that were turned against their will or were born with it but have a human family and no relatives they can turn to. They freak out, they shift, they run. You know how that one goes. Sometimes once they start running, they don’t stop until an Alpha makes them. They lose their humanity and let the wolf take over because it’s easier to not think about whatever happened to them. My best guess is that’s probably what’s happening with this omega, if they’re moving territory with each full moon.”

“Right, right,” I say, turning that over. It makes sense. “So the bone yards are what, markings because I’m nearby and they don’t like that?”

“Maybe,” Hannes says. “Depends how long this has been happening for. You said your beta went and talked to the people at the reserve?”

“Yea, Sasha.” The swelling of pride I have for my beta doesn’t even dissipate as I inform my uncle
that she found these “attacks” going back for months. It does die a little as my uncle then says, “Nah.”

“Nah?” I repeat. “Nah what?”

“Nah it’s not going to be about marking their territory against you, because you’ve only been there a couple of months, moron. This is long term. I wonder…”

He hums – something he does when he’s thinking – and I wait patiently for him to finish that sentence, picking up on a little anxiety from my wolf because that “I wonder” did not sound too comforting.

“You wonder?” I prompt, when nothing is forthcoming.

“I’ll call a couple guys I know from your state and see if they’ve heard of anything… wolf-ish happening. Missing people, animal attacks, you know; the usual,” he says in that tone that tells me he’s sidestepping something I might not like to hear, trying to soften the blow a bit. He used to do it to me when I was a kid and had “anger issues”, but he stopped when he realised that avoiding the issue only made me angrier.

“Hannes,” I say, cutting off his spiel about who could help and with what. “Just tell me.”

He tells me: “There might be something chasing it.”

Well.

Shit.

“Shit cocking fuck,” I swear. He doesn’t admonish me for my language as I am well within my rights here. “Are you serious?!”

“It’s only a theory,” he tells me. We both know it’s more than that. Uncle Hannes has a lot of experience, and a lot of connections in the werewolf community, and if he’s telling me this unstable omega on my doorstep is being chased by someone, then he’s at least 85% certain that it’s true.

“Are you thinking it’s a rabid Alpha, like the one that bit me? What the hell do I do if it’s a rabid Alpha like the one that bit me?” I ask after I take a moment to calm down and calm my wolf down too. I’m not very calm. My pulse is freaking jumping right now.

“I don’t know if it’s that bad, kid. It might not even be true, okay? Just a possibility – one that you should bear in mind if you try to approach it, though. If there’s another werewolf following this omega – for whatever reason – then you might not want to try and make it submit. Conflicting instincts in an omega this unstable could—oh fuck, that bone yard you found recently wasn’t a bone yard, was it?”

Thrown and mildly horrified by the turn this conversation is taking, I answer right away. “Fresh kills.”

“Artfully arranged enough to make you guys back away,” Hannes adds. I start to tap my fingers against my thigh, wolf alert and senses taught. “And it’s only this latest one that’s been like that?”

“Yea, as far as we know.”

“Okay,” Hannes says, and his voice is serious again, timbre low like it gets when he’s pulling the
Alpha card to make me pay close attention. I’m sat here paying close attention, knuckles going white as I grip my phone and try not to panic too much at whatever he’s about to say. “Don’t approach the omega.”

“What—” I begin to question, but he cuts me off.

“I need to make a few calls, but if I’m right, being approached by another werewolf right now is only going to make the omega’s state worse. Fresh kills like that are what the Packs in Texas used to do, back when they were fighting over territory. It’s a power display, intended to keep other wolves away from what’s theirs. I know you’re strong, and you’ve got a good handle on your own wolf enough to be a solid Alpha and an anchor to an omega – like how you got Jean to submit – but if you go off and confront this omega, you’re going to get hurt. Badly.”

“Why?” I ask.

“Because this omega’s behaviour is pretty damn severe. It’s in your territory, technically – or it’s close enough to an established Pack that it’s feeling threatened by you – and that little bloody display you stumbled across on your route back to campus was a message telling you to back the hell off.

“Kid, I’m not just saying this because I think you can’t handle it. I’m pretty damn certain that nobody can really handle this one. Whatever it is you’re dealing with, I think the only thing you can really do is let it keep moving.”

“But it’s close to campus,” I say. “We found those kills maybe two miles from Parkwood. That’s way too close for me to just leave it alone and hope it wanders off. What if it just gets closer? What if it ends up attacking someone?”

“Eren.” Hannes is growling down the phone and it’s a sound I always hated hearing from him. I feel the acute stab of shame as I realise I’ve upset him by arguing back. “Focus on you not getting hurt first off. It’s not too close that you should be worried just yet. Look, just—” he sighs and I can picture that hand scrubbing his face again. Maybe he’s shaking his head. Maybe his eyes are squeezed shut as he tries to come up with an argument I’ll actually listen too.

It’s way too familiar for us.

“Just don’t go out looking for it. Let me put in a few phone calls, okay? I’ll see if anyone’s had an Alpha turn an unwilling recently, or if there’s any news of an omega running through another wolf’s territory near where you are. If I find anything that can help you, I’ll let you know in a couple of days, okay? Until then, I wouldn’t go anywhere near it if I were you. Best heed its warnings and stay clear and safe. Make sure your betas are protected. Understand?”

We’re silent for a little while, both thinking. I know he’s waiting for me to cave like I always do. And I’m probably gonna, because he’s always right about stuff like this. It’s just…

“But there’s a chance someone might get hurt,” I say, and my voice is quiet.

“And if you go after it, there’s a guarantee that someone will be you.”

“What if I can help it?”

“Eren, I don’t think you can. It’s scared, or angry. Difficult to tell which. But you’re still a new Alpha and your Pack consists of two betas and a recently claimed omega. You’re strong, sure, I’ll give you that. And yea, you’ve figured out how to control your wolf better than most werewolves your age, let alone first time Alphas. You’re good, but this is something that’s more feral beast
than it is human. Chances are, it’s never known control over its wolf at all, and you trying to give that back to it without knowing all the variables is only going to end badly for both of you.”

“But—”

“You got lucky with Jean. You made him submit, sure, but he fought you hard before that. Now that guy is someone who already had an Alpha once, right? So you know that he’s had control over his wolf before. This omega probably hasn’t. It’s running, maybe from the Alpha that bit it, and it’s showing the other werewolves nearby that it can kill and make it bloody. Take it from me, kid, you’ll be fighting a losing battle if you try and give it control – something that it’s never tasted before. This isn’t just an omega; this is an omega with some serious issues that you do not want to get close to.”

And what if it was hurt and it just needs help? I want to ask, but I don’t. I know that this discussion is over. If Uncle Hannes says it’s best to leave it alone, then it’s best to leave it alone.

There’s just one thing.

“Levi told me he’s going out there to hunt it down and find its den,” I say in a rush.

“Who the hell’s Levi?” Hannes asks, and it’s a mix between incredulous and angry.

“The vampire I told you about.” For some reason I can feel my cheeks going red, but if that’s because of how ridiculous it feels to admit that vampires are a thing that exists or not, I just can’t tell.

“The vampire you told me about?” Hannes echoes, and I’m starting to think it’s a habit I picked up from him.

“Yea, the dickwad who’s been bugging me to get this thing sorted in case it draws attention to the supernatural population of Trost. He’s an asshole, and he said he’s going out there to fix our omega problems.”

“I hope you told him it’s suicide,” is Hannes’ growled response.

“Oh yea. But he’s strong. Easily as strong as I am when I’m shifted,” I say, chewing my lip. “He might actually…”

“Kill it.” Hannes says it like a gunshot, and I try not to picture Levi ripping into a giant feral wolf like he’s enjoying it.

“Yea,” I breathe. “So, you know, all of this might be over soon anyway, and I won’t be getting involved or injured in the process. Totally nothing to do with me.”

Again, silence settles along the connection and this time I don’t know what Hannes’ thinking. Eventually, he says; “You don’t sound too enthused about that.”

“I just—I keep thinking that I could have ended up like that, you know?” I say, and Hannes murmurs a soft “ah” of realisation. “If you hadn’t pulled me back, I could be running from the fucker who turned me and killed—” I have to stop and breathe, the memories flooding back faster than I would have liked.

And fuck it still hurts like brick to the balls to remember.

“You said I got lucky with Jean? Well I got lucky with you, too. I actually had someone to help me
through it, the fear and the confusion. If this omega was unwilling, then they’re feeling that too. Or they were.” I laugh bitterly as I lean back in my desk chair. Spin it a little from side to side. “I feel like shit not being able to help them, cos if I don’t help them then they suffer and someone might end up getting hurt. But if I try and help them and it doesn’t work, then we’ll both end up getting hurt, and I’ll be forced to—. But then if Levi kills them, then no one gets hurt.” No one but the omega goes unsaid, but we both hear it.

“Being an Alpha isn’t easy,” Hannes says, and I snort cos no kidding. I’m beginning to realise that my uncle hasn’t been telling me a lot of Alpha-related stuff. I make a mental note to get him to spill his secrets later, because I seriously could have used all of the above information sooner. Fuck.

“You have to make a lot of tough calls, but the safety and comfort of your Pack takes precedence.” And there it is, my uncle’s one truth. Pack first.

Pack always first.

“I can’t let Levi kill it,” I say, and I know this to be my one truth. I can’t just let an omega die, not if its circumstances are anything like mine were.

“But you know that things will be easier if you do,” Hannes finishes for me, saying what I don’t want to admit out loud because that makes me sound like a monster. “Eren, if it’s more wolf than human right now, letting your vampire put it out of its misery might be the safer option.”

“But it’s murder,” I say.

“Is it? You know our world runs on different rules than the human world.”

And oh boy, don’t I just.

The thing is; nobody would ever willingly let someone they know just waltz off and kill a perfect stranger. But then if that stranger was a danger to society in the teeth-and-claws-made-to-kill-with-the-bloodlust-of-a-literally-monster-to-fuel-it sense, it makes it less murder and more self-defence. A lot of were creatures end up getting themselves killed by others because they go out of control or they over step the line. It’s just a part of our world, and it makes me feel sick to admit it, but it’s true.

Is a vampire killing a feral werewolf who is expressing violent tendencies the same as murder among humans?

The logical answer would be yes, but if you live in the world of the supernatural and you know how these things can end up, your answer would almost certainly be no. Mercy killing, self-defence, the right choice. Protecting humanity from just another out-of-control monster. Would you consider it murder if the victim didn’t have a human face, or already had blood on their claws? Fuck this is why I never wanted to be Alpha. It’s up to me to interpret what’s right and what’s wrong, both for my Pack and for the wider society.

“It’s your decision, Eren. I’ll put in those calls for you anyway, and see if we can’t find out who this omega was.” Was, not is. So Hannes thinks they’re already too far gone to help. “I’ve gotta hang up now, but if you need anything else just text me, okay?”

“Right,” I say, and I can hear how hollow my voice is. So can Hannes, apparently, because he sighs again.
“Sometimes we can’t do anything,” he says. “It’s not anyone’s fault, it’s just how things work in our world. But hey, you gave that other omega his control back. Focus on getting him settled for the time being, okay kid?”

“Right.”

“I’ll talk to you later.”

He hangs up.

I drop my phone onto my desk, put my head in my hands for the second time today, and groan.

It’s my decision.

Go after Levi and stop him, piss him off even more, and suffer the consequences (be that him lashing out at me or the omega lashing out at an innocent), or let him take down the omega before things escalate any further?

It’s my decision.

Fuck.

We all know I’ve already decided.

“This is all going to go to shit,” I say to myself as I stand up and shove my phone in my pocket. I grab my coat and cram my feet into my shoes. I’m going to go after the werewolf hating vampire and try to stop him from killing an omega that might very well do who knows what later.

Fuck. There are some days when I hate having a conscience.

I open the door to my room and very nearly collide with Armin and Mikasa, and us boys gasp and clutch our hearts like idiots whilst Mikasa merely raises an eyebrow, chewing her gum without any indication that almost walking straight into me has ruffled her in anyway. I am so jealous of her immovability at times.

“Hey Eren,” Armin says, smiling brightly at me. Now, I’m eager to get out of here and go after the vampire, but I’m not a total asshole, so I smile back and say hi. “Haven’t seen you in a couple days.”

“Oh. Yea,” I say, and I could kick myself for how awkward that sounded, but I’ll do it later. Right now I need to get going.

One small problem: Armin and Mikasa are blocking my exit.

“Were you going somewhere?” Mikasa asks, giving my appearance a once over, noting shoes and coat.

“Yea, actually.” Maybe now they’ll let me escape.

“What?”

Or maybe not.

“I…’ve gotta go find Levi.” Eh, it’s true enough.

Something in Mikasa’s eyes flashes and she exchanges a look with Armin that leaves him grinning
again. I refrain from hopping from foot to foot like I need to piss whilst I wait for them to be done with the conversation and let me go. There are literal lives at stake here.

“We missed you at the party the other night,” Mikasa continues, doing something with her voice that puts me on edge. I have no idea what or why but there’ll be time to analyse this later I’m sure.

“Yea, you just disappeared on us,” Armin adds.

“I…” …don’t have an answer prepared for that one.

“We couldn’t find Sasha or Connie either,” Mikasa says, glancing at Armin.

“Did you guys abandon us?” he asks. I look from one friend to the other, and they expectantly look back.

“There was a bit of an emergency,” I say. Pray they won’t ask what exactly. “I’m really sorry.”

“Oh hey, no,” Armin is quick to reassure me, “we’re not mad or anything. Just worried.”

“At first we thought that Sasha and Connie had left to go have adorable bunny sex,” Mikasa says, and it’s surprising how well Sasha and Connie suit the words “adorable bunny sex”. “And we figured you were still around somewhere, until Marco said he saw you leaving with them.”

“Right,” I say. “Emergency. They needed a lift so I had to drive them.”

“Uh huh,” she nods. Chews her gum. “Marco said Levi was with you too.”

At this I am stumped. I have nothing I might say that would make sense and not sound like I was avoiding my friends at a party thrown by said friends in our flat. God I’m sweating, this is like the time Hannes caught me literally stealing cookies from the cookie jar. Shit shit shit think Eren.

“You’re going to meet him now?” Armin prompts.

“Yes!” Do I leap at the chance to escape this incredibly awkward conversation? No, not at all. “And he’ll get pissed if I’m late. He hates late people. So, you know, I gotta run. I’ll see you guys later maybe, okay?” Wow so smooth. I try to edge past Mikasa, and she relents by taking a step back.

“Don’t stay out too late, young man,” she says.

“And text us occasionally,” Armin adds. By this point I am at the door and oh so leaving, but they don’t seem to pay that much heed.

“Send him our love!” Mikasa calls as I slip outside. I close the door fast behind me.

The sound of Armin shouting, “And use protection, for the love of god!” follows me down the steps and into the back parking lot and I make a mental note to hit my head against the nearest tree a couple dozen times once this is over. God, they are being so weird. Use protection? What the hell was that even about?

Actually, no, I’m better off being in the dark about that one.

And who knows, maybe I’ll die later and this will cease being an issue. (Or maybe I won’t, and I’ll have to return to my flat mates and this thing they have about the vampire I’m about to face. Won’t that be a joy.)
Fuck my life.

I break into a slight jog – not close enough to a run that I might look odd, but not close enough to a stroll that I feel I am wasting time – and head for Parkwood. Levi’s been on the loose for a fair few hours now, and that’s not a comforting thought, but the one thing I have on my side is that he would have to have gone home first if only to change his shoes. He was wearing leather brogues earlier, and they are not decent footwear to be tracking and/or fighting in, let me tell you.

I’d also put my money on him eating lunch first, too. Guy’s sensible, if not slightly psychotic aggressive. He seems like the type to not be fighting on an empty stomach.

So the asshole’s made a pit stop, and then gone to Parkwood, no doubt. He doesn’t know how far from campus we found the kills, but if he’s any good at tracking by scent (which I’m pretty sure he’s not, but there is an awful lot of blood out there and he’s a vampire so who the fuck knows man) then he’ll have two sets of our tracks to choose from, both leading him in the right direction, but one looping all over the place the way the tracks of werewolves tend to. I hope he picks up those ones because at least that’ll buy me some time.

From there he’ll be following the omega directly. I don’t know how long it will take him to hunt it down. I’m praying I’m not too late already.

Just as I’m crossing the main road that bisects campus, I hear a voice calling my name from up ahead. I look up, refocusing on my surroundings and see Marco walking towards me, friendly smile on his freckled face.

“Hey Marco,” I say as I approach him, hoping he won’t want to stop me for long. He does as I fear and stops on the path, still smiling at me in that sunny way of his.

“Did you get my text?” he asks, and I blink at him for a second, wondering why on earth he would be texting me, before my brain kicks into gear.

“No?” I say, in a semi-apologetic, semi-inquiring tone.

“Oh. Well, I was actually on my way to talk with you right now.”

Was there some mass email sent around that told everybody today was a good day to try and talk to Eren Jaeger or something? Because if so, I am tracking down the sender and throttling them post-haste.

“Will it take long?” I ask, and then realise that sounded incredibly rude. Points for me.

Marco hesitates for a second, and I once again resist the urge to hop from foot to foot.

“It’s about Jean,” he says, “and how you’re his Alpha now.”

Wait. What?

Now, I’m not going to lie to you guys; that’s one hell of a wrench Marco just jammed into the metaphorical machine. For one thing, I didn’t know Marco knew Jean. But now the fact that his house smelt like omega werewolf that one time makes so much more sense. And why Jean was at the Halloween party. If he hung out with Marco it would make sense that he might show up to a
huge gathering of drunken students.

But Marco knowing Jean, and Marco knowing *about* Jean are two completely different things.

And *fuck*, he brought it up so casually, too. No preamble, no “oh so hey I know we don’t know each other yet but I hear you’re of the lupine persuasion and I’m sort of in on that whole thing, just fyi”, no nothing. Just straight in there with the Alpha stuff.

I flounder. I flounder and flail and it is not good.

“Uuuh,” I eventually get out. *Keep it casual, keep it casual. Don’t panic now, Jaeger.* “You know Jean, huh?”

Marco shrugs. “We’ve been dating for the past five years,” he says. “I’ve known he’s a werewolf for a while now. He’s not exactly the subtle type.”

“Uh huh,” I nod. This is a rather sudden development that I had not anticipated happening, I’ll be frank. Not the lack-of-subtlety bit, no – I reckon Jean’s about as subtle as a brick to the face – but Marco *knowing* knowing Jean and knowing *about* Jean, and just being totally okay with discussing this with me? Yea, that I didn’t see coming.

Marco sighs, a frown clouding up his expression, and says; “He told me you made him submit the other night.”

God, if I’m about to get the werewolf equivalent of the shovel talk from the human boyfriend, I’ll be pissed.

I take a breath and own up to my crime. “I did.”

“Thank you.”

What?

“Thank you? Are you sure that’s what you meant to say there?”

Marco laughs, but it’s not entirely happy. “Eren,” he says. “Jean’s not had a Pack for almost six months. I know I don’t really understand it, and I probably never will, but he’s been different recently. Short tempered, frustrated. He’s almost shifted a couple times, and over insignificant things that would never have riled him up before. I know it’s because he doesn’t have a Pack now.”

“Yea,” I say, feeling kinda bad that Marco’s had to deal with this shit. Humans involved in supernatural affairs have always had the rough end of the deal. “Being without a Pack is never healthy for a werewolf.”

Marco nods with this sad little look on his face, like he’s just had some hypothesis proven right when he was really hoping it wouldn’t be. Poor guy.

“His last Pack was awful,” Marco says, shivering, and now *I’m* the one who’s just had a hypothesis proven right. And oh boy do I not like the look in Marco’s eyes right now. “He doesn’t want another one, I know that. I don’t want him to have to go through anything like that again, but…”

“But you’re worried for him?” I guess, when Marco doesn’t seem to have the heart to finish that sentence.

“Of course I am. I mean, at first it was alright that he didn’t have a Pack anymore. We were better
off without them and Jean was doing okay. But recently... god it’s just getting worse.

“I think you’re a good guy, Eren,” Marco says, and the sincerity in his voice and the honesty I can smell on him with that statement make me feel guilty as hell because I don’t deserve that kind of faith. “I think... I think you could be good for Jean. You won’t be like his last Alpha.”

“Yea well,” I sober up some. “Like you said; your boyfriend doesn’t exactly want another Pack.”

“He told you to fuck off, didn’t he?” Marco guesses wryly. He doesn’t sound at all surprised.

“Not in so few words, but yea.”

“He doesn’t know what he’s saying. If you could just talk to him, he’ll change his mind. I know it.”

“I don’t think that’s the best idea right now,” I say, even though my wolf is whining at me to go to my beta, comfort my beta, yada yada yada beta.

“Please?” Marco all but begs, stepping closer to me. He looks to be about five seconds away from wringing his hands. I have never known anyone to actually wring their hands before. “I know he’s not exactly friendly towards strangers, but since last night he’s been more like himself than he has been in the last six months, and I know that’s because you made him submit.”

“I forced him to submit, Marco,” I huff. “There’s a difference, and it’s not a good one. Jean doesn’t want to be a part of my Pack just yet, and I can’t push him.”

“Please,” Marco repeats, more softly this time. “Just come talk to him. If you don’t, he’ll only isolate himself again. Trust me, I’ve known him long enough.”

Fuck. How can one guy be so earnest? What with my wolf’s insistence that I go be there for my newest sort-of beta, and Marco’s gentle, well-structured arguments, I can feel my resolve crumbling.

It is at this point that I remember Levi and the omega and my stomach drops like eight feet. It’s been hours since he left mine. Fuck fuck fuck. What if it’s already too late?

“Marco, now’s really not the best time,” I say, trying to convey the urgency of the situation to him in the nicest, least-dickish way possible. I don’t want to make light of Jean’s problems, because god knows I’ll be dealing with them sooner or later, but I really really can’t do this right now. “I’ve gotta run. Kind of an emergency, actually.”

Marco’s face falls, and I feel like I’ve just kicked a puppy.

“You can’t spare ten minutes?” he asks, and I shake my head. I really can’t. “Please, Eren. Just talk to Jean for ten minutes. That’s all it’ll take. You’re a good guy, I can see that. Armin talks about you a lot, and I know how much it’ll mean to Jean that you took the time to just let him know that you’re not like his last Alpha; that you won’t hurt him.”

Fuuuuuck.

See, this is why I felt so guilty when he called me a good guy the first time round. Because I have to turn him down. I have other things to do – more important things.

At the back of my mind, I hear a voice that sounds suspiciously like my uncle’s telling me that my Pack is my top priority, and that I should be focusing on the one beta I already have, and I hate that
voice because it’s usually right about these things.

Fuck.

Jean or Levi.

It’s probably already too late for one. And even if I find Levi, will I really be able to convince him to listen to me?

Marco does this imploring thing with his eyebrows, and it’s cruel manipulation at its best, it truly is. I cave.


Marco heaves this sigh of relief and gratitude and starts thanking me like I’ve just gifted him a horse. I pray he doesn’t look it in the mouth just yet, because he might be disappointed with what he finds.

“Don’t expect me to be able to work miracles,” I warn him as I pull my phone from my back pocket and unlock it. “I don’t do miracles.”

I scroll through my contacts until I find Levi, and then hit dial. It rings off to voicemail and as the automated message tells me what to do at the sound of the beep, I know that that beep signals my last desperate shred of hope that I could stop Levi from going after the omega dissipating. There’s no chance now.

Still, I say; “Levi. Listen. I know you think that what you’re doing is right, or whatever, but it isn’t. You think that omega is some wild animal that needs putting down? You’re wrong. That omega is really just some scared, lost kid who doesn’t know what’s going on, and is running from something. You don’t know what it feels like to lose control of your own body, to find some monster forcing its way into your bones and bending them into a new shape, but I do. It’s terrifying, being that out of control.

“Look. Even if you are as heartless as you want everyone to believe – and even if you do think us werewolves are the scum of the earth and don’t deserve to breathe the same air as you – then at least consider the fact that it is very clearly running from something. You don’t have to kill it – it will probably leave town on its own now that it knows there are other werewolves nearby. That bone yard we found this morning was a warning to us to keep our distance, and you really should listen to that.

“This is an unstable omega that is possibly being hunted, and from what we’ve seen, if you go after it now it will fight you without a second thought for its own safety. You’ll both get hurt. Please don’t force it into that.”

I hang up before I can say please again, and then turn to Marco.

“Lead the way.” I tell him.

It’s dark by the time we reach Marco’s place, and getting cold, so naturally I’m relieved when we get inside. That is, until I hear a door slam upstairs and footsteps coming this way, and remember why I’m here.
“No one else is home, don’t worry,” Marco says, and the relief starts up again because at least if we’re about to have some fucked up werewolf domestic we don’t have to worry about unknowing humans overhearing or getting in the way of, say, a stray clawed fist.

“What the fuck,” is my first indicator to Jean’s presence. He stands in the doorway at the far end of the hall and he’s practically seething. “I told you I don’t want to be part of you Pack, now get the fuck out.”

Charming.

I sigh.

“Look—”

“No, you look. I don’t know you, I don’t want to know you, and I don’t care what you have to say. So you can leave. Now.” He growls the last word, and he’s squaring his shoulders and puffing out his chest and it’s textbook intimidation but I doubt he’ll take it any further than this unless I make a move towards him. I’m still the Alpha in this room, whether he wants to admit that or not.

I put my hands up to show that I am harmless. See? Harmless.

“I’m not here to convince you of anything, alright?” I say. Peace offering. Why is it that werewolves are usually the defensive and angry sort? Give me an omega that actually wants my help any day. “You have to make these kinds of decisions for yourself, and whilst I will say that choosing to be part of a Pack is probably the smartest move here, I know you don’t really give a shit about what I say and will likely argue with me just for the hell of it.

Well, I’m not here to argue with you. I’m here because your boyfriend made a pretty compelling plea on your behalf, and I’m not the kind of guy to just walk away from something like that.”

I have more to say – a pretty little speech lined up, actually – but Jean gets this incredulous look on his face, and I can smell the sharp sting of betrayal and shock ricocheting through the air around us as he looks at Marco like he’s only just registered he’s in the room with us.

“Marco?” he says, and yea I would’ve gone for something a little less likely to excite that particular pained laugh from the guy at the other end of the hallway, but then again I’d probably end up getting punched in the face for my troubles.

“I asked Eren to come here and talk some things through with you.”

“What things?” Jean demands, and his stance has shifted into something a little more defensive. He’s physically ready to run.
Marco doesn’t answer directly, he says; “You’ve been falling apart lately, babe. I know it’s a werewolf thing, and I can’t help you with that no matter how much I wish I could. I think it would be good for you to talk to another werewolf about…everything that’s going on.”

“I said I was fine, Marco,” Jean growls. I’m so tempted to intervene right now but a glance at the Italian shows that he’s not worried and therefore neither should I be.

“And I call bullshit. You’re not fine. You haven’t been fine for a while now. Before it was your Pack, and then you gave all of that up and we don’t have to worry about them anymore – and yes that’s a good thing, I’m not complaining about that – but you’ve been getting worse now that you’re on your own and I’m worried about you.”

“You don’t have to be,” Jean says. Defensive again. Why are us werewolves such morons when it comes to accepting help from others?

“But I am!” Marco laughs like he can’t believe how silly Jean is being. “You’re my boyfriend. You went through shit with your last Alpha and I watched that tear you apart and now—”

“Now I’m not going to make the same mistake again. I can handle being an omega.”

There’s silence between us for a moment, and I take the time to determine that this is perhaps the first time they’re having this argument. I also determine that I really probably definitely shouldn’t be present for this.

Marco breaks the silence.

“Well I can’t,” he says.

“What?” Jean asks.

“What?” Jean asks.

“I can’t handle you being an omega. You’ve changed, and not in a good way. I’ve been so worried about you and it just keeps getting worse and I know that you don’t want to make the same mistake with picking a bad Alpha again, but I really really don’t think you will. I think Eren can be what you need right now.”

Jean laughs again, and it’s tinged with pain. He looks from Marco to me and back again. Shakes his head.

“We’re not having this conversation,” he says, and then he turns around and leaves. Marco calls after him, but he doesn’t attempt to follow, and we hear the back door open and slam shut.

The house is silent.

“Fuck,” Marco whispers, and then he puts his head in his hands and shouts the word into his palms. I don’t know where to look, except inwards where my wolf is telling me to go after Jean and beat myself up about this whole thing later in the privacy of my own room.

“I’m sorry,” Marco says after he’s composed himself. “He’s always been difficult. I thought having you here might, I don’t know, help in some way. I thought because you’re his Alpha now he’d stay and actually listen to me.” He looks up at me and grimaces. “Guess that was a load of shit, huh?”

“Looks like,” I say, because I really can’t think of anything else that might be reasonable right now. “You would’ve been right if only he actually thought of me as his Alpha,” I offer. Marco tilts his head, a silent question for me to continue. I say, “It’s kind of a frame of mind. He doesn’t want to be my beta so I have less authority over him. I’m only is Alpha in the most basic of senses, and that
can easily be broken if he distances himself long enough.”

Marco smiles sadly. “He’s pretty good at distancing himself.”

“Why do you put up with him?” I ask, and then mentally punch myself because holy shit now is not the time nor place for that question how fucking insensitive do I want to be?! To my relief Marco actually laughs. “He’s actually a good boyfriend, he’s just a lousy human being.”

“Probably because he’s not human,” I say, and Marco smiles for real this time.

“Yea. He’s nice once you get to know him. Loyal. Before… well, before everything happened he was always supportive of me, and doting and sweet and not a douche at all. I can’t blame him for what happened, but it did change him.”

I don’t know if I should ask my next question but I pose it anyway because better judgement or social tact is not something I have ever possessed.

“What did happen?” I ask.

Marco looks at me – just looks at me – for a very long time. The air fills with a sadness and a fear that tastes like nightmares, and I know that this is going to be a story that’s way too personal to share. I’m about to apologise for prying when Marco gives me an answer:

“I got bitten.”

I make my way back to my dorm block ten minutes and a cup of coffee later, and I have the bare bones of a horror story ticking over in my mind.

There are just some things you can never prepare yourself to hear, no matter how long you’ve been mixed up in the supernatural. How Marco was attacked by Jean’s old Packmates at the order of their Alpha is one of them. At least now I know why Jean is so dead set against obeying another Alpha, though.

When I get back to my dorm I’m physically and emotionally exhausted. I’m hungry and tired and my wolf is all twisted up in anger and doubt and a protective grief inside me that’s making me feel a little nauseous as I walk up the steps to my floor. I pause at the outside door and listen. Can hear Armin playing Mikasa on the Xbox, laughing as something explodes on screen and Mikasa curses. I could probably go and join in, let the feeling of being close to Pack humans calm me down a little, but I don’t know if I’m up for company right now so I push open the door as quietly as possible and shuffle down the hall to my room.

I step over the threshold with a yawn big enough to make my jaw crack.

“That sounded painful,” Levi says, and I stop and look up. He’s perched on the edge of my desk, where he always seems to be whenever I don’t want to see him, the lamp behind him switched on. I breathe in, and his scent washes over me and I smell something on him that makes my stomach drop and my wolf howl.

Blood.
“Are you happy?” I ask, because that’s what my mother always used to say to me whenever I had done something to disappoint her or make her mad. Are you happy now that I am sad?

Levi tilts his head to one side, grey eyes dark with wide pupils in the backlight from the lamp. His hair isn’t jelled back anymore, I notice. It was earlier. He smells clean, fresh from the shower.

“I’m never happy,” he says, and he’s trying to be clever and I would usually snap at him but right now I can’t be fucked.

“Good,” I say. I leave the door open, walk over to my bed and flop down onto it, turn to face the wall so my back is to him. “You can leave now.”

There’s silence for a few seconds, and then the sound of Levi hopping down from his seat. Footsteps across the floor and the sound of the door closing with a gentle click. I let out a breath and curl in on myself.

Fuck everything, I think. Guilt floods me as I realise an omega lost its life tonight and it didn’t have to. I squeeze my eyes shut and whine high in my throat.

“Shit Eren,” Levi breathes into the dark room behind me and I almost have a freaking heart attack. I sit up with a gasp, like the melodramatic moron I am and we give each other this wide eyed stare.

“I thought I told you to leave,” I say. “I thought you did leave!”

Levi breaks eye contact, looking down at his feet and shrugs. “I came here to apologise,” he mutters.

“Apologise?” I ask. He nods, looking back at me. “For killing that omega?”

“No?” he says, like it’s a question. Like he might have just forgotten about killing a feral werewolf earlier today.

“No. Right, no, of course you wouldn’t be here to apologise for that. Why would you?” I laugh, bitterness creeping in and oh hey look my motivation to deal with this shit is coming back to me.

“No, I mean I didn’t kill it,” he snaps. I snort, because yea right.

“You smell like blood,” I point out. Blood and shampoo and something distinctively Levi that I tell my wolf to fucking ignore already.

Levi scowls and runs a hand through his hair, pushing it back from his face. “I got hungry.”

“You got hungry? So who the fuck else did you eat?!” I half-yell in outrage.

“What? No one! Jesus kid, I don’t eat people.”

“No, just werewolves, right?”

“Not even werewolves.”

“What, are we not good enough for you?”

“I—wait, that’s not—”

“Do you seriously hate us that much that we’re only sport to you. Not actually nice enough to eat?”
“You’re not making any sense—”

“You smell like blood! If you didn’t kill the omega then where did it come from?”

“My kitchen,” Levi says, with such venom in his voice that I’m brought up short for a moment.

“Your kitchen?” I repeat. He nods sharply, glaring at me in undisguised annoyance. “Oh my god,” I whisper. “If there somebody in your refrigerator?”

“Only if you count a couple bags of blood.”

“Levi, that’s disgusting.” I pull a face and he snorts, glare gone and a look of wry amusement in its place.

“You have no idea. Fresh blood is way better. I only use the bagged stuff for emergencies.”

“And today was an emergency?” I prompt, sceptic. He moves then, comes over and sits on the edge of my bed next to me, the building tension of a fight dissipating quick.

“You want to know something about vampires?” he asks, glancing at me out the corner of his eye to make sure I’m paying attention. Like I could be doing anything but right now. This close I can smell the uncertainty on him.

“Sure,” I say. No big deal, no big deal, it’s not like I want to grab a hold of him and shout yes tell me all your secrets you mysterious douchenozzle or anything.

“I guess it’s kind of like how you mutts have to shift on the full moon. Vampires have to feed in a regular cycle. When we’re young, it’s every couple of days, but as we get older the cycles get longer. I have to feed at least once every month.” He turns to look right at me, and I know that what he’s saying isn’t something he would willingly tell just any supernatural creature.

“And today was feeding day for you?” I guess. He tuts, which is his equivalent of an aborted laugh, I’m beginning to realise.

“Not even close, mutt. I don’t have to feed for another week at least, but that’s just to keep me alive and healthy.” He pauses, looks up at the window and the night outside. “Sometimes, if we’re not careful, we can slip up because of other things. For a lot of us, it’s stress. We don’t pay attention to the itch that tells us we need to feed because we know we’ve got another couple days left or another week or whatever, and then something can happen that’ll push us over the edge and we won’t realise until it’s too late.

“Threats to me and my territory run me down too. I have to be careful and make sure I feed more regularly or I do shit I regret. Like shout at people, or go running off after an omega, or ignore the local Alpha.” He looks back at me, and there’s a question in his eyes. He doesn’t voice it so I don’t know what it is, exactly, but I can take a pretty educated guess that it’s do you have to deal with the dame problem?

“It’s healthy for a werewolf to shift more than just once a month,” I offer. “It keeps us stable, especially if we’re having a shitty week or dealing with something difficult. The last thing a werewolf wants is to find themself shifting in public and not be able to stop it. It’s better to control the urges than let them control you.”

“Well fucking put,” he mutters. I get more comfortable on the bed, cross my legs and inch a little closer to him so I don’t have to crane my neck at an angle to look him in the eye.
“So you didn’t kill the omega, huh?”

Just double checking.

“Nope. Damn thing’s still alive, you’ll be glad to hear. When I left here, I went home and fed and felt a whole lot better afterwards. Figured I owed you an apology. And then I got your message and that actually made me feel like crap which is something I’m not used to feeling like, so well done. I’ve spent the last half an hour psyching myself up for this.”

“Thanks,” I huff, trying not to smile because this is serious stuff we’re talking about, but the guy’s practically allergic to human emotion and/or admitting that he’s wrong, so forgive me if I’m enjoying this a little. He shrugs a shoulder.

“Yea, whatever,” he mumbles, then takes a breath and says; “I’m sorry, Eren. For being a complete asshole to you and shit. I overreacted and you didn’t deserve that, and I know that excuses won’t make much of a difference because I still said what I said, but you should know that I am sorry. I’m not going to make a move against the omega unless you say so, alright?”

I let him stew for a bit, until he turns to look at me, ready to call me an ungrateful mutt no doubt. “Apology accepted,” I say. “But you’re right; you were a complete asshole.”

“I’ve been told it’s the only thing I’m reasonably good at,” he deadpans. I laugh, surprising myself considering the godawful day I’ve had.

“So hey, wanna hear about the godawful day I’ve had?” I ask because why the fuck not, and Levi shrugs and says “why the fuck not,” and we both rearrange my bedding so it forms a barrier between us and the wall and lean back against it.

“Alright, first off there was the whole thing with waking up buck naked in the woods miles from civilisation with a very angsty defensive stranger stuck with us. Always fun.” Levi hums his agreement, nodding along like he has any clue what that feels like. “And then on the way back we ran into this lovely pile of mutilated animals that freaked out everybody, so then we were all naked and afraid. We got back to where my betas stashed our packs, got into some clean clothes, made our way back to campus only for Jean to tell us all to go fuck ourselves, essentially. Oh and I also had the small problem of informing the town vamp that the omega I dealt with was not the omega we wanted me to deal with, and I was pretty fucking certain he would blow a goddamn fuse when I told him the news.”

Levi winces and offers yet another apology at the prompting of my very pointed look, and I cannot get used to those words coming out of his mouth sounding actually sincere. Holy fuck.

“So anyway, let’s not dwell on that for too long. You made me feel like crap x2, so then I went back to sleep with my betas and when I woke up I was wracked with guilt over this omega death sentence so I called my old Alpha. He gave me some advice, and turns out he thinks the omega is running from someone, maybe being hunted. He’s going to ask around a bit and see if he can find out anything just in case we have to act, but chances are it’ll leave soon, especially now that it knows there’s another Pack here.

“So after that stressful, yet insightful conversation, I had a mild breakdown over whether or not I should actually let you go off and kill it or if I should stop you or what. I ended up deciding that we can’t just deal with all of our problems by punching them in the face, so I went off to go find you in the woods somehow, but on the way over there – get this, right – I ran into Marco.”

“Marco?” Levi asks. “Italian, freckled, kinda cute in a wears-cardigans sort of way?”
“Yea that’s him. Anyway, turns out he’s Jean’s boyfriend.”

“Interesting,” Levi muses, with narrowed eyes. “That why his house stank of werewolf?”

“Uh huh, but there’s more. Marco knows Jean’s a werewolf. And he knows that I made Jean
submit to me. And he was on his way over to ask me to talk Jean into becoming part of my Pack.”

By this point Levi’s eyebrows are attempting to connect with his hairline. “Is it normal for the
boyfriends of werewolves to approach other werewolves on their behalf?”

“Not that I’ve heard of. I mean, it’s rare that human partners know about the wolf thing unless they
were there from the start, or they’re married or accidentally found out and decided it wasn’t a deal
breaker or whatever, but it’s even less rare that they’ll actively get involved in Pack matters, let
alone on behalf of someone else.”

“So what did you say?”

“Well I said I was a little busy – I mean I was planning on tracking you down and tackling some
sense into you or someshit – but he got all beggy and desperate and I caved. So I went with him to
Parkwood and had a lovely little chat with Jean that was entirely a shouting match between the
three of us, and—” I realise I was about to give away some pretty personal details about Jean and
Marco’s past without thinking, like a complete idiot and have to bit my tongue to stop myself.

“And?” Levi prods.

“And I don’t know if you should hear the rest,” I say, and the silence after that is awkward as hell.

“Ah,” Levi says. He knows my silence has to do with the argument of earlier and the recent
reinforcement that werewolf business is not his business. “You don’t want me getting involved
with any of this.”

“Not particularly,” I admit.

“And I supposed you won’t be keeping me up to date on any of the future stuff either?”

“Maybe,” I allow. He tilts his head. A question. I sigh. “Look, you’re a dick and I hate you a lot of
the time, alright?”

“Yes, we’ve already established this.”

“But you’re also ridiculously strong and I’d rather have you on my side if this all goes to shit,
rather than against me. I don’t want you to go running off on your own suicide mission the next
time I give you an update, but I guess it’s only fair that if this omega is being chased by something,
then you should be given a heads up. See the problem?”

“I see it.”

“So really what I’m asking is, will you cut the crap and actually listen to me or are you going to
keep pulling stunts like this?”

“You’re asking me if I can be trusted to follow your lead in future or not,” he clarifies.

“That too,” I say. He nods.

“I told you I’m sorry. I meant it. I’m not going to lie through my teeth and tell you that I’ll never be
a dick to you again, because being a dick to you is the most fun I’ve had in years, but I will work
with you. For you,” he amends quickly.

I hold his gaze for a second, until I can smell the sincerity in the air around him, and then I nod.

“All right then. I’ll keep you informed, and you’ll have my back if another Alpha comes to town in search of his rogue beta.”

“Sounds fair. I might even go so far as to offer a tentative friendship between us.”

“How generous of you,” I say, voice dripping with sarcasm. He leans a little closer to me, a smile pulling up the corners of his lips and it’s the look of a predator playing with its prey.

“Well, I’d say friendship is the next logical step here. After all, I have seen your dick.”

I take a second to register what he’s just said, and then I drop my head into my hands and groan, because of course this is my life now.

Fuck.

“I know for a fact that you have nothing to be ashamed of. Like holy wow Jaeger—”

“Oh my god Levi, stop,” I groan. “If I let you be my friend will you never mention my dick again?”

“Only if you order pizza. I’m fucking hungry after that mental picture.”

“Jesus. Fine, but only if you pay for it.”

“Why am I the one who’s paying?” he asks, sounding offended.

“Because you’re the one who’s been making my room smell like stale blood for the past half an hour. Also you ruined my day.”

“Well yea, but then I complimented your package, so...”

“Didn’t we just agree that you wouldn’t mention my dick again?” I ask, and this conversation is paining me but I’m also dangerously close to laughing.

“True, but I didn’t technically say the word dick.” He’s grinning. The fucker’s actually grinning at me. I shove him to the far end of the bed and hope he falls off it. He doesn’t, but it’s close enough that it makes me feel a little better. He stays sprawled out over the mattress and pulls his phone out of his pocket.

“Are you always this weird after you’ve fed?” I ask. He nods, but doesn’t look too happy about it.

“I have been told that it’s the only time I’m semi-bearable as an individual,” he sighs, holding the phone up to his ear. I’m guessing whoever told him that hadn’t done anything as regrettable as dropping his pants in front of the guy.

“I want Texas BBQ,” I say.

“Yes Alpha, right away Alpha,” Levi purrs, and I grab the nearest pillow and whack him in the stomach with it, making him wheeze his hello into the phone. My vengeance is sweet until he kicks me in the thigh and manages to deaden the entire limb.

When the pizza arrives it’s still dead and most probably bruised and my supernatural healing factor ain’t doing shit for me today. Levi smirks at me as I scowl and limp my way back to him and thrust
the boxes into his hands.

“Alrighty,” he sighs in contentment. “One meat feast for me, for obvious reasons—” a side eye aimed at my crotch that I don’t rise to the bait of because I’m done with his taunting “—and a Texas BBQ for the grouchy werewolf. Enjoy.”


“Kill Bill?” he suggests.

“…Acceptable.” Gratuitous violence and bloodshed, although commonplace in our lives, is still enjoyable on the big screen.

I open up my laptop and put it on and we tuck into hot food and when the first film is finished we put on the sequel and end up quoting the lines. It’s easy for a change, and a nice distraction for the bullshittery of the outside world, and when I fall asleep he’s there but when I wake up the next morning he’s gone. So are the empty pizza boxes.

Chapter End Notes

Kudos and comments are always appreciated.

Thank you all <3
In Talks

Chapter Summary

Eren receives a phone call, Levi gets personal, and Jean shows up. Again.

Things settle down.
No, seriously, they do.

I hang with Armin and Mikasa, and then Sasha and Connie, and then Armin, Mikasa, Sasha and Connie (because those four are getting along like they’ve known each other for years, and my betas are totally treating the others like Packmates… albeit Packmates who are completely ignorant of the supernatural world at large). Levi texts me at regular intervals, at first to see if my uncle’s gotten back to me yet (he has, but not with anything particularly helpful because that would just be too easy, wouldn’t it?), but then just to bitch to me about his neighbours in the city and the other students on his course.

And speaking of courses, I actually get back on track with mine. I attend lectures and drop in on a workshop and realise that in my mild panic over crazy werewolves, my exorbitantly expensive academic life has been suffering. Fancy that. Yes, it’s almost as if the pressures of being an Alpha of a brand new Pack in unfamiliar territory at the age of nineteen have somehow had a negative effect on my education. Crazy.

But I pull it together. I breathe. I relax.

And then comes the phone call.

I’ve been spending the day at Sasha and Connie’s rented house down in Trost. The sky outside is a thick, solid mass of storm clouds, and we’ve been waiting all day for them to finally break open. We were supposed to be going for a run today – let off some steam, stretch our four legs a little, you know – but the winds started to pick up and we ended up chickening out and just staying home instead, swaddled in blankets.

Sasha naps, on and off, and Connie has sole control of the remote so I have to watch what he deems worthy. (No amount of complaining can get him to change his mind.)

When my phone rings upstairs we all hear it, Sash lifting her head from Connie’s shoulder to peer up at the ceiling. None of us particularly want to go get it, but I manage to shake myself free of limbs and blankets and trudge up the stairs and into the spare room I never use.

On the screen flashes my uncle’s name, and a single drop of oh shit slips into the pit of my stomach and sets my heart a-beating and my wolf a-twitching.
“Hey, old man.” Keep it light – you don’t know that it’s bad news just yet. “How’s tricks?”

“Not good, kiddo,” comes the tired reply, and that oh shit begins to unfurl inside me. “You got a minute?”

“Yea, sure,” I say distractedly as I take the stairs back down to my betas. I know they’ve been listening in on our conversation because they’re wide-eyed and facing the door over the back of the couch when I step into the room. They’re probably picking up on my anxiety. I try to cool it a little, for their sakes.

“I’m putting you on speaker, Hannes. Go ahead.”

I put my phone down on the low coffee table and sit back on the couch, betas pressed against me on either side as Hannes begins.

“I’ve been talking to some of the Packs from out of state. South Dakota, actually. Judging by what you’ve told me about how this omega is moving, Eren, I figured Dakota would be the first logical place to check for any unusual happenings, understand?”

“Totally,” I mumble as I rack my brains to try and visualise just which Packs operate in the state of South Dakota and which are closest to us up in Minnesota.

“First off I got in touch with the girls over in Lake Traverse, seeing as they’re the largest Pack in west SD, and therefore closest to you. They’re pretty loose when it comes to territory, so although there have been a handful of omegas crossing their land, they don’t know if any of them are the one you’re dealing with. Not as informative as I had hoped, so then I tried Sioux Falls, but they had even less to tell me. No omega activity whatsoever down there. After that I figured maybe your omega was running along the northern state line, so I checked in with Standing Rock. You know how they are – they told me that if there had been an omega on their territory, it wouldn’t have made it out alive.”

“Charming,” I mutter, remembering an out-of-state Pack meeting I attended with Hannes and his Second a few years back. The delegates from Standing Rock had been there, and I had suffered from some pretty imaginative threats the whole weekend. (Turned out they weren’t fans of Alphas who submit to other Alphas, for whatever reason. Yay for me.)

“Charming, indeed,” Hannes goes on. “So I went and got in contact with Christie from Black Hills instead and she was much more helpful.”

“Black Hills?” Sasha asks when Hannes pauses for breath.

“Oldest Pack in South Dakota,” I explain. “They’ve got three Alphas each with their own betas, and take in omegas frequently. They’ve been around for just over two centuries – I’m surprised you haven’t heard of them.”

“Family Pack,” Connie says by way of explanation, and of course, now I understand. Family Packs don’t like to get involved in territory disputes or state affairs. They don’t need to. “We kept to ourselves.”

“Makes sense,” Hannes says from the other end of the line. “Black Hills also have a system set up with some of the larger Packs in the Northern half of the US. If a beta wants to – for example – go off to college, they can rest easy in the knowledge that there’ll be a welcome committee already arranged with the nearest Pack to that college. Because of this, Black Hills has a lot of connections
with other Packs across the country."

“Right,” I say. “If anyone’s going to hear anything, it’ll be them.”

“Should’ve been my first port of call after Sioux Falls,” Hannes sighs. “Would have saved me having to deal with Standing Rock and their A grade bullshit.”

I smile, knowing just how exasperated Hannes can get with the macho-animal act other Pack Alphas put on.

It is at this point that I realise Sasha is staring intently at the phone. She looks like she’s about to start demanding answers from Hannes, and the only thing stopping her is Hannes’ status as my previous Alpha. I roll my eyes and ask on her behalf; “So what did they say?"

“They said they’d had a few reports of omegas crossing state boundaries lately. Seemingly all within a week of each other.” And yea, that’s not brilliant news. Pretty alarming news, actually, but it might be of some use to us.

“And...?” I prompt.

“And Christie’s been looking into it herself. She didn’t like what she found and was reluctant enough to share this information with me, so that should give you some clue as to what you’re dealing with.”

And yea, the relatively light mood of a few seconds ago is completely gone with that admission, replaced instead with broiling anxiety as the heart of the problem is fully revealed.

“Alpha gone batshit?” I guess, but it’s not a guess. If it was anything else, Hannes would have told me the minute I picked up the phone. He wanted to ease me into this one. I’m sort of grateful for that consideration of his. My wolf, prowling at the edges of my mind, is too.

“Yes. As far as she can tell (and this is coming from another Pack who had to deal with attacks on humans from a terrified omega) it’s fresh to the game and doesn’t have control of those it’s turned.”

“What are you thinking?” I ask him, eyes shut as my wolf starts to push himself against the bars of his cage, rattled.

“You tell me,” he says, and I want to snap that this isn’t the time for a mentor session, but I crush that urge and sigh instead.

“If it’s a new Alpha and they turned someone, that power could’ve gone to their head. Would have gone to their head. I know the only thing stopping me from going off the rails and turning someone else was you, but if a newbie Alpha didn’t have Pack support or someone to show them the ropes, then sooner or later they’d lose control and anyone unlucky enough to be around when that happened would get caught up in the crossfire.”

Connie places a hand on the small of my back and I lean into the touch as I try to swallow my wolf back down and stay focused. Sasha shuffles a little closer to me.

“Anyone turned would just add to the Alpha’s power, making the situation worse than it already was. You then have a crazy, power mad Alpha, and terrified, confused betas to deal with.”

“And if a beta runs, the Alpha will sooner or later follow,” Hannes finishes for me. The anxiety, confusion, and anger in the room is sickening. I feel like opening a window.
“Right.” I swallow again and my wolf finally retreats. “Right, but we already figured this much out on our own. Knowing that a new-made Alpha is turning betas and giving chase when they run doesn’t really help us at all unless we know who these new werewolves potentially are, or who the Alpha was before they lost it. I’m going to help this omega if I can, but I need to know which Alpha I’ll be pissing off when I do.”

“Glad to see you’ve got your priorities figured,” Hannes teases, and as much as this situation isn’t the time for joking, I huff a laugh all the same because this – sitting here and talking through werewolf politics with him – feels so familiar it’s like being back home at Thomas’ place and listening to one of our betas bitch about Lucy’s Pack the next town over. It’s helping settle my wolf some, despite the unsavoury subject matter.

“So do you know?” I ask.

“Do I know who this Alpha is? No. Do I know which Pack they were from? Yes.” There’s a pause.

“Are you going to make me drag it out of you?” I ask.

“What? No, hang on, I made a note of this, I’m just trying to—aha, here it is. Okay, yes, so Christie had been in contact with a small Pack in Yellowtail, Montana, about half a year ago. They’ve been trying to establish themselves, get their name and their borders recognised – the usual. The Alpha was a born werewolf, pretty sound control, nothing pulling up any red flags for Christie, so she stopped the regular check-ins to let this new Alpha stand on her own.

“Five months ago, Christie got a call asking about what to do if one of your betas is being more challenging than usual, acting out, refusing to listen to Alpha. You know what Christie told her to do?”

“Give them an ultimatum,” I say. I know Christie’s style. She’s strong; domineering. Because of this, she has one of the largest Packs in this part of America. That means a lot of betas to be minding and fussing over and trying to keep in line. Any beta acting out under her is given a choice: “Change your ways and stay, or get out and find a new Alpha who’ll put up with your attitude.”

“Harsh, but when you’ve got as many betas as Christie does, you can’t be letting one walk all over you or they’ll all start acting like that. Quickest way an Alpha loses command is the ripple effect.” I can hear Hannes sigh on the other end of the line. “So that’s what Christie told her. She heard back from Yellowtail that the beta was out – had decided to leave and try to make it alone or find another Pack – and that the balance was back the way it should be.”

“Right, but that story of new Alpha struggling to get all her betas in line isn’t exactly unheard of,” I say. My wolf chuffs in amusement. He knows more than most. I ignore him. “What makes this one worth hearing?”

“That Alpha lost control?” Sasha guesses. “She lost control and now she’s hunting down that omega that left.”

Hannes shoots off a “Nope.”

“The Alpha made more betas to make up for the lack of one, and then lost control, and it’s one of the new betas she’s chasing down,” Connie guesses.

“Wrong again. Turns out, nobody knew anything bad had happened to that little Pack. Other than Christie, the only other werewolves that had known they were there were over in Twin Bridges,
and that's a fair distance to be making a social visit. When I started asking around for you, Eren, Christie tried to get hold of Yellowtail, only to find that she couldn't. Three months of silence isn't exactly odd considering how busy Alphas can get. Taking out the time to call up some wolf you vaguely know in the next state over when they haven't needed your help for a while is just unnecessary, right?"

“I take it, from your pause, that it would have helped a lot if Christie had taken the time to make that call?” I ask. I have a really bad feeling about this.

“’Fraid so, kiddo. Christie couldn’t get a hold of them, got through to Twin Bridges instead, and they told her that about five months ago Yellowtail got attacked by another wolf who managed to overpower the Alpha.”

There’s silence in the living room as we process that. The tv flickers, mute, on the wall opposite.

“What do you mean by ‘overpower’?” I say, eventually.

“I mean exactly that,” Hannes replies. He sounds about as grim as I feel. “A wolf walked into town, went after the Alpha, won, and then became Alpha in her place.”

“But…” Sasha begins, voice quiet and eyebrows furrowed. She smells confused and upset and my wolf whines for her. “But how could that even happen?”

“Easily enough if the Alpha wasn’t expecting it.” Hannes’ voice has a growl to it that I haven’t heard in some years. It tells me all I need to hear to click the final pieces into place.

“The omega. The one she told to leave. It came back, probably put on an act to make her show it some pity and kindness, as if it wanted to rejoin the Pack, and then went for her throat when she let her guard down.” Hannes doesn’t deny it. I feel sick. Sasha starts whining and I automatically wrap an arm around her shoulders. Pull her closer to me. Connie’s hands are curled into fists on his knees.

“How could anyone do that?” he asks through gritted teeth.

“Werewolves are just humans with predator instincts,” Hannes explains. He’s explained this one to me in the past, too. “It’s why Alphas have to be super careful about who they turn. If you turn someone with a trauma or a disorder that causes them to see reality in a different way, for example, or someone who has a hard time controlling their temper, then that will only be amplified and fed upon by their wolf. A new Alpha can easily make a mistake and turn someone unwell or unstable. It happens a lot more than you think, actually. The point is – werewolves act on their impulses a lot more aggressively than humans do. An omega festering a grudge and cooking up a revenge plan is, sadly, entirely too possible in our world.”

“But what happened to the Pack?” Sasha asks.

“Gone,” Hannes states, and my brain hits that word like a wall.

“Gone?” I sound incredulous. “What do you mean?”

“I mean, there were four betas in the Yellowtail Pack, and Twin Bridges couldn’t find a single one of them when they went looking. No Alpha, either.”

“They ran and the new Alpha gave chase?” I supply. My wolf is thrashing within the bonds of my control.
“Most likely. But that’s not the worrying part.”

“How is that not the worrying part?!” Connie exclaims, jumping up from the couch. I can smell the rage rolling off him, and I’m on my feet a second later, pushing myself between him and the coffee table – between him and Hannes, essentially – teeth bared as I let my wolf take a little control now.

“Calm down,” I tell Connie. He glares back at me, eyes golden and defiant.

“I can’t,” he growls.

“You need to.”

It’s simple.

If he doesn’t calm down, this room is about to get completely trashed. His wolf is pushing through and if he loses control it’s going to wreck whatever’s in sight.

I put a hand on his chest and let my eyes flood gold.

“If you can’t, then you need to go outside.”

We stand there for what feels like minutes, but isn’t. It’s just so tense, and I can feel my wolf coiling its strength, ready to snap into command should the situation slip out of my control. He’s almost urging Connie to not back down here.

But Connie goes. His teeth are sharp enough to score bone, and there’s a look in his eyes that I have never seen on calm, certain Connie before, but he backs off and heads for the door. I wait until he’s gone and I’ve heard the back door shut behind him before I push my wolf back down.

When I turn around, Sasha is staring at the doorway her boyfriend just left through, looking so incredibly lost and vulnerable.

“Hey, it’s alright,” I comfort her, sitting back down beside her again. “He just needs some space to get his thoughts together, and he’ll be fine.”

“I’ve never seen him act like that,” she admits, eyes still wide as saucers. I try not to think about that too much, although now my wolf is barking at me to go after him, make sure he’s fine, make sure he hasn’t run. I take a moment to listen, and I can hear his footsteps outside in the grass. Measured, steady, close. He’s pacing.

“He’ll be fine,” I repeat, as much to myself as to Sasha.

“Was that Connie?” Hannes asks, and I almost jump out of my skin because for a second there I forgot the phone was still on.

I clear my throat. “Yes—uh, yea. He wasn’t too happy with what you said.” And then, because for the life of me I can’t remember, I ask; “What did you just say?”

“Something about the missing Pack members not being the worst part of this story?”

“Right.” I swallow and close my eyes. “Right. Go ahead.”

Hannes hesitates. “Eren… if you would rather do this another time—”

“No,” I say quickly. “No, I need to know this now.”
“If your betas are uncomfortable—”

“I’m fine.” This time it’s Sasha that interrupts my old Alpha. I turn to her in surprise (I can’t help it) and she raises her eyebrows at me. “We need to know what we’re dealing with, don’t we? If we can help that omega, we need to hear the rest of the story.”

A wave of pride surges through me at that, and I try not to beam too much, because this is really not the time to be smiling.

“Fire away,” I tell Hannes.

“There were other missing peoples’ reports from around the same time,” he says, and just like that my smile drops. Shit. “A couple hiking that were never found, and a girl of fifteen walking home after band practice.”

“Shit.”

“There’s more,” Hannes warns me. “There was also an ‘incident’ the day after. A double homicide.”

“Oh fuck,” I breathe, and I’m wishing I hadn’t asked, hadn’t told Hannes to keep going. I reach over and take Sasha’s hand and she grips mine tight.

“A man and a young boy found brutally murdered in their home. Wife gone. That’s the information Christie managed to get when she asked.”

Fuck fuck fuck.

My mind starts spinning through the possibilities: the Alpha attacked the family altogether, the husband and child died, but the woman got away only to be tracked down by said Alpha; the Alpha turned the wife and the wife killed her own family when her wolf slipped out of her control; one of the other betas lost control after the stress of everything that was happening, snapped, and spilt blood.

“There was a lot of the wife’s blood found at the scene, Eren.”

“Crap,” I say, and I drag out the syllable as long as I can. I rub my face with the hand Sasha isn’t currently strangling.

“Did she get away?” Sasha asks. I don’t know how to answer her.

“Most likely, if it was the Alpha that did it, she would have turned and maybe survived. Although if you can count that as survival…” Hannes trails off into silence. I let it lie for a while as I sift through my thoughts and Sasha does the same. Connie still treads rings in the garden. I wonder if he’s listening in, but when Hannes speaks next, I pray to the gods that he’s not.

“Eren,” my uncle says. “This woman was pregnant.”

“It was awful,” I tell Levi later. We’re sitting in the campus library at half ten. The world outside is completely black, moon obscured by thick clouds. The vampire sits across from me, brow creased delicately as he listens attentively to what I have to tell him.
“I can’t imagine,” he murmurs, and for what it’s worth, he sounds sincere.

“It just kept getting worse,” I groan, dropping my head forward onto the table top with a decently loud bang. There’s no one else on this floor to shush me, so I don’t give a fuck.

I start very much giving a fuck a second later when I feel fingers push into my hair and begin to massage the back of my head.

“What are doing?” I ask, in a slightly-muffled tone from the table top. Levi hums.

“I’m petting you.”

“Well stop,” I say as I sit up, resolutely ignoring the whine of complaint that my wolf throws my way. Levi’s eyes are wrinkled a little at the edges with a smile he’s hiding behind a hand. I narrow mine in suspicious irritation.

“You’ve had a stressful day.” Levi tilts his head. “Wouldn’t you like me to relieve some of that stress?”

“This isn’t a game, Levi,” I growl, more than a little annoyed, and (although I won’t admit it to him) starting to feel slightly flustered. “Eight people are missing, one of them – if not all of them – are out of control and dangerous – and two people died. Why are you making this into a joke?”

Levi sighs and places both his palms on the table in front of him, looking down at his nails. They’re painted red tonight.

“You forget that death and missing persons’ cases are something I have been intimately familiar with in the past. Or are you really that ignorant of the myths about my kind?” He looks up at me from beneath dark lashes, and I swear I see the colour of his eyes flicker. I blink.

“You don’t kill people,” I state. He sits back with a quick smile that makes my wolf nervous.

“No, of course not. Modern forensics have become far too intrusive for it to be even a little bit worth it, and besides that, I don’t need to actually drain a whole human in order to keep fed. Things were different in the past, but the past is now a long long way behind me.”

“Right.” I clear my throat. TMI, much? “Good.”

He inclines his head in a regal manner and I kick his shin under the table because that was not something he should be acting all smug about. He doesn’t rise to the bait and retaliate, which is new.

“Then what happened?” he queries.

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“He was born a werewolf,” Levi murmurs, and I can’t remember if I told him this, but I figure I probably must have at some point. I nod. Swallow.

“He had his wolf since birth, although he couldn’t let it out until they were both strong enough. But it’s different when you’re turned. The wolf exists as part of your Alpha at first. It’s weird and uncomfortable, and I guess that first shift is supposed to be the moment you sever the supernatural umbilical cord, but if you don’t know what you’re doing…?” I grimace. “If you don’t click with your wolf—if you can’t control it, it keeps being fed by its Alpha’s thoughts and instincts.”

“Crazy Alpha equals crazy betas,” Levi says, and I can see it’s all making sense to him now.

“Exactly,” I mutter. I want to cry.

“Now imagine being a hiker out on a walk, far from home, deep in the woods, right? Suddenly this… monster appears out of the darkness, attacks you. What do you do?”

“If I was human?” Levi has to clarify, and I realise it didn’t occur to me that I’ve been sat here talking to a natural born killer who’s never been afraid of wandering at night. “I would run.”

“So now you’re lost. Maybe separated from your partner, too. You don’t know if what got you got them as well, but you can’t go back to look for them or you risk getting attacked a second time. Now, usually, if the bite is asked for and granted by a friendly Alpha who knows what they’re doing, the new wolf won’t want to take control until the next full moon when it can run with its Pack.” I pause to make sure Levi’s following me. He nods, frowning once more. I wonder if he’s ever been given this kind of information before.

“This passivity is pretty much due to the control and strength of the Alpha and the rest of the Pack. Werewolf Packmates have this sort of connection to one another through their Alpha which basically means that the more wolves in the Pack, the more stable the Pack as a whole is. Follow? Okay. Now an out of control Alpha randomly turning people? Yea, no, stability is totally fucked. Any new wolves will be picking up on that and wanting to shift as soon as possible. Panic response, defence mechanism, or just the pull of their Alpha, we don’t know why they do it exactly, but it’s always awful and unavoidable.

“For a couple of hikers lost, wounded, and separated, there’s no chance that will end well. Once their wolves wake up to the world around them, they’ll shift and they’ll completely lose it.”

I have to stop because my knuckles are white and my nails are digging into my palms. It’s taking a lot of deep breaths to stay calm myself, right now. My wolf is puffed up, all righteous fury and protective frenzy and I know I’ll be going to bed with the mother of all headaches tonight.

“And the kid?” Levi asks, voice rumbling with an emotion I can’t quite pinpoint. As usual, I can’t smell a thing on him. “What about the teenager?”

I don’t answer him for a moment. I sit back and turn to look out of the big glass window at the black sky and the shining city, and think.

“I don’t know what it’s like for teenage werewolves who have grown up in a Pack. I don’t know how puberty or hormones affect instincts or control, naturally. I do know what it’s like getting turned as a teenager, though.”

I have to stop. My wolf is choking me, and the memories of the panic. The blind, hot, angry panic that floods through me as I lay there on the kitchen floor, blood soaking my shirt, hands shaking as I reach out, reach for her, reach for—
“Eren.” Levi snaps me out of it. I look at him and have to blink away the past before I can properly focus on his face. His eyes are trained on me, and they usually hold some kind of challenge within them, but not right now. Right now I don’t know what they hold. Levi says, “Tell me,” and I do.

“It’s terrifying,” comes out as a whisper. I clear my throat and try to work my way through the rest of the sentence with at least a little dignity and strength. I’m an Alpha, for Christ’s sake. “I had no idea what was happening – not for a good few days. See, the thing about being a werewolf is that all of a sudden it’s not just you in your head anymore. You feel the teeth burst through your flesh and it’s agony.” I laugh, and it’s only on the right side of hysterical. “God, it hurts so fucking much. I got bitten by my friend’s dog when I was younger, had to have stiches. I thought that was painful, but I had no clue what real pain actually felt like.

“See, I think it’s the wolf spreading through you. I don’t know a fucking thing about how it actually happens, but what it feels like is your whole body is being forced through razor wire starting with your skin and then your veins and working inwards and upwards to your heart and then your head. I think I passed out, because I remember opening my eyes and I was on the floor but—I—there’s no memory of how I got there or how long I was lying there, just trying to breathe through it all.

“But there you are, just lying there, thinking that it’s finally over – you survived whatever the fuck that was – and then you feel this thing shift at the back of your head and nothing is the same again.” I run a hand over my face and look up at Levi. He’s leaning forward across the table now, absolutely hooked. I can’t tell what he’s thinking, and I have no clue what he’s feeling, but I doubt it’s sympathy from the way his lips are parted and his eyes narrowed. He looks… hungry. His tongue flickers out as I watch.

“What is it like?” he asks. Breathes the words between us and I take them in and they settle in my lungs, tasting like temptation as my wolf watches through my eyes.

“It’s…” I struggle to find the right words. How the hell do I describe the feeling of having the literal force of an animal living at the edges of my consciousness? Having all of that power just crackling away in the heart of me, but knowing that if I ever wanted to use it I risk losing sight of what’s really me and what isn’t; the price being signing off my body and letting something else take the wheel as I sit back and watch and hope it goes how I want it to.

In the end, I just whisper, “It’s big.”

Levi tilts his head.

“It’s just so goddamn big, Levi. I don’t know how else to describe it. There’s this other part of you that isn’t really you anymore, and you’re aware that it’s there and you can kind of communicate with it, tell it what you want it to do, but at the same time it’s so… so wild and uncontrollable, and you know that once it’s got command of you there’s going to be nothing you can do to hold it back.

“That’s the problem with the shift, I think. For new wolves, I mean. When you first turn, you don’t want to trust it. It goes against everything you know about yourself. It feels like this hideous, invasive pressure at the back of your head, shadowing every thought, every movement. You want it gone, but of course there’s no way of getting rid of it, and when it starts to break out of its cage and slide out of your mind and into the rest of your body, you fight it and fight it and fight it with all you’ve got. Every little part of you that’s still human is screaming at you that this is the thing that almost killed you, and now it’s going to finish off the job. It’s terrifying.”

Levi looks like he’s practically holding his breath now. His grey eyes are wide, his supernatural side showing in the slitted pupils. It should feel unnerving, having this creature gazing at me so
rapturously. It doesn’t. Even my wolf is silent when faced with those eyes tonight.

“I guess it’s right, though,” I offer.

“Right?” Levi blinks and his pupils are round again. “What’s right?”

“The wolf is killing you on that first shift. It’s wiping away every little bit of your humanity and replacing it with this heated mixture of man and wolf that’s not one thing or the other. It’s painful and nauseating trying to figure out afterwards what parts of you are still you. For a teenager, it’s horrendous.

“Young kids getting turned either won’t shift, or if they do, they won’t know enough about themselves and the world for it to change their perspectives much. They haven’t lived long enough as human to know what being human is all about. An adult getting turned knows who they are, and likely have for a while. They’re got their feet firmly set on a ground that they recognise. Having this other presence invade their bodies and settle in there for the long run isn’t as daunting or as life destroying as it might have been ten years ago, because they already have a life built and they can think through things logically or whatever.

“But being a teenager and getting turned… It’s self-identity hell. Your teenage years are when you’re supposed to discover yourself, right?” I ask.

“I grew up in the 1600’s as the affluent son of a vampiric French aristocrat, but sure,” Levi deadpans. I file that little titbit away for later analysis, and continue as if he hadn’t spoken because unpacking that right now is so not an option.

“Like I said; self-discovery. The average teenager goes through “phases”, as adults like to call them, and some of them you know right away you made a mistake with, but some of them you keep at until you’re well into your adult life. Music, film, sports, fashion, you mess around with these things to see which best fits you, because for the first time in your life you’re getting to make your own decisions for yourself. No parents walking you through it, just the gentle influence of culture and society and whatever the hell you’re watching on YouTube.

“Now, if you get bitten by a crazy Alpha werewolf and find yourself being forced to accept that you’re part of a world you hadn’t seriously thought could actually exist, that fucks you up pretty bad. Suddenly your identity has been decided for you, and it’s got glowing eyes and teeth sharper then knives. You endure a full body transition once a month that you barely remember when you wake up miles from home, naked, and covered in dirt and blood. It’s a nightmare.”

“Sounds it.”

“And that’s just the logistics of it. Remember how I said the first shift is like cutting the supernatural umbilical cord? Well if you’re not aware that that’s what’s happening, and are fighting it every step of the way, that cord doesn’t get cut. It stays. You’re a stubborn, angry, petrified teenager supernaturally tethered to a pissed off, out of control Alpha werewolf and with every forced shift that bond remains and makes everything so much worse.”

“Shit,” Levi says.

“Shit,” I echo.

It is.

It was.
It always will be.

I wonder, briefly, how it must be to be born a werewolf. To have that bond between your wolf and your mother or father for the first dozen years of your life, and then for it to sever naturally with your first shift. It must be heaven compared to what I went through – what that poor teenager likely went through. I’ll have to ask Connie about it some time.

“How long can that last for?” Levi asks.

I hum. “For me it was almost two months.”

“Jesus.” He sits back heavily in his chair, just staring at me. “And it’s like something crawling inside your body, killing you slowly, all that time?”

“Yes, pretty much.” I hope he doesn’t push too far with this one, because now my wolf is starting to complain. “But it stops if you have help, or you can get away from that Alpha and figure it out for yourself. Personally, I had help. There was an Alpha nearby who found me and brought me back from that edge—” I don’t mention anything about how I was actually dealing with the fucked up mental state of being a new Alpha at the time, because the less Levi knows about that the better “—and since then I’ve had a Pack around me, helping to balance me out.”

“If… Jean?” Levi raises an eyebrow and I nod that yes, that is the new wolf’s name. “If Jean was still an omega, would he eventually become like that?”

“Possibly. Obviously, he has that connection to his own wolf that a newly turned werewolf wouldn’t, so his control would be better and he’d last longer, but…” I sigh. I’ve been doing that a lot tonight. “Very few wolves can survive without a Pack for long, and those that do would argue that, after a time, it ceases being survival. For Jean, I think that eventually the nature of the wolf would have torn apart his human side and he would have reached a point where he wouldn’t know himself, or wouldn’t be able to come back to himself after the shift.”

“I thought you said that the human side gets extinguished?” Levi questions, and I appreciate his phrasing, because “extinguished” definitely sounds better than “killed” or “eradicated”.

“It’s—um, difficult to explain unless you’ve experienced it?” I hazard. “Who I was before I got bitten isn’t the same boy that woke up after the first time I shifted. I can tell you that without a doubt. It changed me, it changed how I viewed the world, I guess. Not in some deep soul-searching way, but I was just attuned to different things after. I have a wolf’s senses now. Same with instincts. Physically I’m human, but I’m borrowing from my wolf side, and when my wolf takes over he has access to the human parts of me, too. He knows my mind.”

Good grief.

“That sounds…” Levi purses his lips and tilts his head and I supply the words I think he’s probably looking for.

“Like complete and utter bullshit? Hippy crap? Like I’m talking outta my ass?” I crook a smile and he mirrors it.

“Actually, I was going to say mind-blowing, but I like those options better.”

“Thanks.”

“Any time.”
There’s a comfortable silence between us for a moment and neither of us really feels the need to fill it. Levi’s probably working through that encyclopaedia of facts I just dumped all over him. I take my time counting up to and back from ten and soaking in the view of the dark night outside.

After a while, Levi asks; “And what about the woman?” When I just look at him, he prompts me further. “The woman that was pregnant. How would being bitten affect her?”

“You mean how would it fuck her up?” I ask. I push the air out of my lungs and put my head in my hands. “Christ, I don’t even know, Levi. Werewolf pregnancies are complicated things, and no one in their right mind would ever consider giving the bite to somebody who was already pregnant. I honestly don’t know how it would change things.”

I look back up at him and he’s frowning, eyes fixed on the table top between us, worrying his bottom lip with his white, white teeth. His eyes flicker up to meet mine and I feel caught out for a moment until he says, “Vampire pregnancies are likewise difficult things.” That pulls me up short.

“Vampires can get pregnant?” I ask, and sure I must sound like an idiot to him (and I clearly do, if that facial expression is anything to go by) but honestly, it hadn’t occurred to me that that was a thing that could happen. To convey this point, I push onwards. “I thought you guys were dead or something. Like, undead. Doesn’t your heart stop beating? How would a vampire even get it up to get another vamp pregnant? Can you get pregnant from a human? Well not you, obviously, but a female vampire. I imagine vampire sex would be really detrimental to a human’s physical wellbeing.”

By this point, Levi is looking exceedingly unimpressed in that way he is exceedingly good at.

“Do I look dead to you?” he sasses. I bite my tongue to quell the urge to reply well your personality is pretty lifeless and instead answer with a nice, safe, “No?”

His eye twitches. I have about .52 of a second to regret that question mark before he leans across the table, grabs my wrist, and presses my hand palm down against his chest.

“Tell me what you feel, Eren,” he says. My wolf freezes.

“I feel uncomfortable,” I reply honestly. His eyebrows draw down into something nearing scowl-territory and I hurry to correct myself. “I feel your chest.”

Levi’s eyebrows raise, as if to encourage me to elaborate. I try again.

“I feel your muscular chest?”

He tuts, tightens his hold on my wrist, and presses my palm down a tad harder. “Try once more.”

Oh, I think, as it finally dawns on me what he is getting at.

“I feel your heartbeat.”

“Very good!” he mock praises. (It’s my turn to scowl now, and I do so without reserve.) “And what does a heartbeat signify?”

“That you are alive,” I say, with as little inflection as possible. My wolf huffs in amusement.

“Correct once again.” Levi finally lets go of my wrist and sits back in his seat. “Pretty sure I’ve already told you, but not all vampires have died in order to become the way they are.”
“What’s that supposed to mean?” I ask.

“It means that I’m about to tell you a little something in return for that very heartfelt hour I just sat through.”

“Wha—” I start to complain, but he cuts me off with a wink, and I swallow my irritation. Let it slide. He’s about to divulge valuable information about the process of becoming a vampire. Three months ago I didn’t even know that vampires existed.

I need to hear this.

Levi leans back in his seat, arm slung over the back of the chair, legs re-crossing under the table. I let him get comfortable. I can recognise the need to take up space in order to make myself feel safe.

“Vampires can be born, just like werewolves. We can be turned, too. I’m not really too sure what the process of being turned feels like – it never happened to me, I was born this way.”

(Lady Gaga, unbidden, begins to play at the back of my mind. I try to tune it out as best I can and focus on Levi.)

“As far as I’m aware, being a vampire is no different from being a human, only humans are slower and more easily damaged, and tire quicker, and generally make more noise doing just about anything.” I give him a look. “The fact is, it’s not like how you’ve explained being a werewolf to me. There isn’t another presence in my mind that makes me do weird shit under the light of the full moon, at any rate. I have different instincts, I know that. (Doubt any human has a need to drink blood once every month.) But what I’m getting at here, is that I’m just me. Entirely.

“I know the instincts and the extra strength can take some adjusting to for new-borns. I grew up in a vampire-rich household so I had all the guidance I needed in that respect, but the books and the films about vampires being bloodthirsty mass murderers? They’re all based on the fuck ups of new-borns.”

I open my mouth to say that “fuck ups” is a pretty shitty way of looking at mass murder, but Levi raises a hand and cuts me off before I even get started.

“Sorry, not “fuck ups” – grievous crimes. Better?”

I nod.

He continues: “The myth that vampires need to drain a whole human dry to live is bullshit. Complete crap. Have you ever tried drinking five litres of something in one go? You’d drown yourself if you did. No; we only need a pint every few weeks, usually on a monthly basis, and we sure as hell don’t binge. (You can get blood poisoning from doing that.) For new-borns, the feeding cycle is shorter, of course. Their bodies are going through a huge transition or whatever, so they need more energy and vampires syphon that from live blood. I don’t actually know all that much about that side of vampire physiology – it’s not like there are many people going around doing research.” He pauses. Tilts his head. A smile slips its way onto his lips and his expression softens. “Actually, there is one person I know of who was always interested in what makes a vampire a vampire. She was just this crazy lady when I was growing up, and I couldn’t figure out why my Father put up with her being there all the time. Now, I guess it’s because he was curious about what she might find out, too.”

He’s silent for a while, thinking about the past, and I don’t prompt him to continue. There’s
something about that smile on his face that I don’t want to chase away just yet. It’s fond, I realise. I’ve never seen him look fond before. I wonder where his family is now. My wolf looks at this man through my eyes, and I know he’s evaluating, adding it all up. Lowering the Risk Factor.

Levi shakes himself out of it, and his smile is gone when he refocuses on me.

“My mother was a born vampire, too. I guess you could say I’m from old, old blood. From what I can remember of my siblings’ births, a vampire pregnancy is the same length as a human pregnancy. The only difference is that a vampire has a bloodlust that kicks into overdrive when they’re feeling threatened and/or stressed.” Levi leans forward in his seat, arms crossed on the table top, eyes fixed on a point on my chest but clearly seeing something else entirely. “I can remember they had to keep maman confined to her rooms close to the birth. I was still too young to truly understand why at the time, but it’s because she would go out hunting and it was a threat to our safety. She went into a blood frenzy, basically, and the last thing any of us wanted was for the city to go on a witch hunt.

“So they locked her in. I could hear her screaming – real animalistic screaming – during the night. When the babies were born, she took weeks to calm back down and become herself again. She wouldn’t even let father near the babes.” Levi presses his lips together and rubs at the palm of his right hand. He clears his throat.

“The main difference between those who were born like this, and those who became like this, is that born vampires are emotionless creatures. We can feel, sure, but it isn’t—” he stops and searches for the right phrasing. “Well, I don’t feel emotions like you do, Eren. I feel what my instincts make me feel, and everything else is inconsequential. Hunger, anger, fear, exhilaration. Those I feel when I need to. Boredom, too, although that particular emotion has been my life-long companion.” His lips quirk into a rueful half-smile and I find myself mirroring it. I don’t want to say anything. I don’t want to break this spell of honesty and revelation. He sounds so old as he sits there and recounts all these things to me.

“What I’m trying to convey, here,” Levi says, “is that when a born vampire feels anything, it is because some innate part of us says that we must. When a born vampire goes into a blood frenzy, when they lash out at those closest and most loyal to them, when they feel such all-consuming anger and need like maman did, without respite and without any way to control it themselves, it is serious. The riot of emotions and instincts present in a vampire pregnancy caused my mother – a seven hundred year old being who had perfect control over herself every other day of the year – to become something completely foreign.”

He looks at me, those grey eyes piercing, and my wolf is beating the words no emotion against the walls of my mind like a drum. Is that why I can hardly smell it on him? Is that why I can rarely tell what he’s thinking?

I gaze right back at him and try to supress the shiver that wants to crawl its way up my spine. Just how inhuman – how capable of being monstrous – is he?

“I suppose it makes it easy to prey on people if you can’t feel remorse,” I say, and goddamn nearly kick myself as soon as the words leave my mouth.

Levi, however, laughs. Low and husky, I realise I like the sound of it. I wonder if he really found that funny, or if he’s just pretending.

“You suppose right,” he says. “It’s probably why we’ve evolved this way, just as I’m sure there are certain supernatural abilities you have that are a result of specialist evolution. Now, Eren, we can discuss this to your heart’s content later. My point, that you seem to have missed completely, is
much more pressing, wouldn’t you agree?”

“Depends on what your point is,” I say, trying to think.

“My point,” Levi says with a tut, “is that if a vampire with as much control as my mother could completely lose it during a pregnancy, just how badly would a newbie werewolf tied to an out of control Alpha be affected by a pregnancy?”

That question hits me like a bucket of ice water.

“Oh.”

“Yes. Oh.”

“…You may have a point,” I concede.

“I usually do,” Levi says with a grin, and I notice that his teeth are all fangs now. His lips seal, and when they part again, his teeth are once more human and unthreatening. The transition is so quick that I would probably think I had imagined it if it wasn’t for the smug-as-shit smirk on his face. He says, “I also have excellent control.”

“How old are you?” I asked, and it definitely doesn’t come out strained, nope not even a little.

“Old enough to know a thing or two,” Levi answers with a wink, and this time I do kick him under the table. He laughs out right at me, and I can feel my wolf confusedly trying to work out how we should be responding to that. I take the decision out of his hands and stick out my tongue.

“You’re a dick,” I inform him.

“And you’re rude for asking such a personal question,” Levi counters.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” I say with much sarcasm. “I didn’t realise that talking about how you were born wasn’t personal.”

Levi shrugs. “Knowing the details surrounding my birth doesn’t give you anything you can use against me. But a vampire’s age can be used against them, so on that front you’re not getting a thing out of me.” He leaves it at that. ‘That’ meaning: he leaves me with more questions than I started with. Which is just great. Because it’s not like I have a curious streak the size of Texas or anything, no.

“It’s getting late,” I say, instead. Levi glances at the window and the darkened world outside and hums his agreement.

“Time for this werewolf to go to bed?” he guesses.

“Something like that,” I mutter, thinking of the reading I have to do for tomorrow that I really should have done sooner but oh fuckin’ well.

“Well then,” Levi says as he stands. He brushes his palms off against his pants and checks his phone. “Let’s get you home.”

“Do you miss them?” I ask him as we’re leaving the library building.
He’s looking at the moon as the clouds shift in front of it. “Miss who?” he asks, absently.

“Your family.”

Levi’s gaze drops and a shadow passes across his face.

I know it’s none of my business. I know that. And if he shuts me down and takes off, then so be it. But before today I didn’t even know that vampires could have families, and Levi’s made no mention of his up til now. How long has he been away from home?

Eventually, he turns to face me. He’s smiling, but I can smell the bitter scent of sorrow in the air and I know what that means. I’ve felt that sorrow. It means he isn’t just far from home – his home is gone.

I remember what Levi said about vampires and emotions, and I understand that he can’t block this out. He has to feel this.

“So, Eren,” he says, his voice so gentle and so old and so tired that my heart almost breaks for him.

I nod, and I hope it conveys that I mean I understand – really understand. He gestures ahead of us and we both begin to walk along the path that leads to my dorm building.

“What happened to them?” I ask, and I know I should stop talking, but then again Levi would have expected that I have a shit ton of questions and if he didn’t want to talk, he would have made that clear. I hold my breath and hope he doesn’t snap at me.

When he speaks, it’s with less emotion than before. “They died.” He shoves his hands into his pockets. “More accurately, they were ripped apart.”

“Ripped apart?” I echo, alarmed by the wording.

“Yes,” Levi confirms. He doesn’t look at me as he continues; “My family were ripped apart by werewolves. Every last one of them.”

It’s a long night of trying to read and not think about what Hannes and Levi both told me, and then failing miserably and curling up in a ball of worry beneath my sheets. In the morning, when the sun wakes me in a rare moment of visibility, my phone is flashing at me.

I have a voicemail.

It’s from Hannes.

His familiar voice filters through the phone to me: “Hi Eren, I know it’s early for you, but I just wanted to let you know that Thomas is on his way up to Trost. Your situation is a lot more temperamental than we originally feared, and I know it’s not my place to tell you what you should do, but I think you could definitely benefit from an extra set of paws on this one.” There’s a brief pause as something indistinct is shouted in the background, and then; “Plus, Thomas has missed you like crazy. Call me when you get the chance, kid.”

Click. End of message.
I lower my phone onto the pillow beside my head and stare up at the ceiling as I think that through.

Thomas is coming here. Thomas is coming here. He’s coming to help me deal with a terrified, out-of-control omega that could be anything from a runaway teenager to a pregnant woman whose entire family was brutally murdered. Thomas, my uncle’s Second, is headed to Trost right now to help me deal with an omega and the possibility that a deranged Alpha is tracking them.

“I need to do something,” I mumble.

*What?* “I need to get up.”

*Why?* “Because I need to call Hannes and make sure I heard that correctly.”

*Why do you think you haven’t?* “Because Thomas is the Second in a fairly large Pack several states away who has much better things to be doing with his time than travelling halfway across the country to help me.”

*But you were a part of his Pack. You’re family.* “And now I’m an Alpha of my own Pack and he’ll be deferring to me and I’m not too sure how I feel about that right now. It’s a lot of responsibility. Running around the woods on a full moon is one thing, but accepting a high-ranking member of another Pack into your territory is something else entirely. Especially when so much shit is happening.”

Okay, so get up.

I get up.

My phone rings.

It’s Mikasa.

“Are you going to the gym today or are you planning on sleeping until noon?” she asks.

“Good morning to you, too, Mikasa,” I say with a yawn. I hear her chewing her gum over the phone line.

“Armin’s driving us,” she tells me. “I haven’t managed to convince him to actually join us for a workout yet, but I think this is progress.”

“Armin doesn’t need to workout,” I say as I pull on fresh boxers one-handed and try not to trip and die. “He’s skinny as hell.”

“Exactly!” Mikasa hisses. “He’s too skinny. Boy needs to beef up if he wants a girlfriend.”

I snort. “To be fair, I think Armin would much rather just focus on his grades than spend hours at the gym in an attempt to attract a mate.”

I hear Mikasa’s gum pop.

“I was afraid that might be the case. Ah well. Can’t fault a girl for trying,” she sighs. I snort, and then fall flat on my ass because sweatpants aren’t kind to the distracted.

“Did you just fall flat on your ass?” Mikasa asks.

“Yep. Take note of the pain I endure for you.”
I grin and grab my gym bag. “Yes boss.”

We stay at the gym for an hour, and by that time Armin is lying on the floor prophesising death. Mikasa and I could keep going, our competitive natures now at full strength, but we take pity on our fair-haired friend and carry him back to his car, because apparently all the muscles in his legs stopped working after watching us exercise.

“I guess you’ll have to drive, Eren,” Mikasa says, with something suspiciously close to relief in her voice. Armin perks up immediately.

“No, I’m fine to drive,” he assures her.

“But your legs…” Mikasa tries.

“Feel much better now, thank you,” Armin says as he fishes his keys out of my sports bag and unlocks his ride. As he slides into the driver’s seat, Mikasa throws me a look that promises my death, either by her hand or Armin’s driving. I shrug. I’ve already learnt not to argue with the guy.

I get about as far as opening the trunk when the unmistakable feeling of someone watching me knocks that plan clean outta the water. If I were a wolf right now, the hackles on the back of my neck would be dancing the fucking cancan. However. As I am currently in human form, the best I can do is turn around and use my very human eyes (thatdefinitelyarenotglowingrightnow) to scan the surrounding area for the lurker.

By the cluster of trees at the far end of the parking lot, I spot him.

Jean.

A moody, broody, lurking Jean, by the looks of things.

I consider (briefly) as I trudge on over, whether or not that scowl on his face is as a direct result of any negative feelings towards me, and whether or not said negative feelings might manifest themselves in aggression and/or violence. And then I’m standing right in front of him and he’s shifting his weight from one foot to the other and looking somewhat pained, as if he’s made a mistake by waiting for me to cross the parking lot to be within common human speaking distance.

“Jean,” I acknowledge, by way of greeting.

He grunts.

Great start.

“Can I help you?”

He shrugs.
Is that a no?

I honestly don’t know what to say, because I’m pretty sure the last time we met he basically told me to fuck off, but my wolf is offering me the tried and trusted “follow your instincts” route out of this awkward standoff, so I adjust my Alpha Authority Levels and say; “Come on, we were just going to make lunch. You can chat to Armin for a bit and take your time to decide how you want to say whatever it is you came all the way over here to say.”

I even throw in a smile before I begin the walk back to my dorm building, grabbing my kit from Armin’s car and locking it up like a good friend on the way.

Miraculously, Jean follows.

Lunch is held round a freshly scrubbed kitchen table in our slightly cluttered kitchen, and comprises of bacon sandwiches, strawberry laces, and a healthy side of salad that’s only a couple days past its use-by-date. Mikasa turns her nose up at the lettuce and steals Armin’s tomatoes when he’s not looking.

Jean sits across from me and doesn’t make eye contact with me once; electing instead to focus his attentions on Armin and their mutual adoration for Marco. They talk about sports and Armin’s photography, and Jean asks whether Mikasa has ever thought of modelling and immediately backpedals like a deer trying to cross a frozen lake when he sees the look on Mikasa’s face.

“My modelling career begins when this world burns,” she says, monotone. Armin laughs and then explains to Jean about what happened the last time Hannah took Mikasa shopping, whilst I pull immature faces at my friend to make her crack a smile. It works, of course, because I am a Master at face pulling.

It’s nice, sitting round a table with these two amazing humans, the three of us freely teasing each other as Jean sits opposite and tentatively joins in, still testing the water around these people he’s only met a handful of times. I start to think that maybe this might work with him – that he’ll integrate with the Pack easier if he realises Armin and Mikasa are a part of it.

And then Mikasa’s phone rings and it’s her mother calling and she has to take this, so Armin offers to do dishes if I’ll clean up after dinner, and that rather neatly leaves me with nothing to do but to face the werewolf in the room. So I mumble some excuse to Armin, stand, and gesture for Jean to follow me.

In the privacy of my room, I feel like I can breathe a little better, although if Jean’s tensed shoulders are anything to go by, I’d say he ain’t feelin’ it.

“Alright,” he begins, before I can get a word in. “I’ve got to say some stuff, so just shut up and listen.”

My wolf doesn’t like it, but I accept his terms.

“First things first, the only reason I’m here is because Marco’s been on my case all week about coming to see you. So I’m not doing you any favours by being here, alright? Just so we’re clear – I’m here because Marco asked.” He’s pacing back and forth, a frown on his face and he taps the fingers of one hand against his thigh. I make my stance as open and unthreatening as I know how, trying to exude a calmness I hope he’ll pick up on as he paces.
“Secondly,” he continues, “you should know that I’m not at university to get involved in a ton of supernatural crap. I don’t want to be a part of any Pack, alright? You seem nice enough, but I’m done obeying an Alpha. I want to be my own wolf. I’ve got Marco, and I’m paying a shitcrazy amount of money for this education so I can have a good life with him. I don’t want you dragging me into any Pack war or what the hell ever it is you’ve got going on. And I know something’s going on,” he says, pointing a finger at me. I raise an eyebrow. “Because there’s always something going on with you Alphas.” He seems angry. I can smell the resentment and the hurt musting up the air around him. My wolf is pushing me to say something – this is my beta here. Only he’s not, is he? He’s an omega I made submit because he was fringing on losing control and I decided to take matters into my own hands in order to prevent the horrible inevitable from happening. He didn’t ask to be a part of my Pack. What right do I really have to keep him here?

“You’re right,” I say. Jean stops pacing and looks at me. Clearly, he had been expecting me to fight him on this. “You came to Trost to be a part of human society – not part of a stranger’s Pack. I’m sorry that I’ve involved you in a life you are clearly trying to get away from, although I hope you can understand why I felt I had to.” He looks away from me, down at the ground, like he’s annoyed at himself for letting things get so out of control. “I knew that by bringing you into my Pack, I could give you back the control over your wolf that must have been slipping since you broke from your last Pack. Trost is a busy city, and there aren’t just humans living here. You almost lost it the moment you saw me—” Jean tries to interrupt, by I carry on “—and you can argue that you got yourself out of that party and away from anyone you might have put at risk, but I’m not the only werewolf in Trost. Can you honestly say that would have been the only close call?

“As the only Alpha in Trost, I am responsible for the other werewolves living here, and their actions. Jean,” I say, calling his attention. He looks back at me, uncertain all of a sudden.

“I’m not asking for your story,” I tell him, softly. “You didn’t seek any of us out when you got here, and obviously you had your reasons for that. If you say you don’t want to be a part of this Pack, then so be it; we won’t involve you. But I’m not going to cut you loose so you can be an omega again.”

“You can’t—” he starts to protest.

“Just for the time being,” I correct, quickly. My wolf is rolling its eyes at my unclear ass.

“Unfortunately, there is a small situation at the moment that we are attempting to deal with. (By the way – this isn’t me involving you – this is me politely informing you because it’s nice to be informed politely.) You see, there’s another omega in town—actually, living out in the woods close to campus. We’re fairly certain that there’s a good chance they were turned against their will by an Alpha who was not entirely in control at the time, and that said Alpha is most likely hunting them down.”

“What the fuck,” Jean says. I wince.

“Yea.” I wait a beat, just to give that all time to set in. “And the Second of the Pack I was previously a part of is coming here to help us sort it.”

“What the fuck?” Jean says again, this time slightly questioning.

“So for the time being, I think it’s best for everyone if you stay under my protection. Just until this is dealt with.”

Jean glares, mouth in a petulant twist. He clenches his fist, breathing through his nose. My wolf sits up, alert and assessing. Just in case. Then Jean softly whispers “What the fuck,” and I start to relax, certain that he isn’t going to accidentally hulk out on me.
Jean doesn’t accidentally hulk out on me. Instead, he lets me give him the very Alpha-ly line of “my door is always open if you need me”. (Which it isn’t, because my door locks automatically, but he has my number and in the age of cell phones that’s essentially the same thing.) He leaves with only minimal stiffness-of-the-shoulders and grumbling, and I count the entire hour a win. I drop a text or two to Levi and the others to let them know that Jean is aware of our current situation and the wolves headed our way (friendly and otherwise) and then pack my bag and head off to class like any good student would.
Once More With Feeling

Chapter Summary

Thomas comes to town, the Pack comes together, and Eren comes to a decision.

Chapter Notes

Two and a half years is enough of a hiatus, don't you think?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I’m a bundle of nerves until the following evening, waiting for Thomas to arrive. He sends me updates pretty regularly as he’s packing, and then as he sets off on his long journey up to Minnesota (the traffic sucks, the scenery doesn’t). He’s going to have to stay overnight along the way, so he’ll be here bright and early tomorrow morning.


I force myself to stop counting down the hours until then and try to study instead, but it’s impossible. All I can think about tonight is how I’ve never had the responsibilities of welcoming another wolf into my territory as an Alpha before, and I’m really not enjoying it so far.

It’s only Thomas, I try and tell myself. I know Thomas (have done for many a moon) and more importantly, I like Thomas. So does my wolf. I’d have no problem with Thomas coming to stay if it was just me chilling at university, living that normal student life.

But my life is far from normal and I’ve got a Pack to worry about now. A relatively new Pack who doesn’t know Thomas, and doesn’t have the connection with him that I do. Oh sure, they’ve been brought up to speed, they know what’s about to go down, and they should take my lead on this (their wolves included) and accept Thomas into their space with no problem, but werewolves have always been fickle creatures and the presence of an omega in our territory has certainly had an impact on our collective peace of mind. We’ve all been decidedly more twitchy, lately.

And that’s why Thomas is here, I have to remind myself. He’s here to help us find and save the omega (if we can). He’s here as a friend and an ally.


My phone lights up.

[From Connie]: so what’s the plan for tomorrow?

And that gets me worrying again, because I still haven’t made up my mind on that front.

I’ve been going back and forth about how I should introduce everybody – would it be best to do
this all privately, or would a more social setting like La Recoin offer my betas a bit of stability? Their control has certainly been getting better the stronger our bonds as a Pack have grown. Give them credit where it’s due, they’ve dealt with everything that’s happened since the start of semester like a couple o’ champs. Do they even need the stability of a public setting or am I being super Mother Hen about all this?

I’m beginning to think that maybe it’s all in my head. My wolf stretches and sniffs as if to say “you think?” and yea, that’s fair.

But then there’s the question of Levi. And now I know I’m not being too cautious here.

Ideally, I want my Pack to be comfortable with Thomas, and vice-versa, before I bring Levi into the equation, but I’m pretty sure the little prick is going to find a way to undo all my hard work once he’s within spitting distance anyway so what’s really the point.

I know that Thomas is aware of our… fangi situation over here, and I’ve seen how solid his control is under pressure (it’s why he’s been such a good Second for my uncle, and why Hannes trusted him to get involved with my headache of a conundrum in the first place) but I’ve also experienced first-hand how much of an asshole Levi can be when he wants, and I don’t really want to expose Thomas to that if I can help it. Maybe introducing everyone together is a better idea? Keep Levi’s personality as diluted as possible, make sure he’s at a disadvantage and see how things go?

Pfft. Who am I kidding? I have no idea how any of this is going to pan out, I can just hope for the best and pray Levi wants us all to get along. Remind me why I’m still acquainted with him again?

My wolf silently judges me as I worry over it, clearly unimpressed (for the hundredth time) by the company I’m choosing to keep these days.

So, I reason with myself. I can’t keep Levi out of this (that would be like personally pulling the pin out of a grenade and then quickly sitting on it) but at the same time, I don’t really want Thomas to endure the vampire’s direct company for longer than is strictly necessary.

So maybe a public setting would be the best idea after all? A place with innocent people milling around, or food available to keep us all nicely distracted and hopefully keep a certain someone’s mouth busy with something other than talking shit.

Sounds ideal.

I make up my mind and text Thomas, ask him if he wants to go out for a late breakfast tomorrow after he’s settled in, to meet the gang and discuss our plan of action.

[From Thomas]: sure thing. was thinking that would be the best thing. you let me know where to be and i’ll be there. bring the vampire!

Well that’s settled then.

[To Thomas]: your funeral mate

I don’t get a response to that (which is fine, it’s whatevs) and I’m really really not focused enough to seriously think about continuing with my assignment right now, so instead I decide to treat myself to a nice hot shower and an early night. Gotta save that energy for tomorrow’s excitement and all that.

As I stand there under the spray I try to come up with a good way to break the news to Levi that
there’ll soon be another wolf in town. If I’m being completely honest with you, I would rather squirt this entire bottle of shampoo directly into my eyes than have to face Levi’s reaction, but hey ho ce la vie.

“Hey Levi,” I practice to my steamed-up reflection on the back of the en-suite door, “you’ve sure been a lot less violent towards me recently. Want to meet the werewolf who taught me how to stalk a deer? No? Oh what a shame, because—yea this is so not going to work.”

I sigh and lower the shampoo bottle. I’ll save it for another day.

When I finish rinsing the soap out of my hair (and by golly is it getting long now) and step out of my en-suite I am greeted with three unread texts from just the person I don’t want to speak to.

I sigh once more as I sit down on the edge of my bed. World-weary at the tender age of nineteen and still dripping from the shower. What a mess I am. I unlock my phone with wrinkly fingers and read:

[From Levi]: I’m bored.

[From Levi]: Eren, I said I’m bored. Don’t you care?

[From Levi]: Clearly you’ve fallen down the stairs and broken your neck or you would have text me back by now.

As I’m reading through them, another one pops up.

[From Levi]: Fine, I’ll come and make sure you’re still alive. I’ve got nothing better to do.

I groan and flop back onto my duvet, no doubt leaving wet patches. I fling my arm across my face, block out the glare of the overhead light and realise that actually I’m going to get to break the Big News to him sooner than I anticipated. I could easily text him back and tell him not to bother coming over, tell him to quit bothering me and go find someone else to fuck with. There’s no guarantee that he’d listen to me, of course, but hey I could try.

I lower my arm and turn my head, give myself a double chin as I blink with bleary eyes at my window. I could sit up but I’m too stubborn.

At least the window’s closed and the curtains are drawn. That’s good. Means Levi will have to use the door like a civilised person instead of just appearing like he sometimes does.

I go back to shutting out the light with the crook of my elbow and tell myself that I’ll get up and dry off properly in five minutes. Yea. Sounds good.

Three minutes later and there’s the sound of something hitting my window. Not unlike the cliched sound of a stone being thrown, but who does that these days?

I sit up, head cocked to one side as I listen.

*Clack click clack* it goes again. My phone buzzes.

[From Levi]: Open your window.

“No!” I say out loud, glaring at the curtains and the man I presume is standing somewhere beyond. “Use the front door you freak. What the fuck?”
“What the fuck,” I say again for good measure, and then hoist my towel tighter around myself and stomp over to my bedroom door and yank it open, ready to give this guy a piece of my mind.

No Levi stands on the other side, and I deflate a bit as I realise he meant the front door to our flat. I check the coast is clear before venturing out, making sure to leave my own door on the latch so I don’t get locked out as soon as I make a run for it.

As I’m reaching for the front door handle I think, belatedly, *huh, should have put some clothes on,* and then I’m opening said door and the freezing night air is blasting me full force and Levi is pushing past me in his usual impatient manner, smelling of almonds and coffee, and as he pushes past me he realises exactly what I am (and am not) wearing and I hear his breath catch in his throat as he stops short and just stares at me.

We stand there for a beat in silence, both of us slightly caught off guard by the closeness of the other and the clear mess that I am right now. And I am feeling all kinds of mortified and indignant, but I have no clue what Levi is thinking – he’s as impenetrable as ever, the only indication that something is amiss being the fact that he hasn’t taken another breath yet and his eyes are slowly tracking down my still-damp chest, all the way down to the towel that I’m clutching around my waist like it’s a life line.

I clear my throat as goose bumps break out over me in waves, and realise I should close the door – I’m letting all the hot air out, as Hannes would say. I let it go and it slips shut with a click. And like that, the spell is broken and Levi lets out the breath he’s been holding, eyes flicking back up to mine.

“Put on some clothes you freak. What the fuck?” he says, mimicking me from earlier. And I’m relieved that he’s the one that spoke first, because no matter what I might have come up with, it would have been completely undermined by the fact that I’m still standing here shivering with a towel around my waist.

“I’ll wait in the kitchen,” he says with a wave of his hand before I can respond, and turns on his heel. I catch a hint of emotion from him as he does so, but it fades so fast that I almost might have imagined it. I watch him retreat to the safe ground of the kitchen as I try to place what I’ve just scented from him. I notice, absently, that the tops of his ears are red. Was that from the cold outside, or is it something else? Embarrassment, maybe?

My wolf huffs in annoyance and I take that as my cue to get moving. I shut myself back in my room and make sure my door is locked before I drop the towel and start pulling on clothes at record speed.

He waits patiently, all things considered. Helps himself to a coffee and makes himself comfortable at the kitchen table, in the seat that gives him an uninterrupted view down the corridor to the front door. He locks eyes with me as I stumble back out of my room (this time *fully* clothed, thank you very much) and sips his coffee, steam curling up around him.

I sit down opposite him and wonder if he’s going to make a joke about my appearance of a minute ago. He’s probably been sitting here thinking up something he can break me with. I clasp my hands in my lap and wait for the gavel to fall. I can’t really say anything to defend myself, that would just make it worse.
“Eren, if you need to take a shit just go,” he says, putting his mug down with a clank against the table top. I’m clearly at a loss, so he rolls his eyes and elaborates; “You look constipated, mutt.”

My wolf’s ears prick up at the return of our least favourite pet (ha!) name. I feel the itch at the back of my mind that says he’s listening.

“Well maybe I’m just trying to figure out what exactly it is you’re doing here?” I say, and imagine high-fiving myself for how cool and collected I sound. I cross my arms to put the point across.

“I’m paying you a visit,” he says with a shrug, “because I have nothing better to do and you’re the most fun I’ve had in years.”

I make a noise that isn’t exactly dignified, and he raises an eyebrow. I’d cross my arms again if I could.

“It’s fascinating,” he continues, leans forward across the table top, puts his chin in his hands and appraises me with a smirk dancing at the edges of his mouth. “Watching an Alpha werewolf stumble through his college years truly is thrilling.”

The sarcasm astounds me.

“Look, if you’re only here to annoy me—” I start, but he cuts me off.

“Eren, come out for a drink with me.”

My brain short circuits for a moment and in the time it takes me to boot it back up he’s already moving on, saying; “I’ve been stuck on campus all day and I am this close to beheading my lecturer. If you let me go out and get drunk by myself you’ll be responsible for whatever happens. Honestly, you have no idea what I could end up doing tonight.”

“You want to go out for a drink with me,” I say very carefully, like the words might break if I rush through them. He blinks at me, realises that I’m struggling here, and decides to help me out.

“Yes, Eren,” he says, slowly enough that it’s just shy of pissing me off. “I want to go out for a drink with you so that I don’t end up committing a murder.”

“Don’t you have any other friends?” I say before I can think better of it, and it startles a laugh out of him.

“No, I do not,” he confirms as he stands, chair legs scraping across the floor far too loudly in this quiet kitchen. I watch him rise, feeling more and more miserable as he does so. He inspects his nails, painted black today. “And now that I’ve mentioned murder, you’re going to have to come and keep an eye on me just to make sure I don’t actually mean what I say.”

He flashes me a toothy grin.

“I hate you,” I sigh, but I stand. At least it beats stressing out alone in my room all night. I could probably use the distraction.

“That’s the spirit.” He walks past me, clearly expecting that I’ll follow. “I’ll drive.”

His car is parked five minutes across campus and all the way there I’m trying to come up with a way to let him know that I actually do need to talk to him, but it’s going to be a serious
conversation and he’s probably not going to like it. I dimly think that maybe I should wait until he’s had a few drinks and he’s in a more forgiving mood before I let slip that we’re soon to have company. If experience has taught me anything, it is that a drunk Levi is a relaxed (and sometimes happy) Levi.

“What’s bothering you?” he asks after we’ve passed a trio of girls clearly on their way to Sina.

I look at him, open my mouth to say what I need to say but then chicken the fuck out and just mutter; “Nothing. Tell you later.”

He stops abruptly and I have to back pedal.

“You’re distracted,” he states, arms folded, not looking happy. “Look, if you don’t want to come with me, just say. I’m not forcing you—”

“No,” I cut him off hastily. He raises a brow, clearly not buying it. I try to explain without giving too much away. “No, I’ve just got a lot on my mind. I actually need to talk to you, but honestly I could do with a drink before I get started.”


I don’t like it.

“Let’s just get moving, it’s freezing out here,” I say, putting on a good show of rubbing my arms and shivering, despite the fact that I feel incredibly warm standing beside him. He rolls his eyes and starts moving again, leads me down the side of a lecture hall and round to the parking lot at the back. It’s surprisingly full, and I have to remind myself that it’s only eight o’clock, it’s just getting dark early now we’re well into fall.

“I’m not a great listener,” he says as he unlocks his car and we both get in. It’s all black leather in here and it smells overwhelmingly of Levi and the cherry air freshener hanging from the rear-view mirror. My wolf flinches at the strong scents, but then settles. I breathe a little more deeply and relax back into the passenger seat. Levi continues, “I prefer listening to myself, but I can occasionally put up with listening to others.”

“No surprise there,” I mutter, and he turns to me, a look of shock on his face that almost looks genuine.

“How dare you,” he says, “get out.”

I laugh at him. I can’t not. After the stress I was working myself up into earlier this evening, and the shit show I am fully expecting my upcoming Serious Talk with Levi to turn into, the fact that he is very clearly attempting to be supportive, and joking around with me is just too laughable.

How is this my life?

“Oh no, I’m serious,” he continues, reaching over me and opening the passenger door. I snort (can’t help it, it’s a family trait) and he grins at me with perfect white teeth. Up this close I can see the blue in his eyes and the smile lines traced into his pale skin. I can make out the freckles on the bridge of his nose. All things I’ve never really had the chance to notice before, and I’m surprised at how human it makes him look. Then he narrows his eyes and his smile turns into a smirk and the predator is back. My wolf floods me with adrenaline as my stomach flips.

He’s so close. I can hear his heart beating and I can feel his breath as it ghosts across my cheek. He’s leaning over me, and I’m trapped here with him looking at me like that and I know that my wolf should be squaring off right now, pushing back, but instead all I’m getting is a very strong
desire to stay and see how this turns out. Anticipation. Excitement.

The way he’s looking at me is definitely not human any more. He looks hungry, and I can almost taste it coming off him. My wolf shakes at the smell of it, eager and wild. Well then.

I swallow, and reach over without breaking eye contact with him. I find the door handle, slip my hand beneath his and pull the car door shut again.

Once more, it is the closing of a door that snaps us out of it. He sits back and turns the key in the ignition, looking as if nothing had just passed between us, as if absolutely nothing out of the ordinary had happened at all. But that drop of hunger I can taste on my tongue is only growing stronger, and with a jolt I remember what he had said earlier: “you have no idea what I could end up doing tonight.”

He’s dangerous. No matter how comfortable I might be getting with him these days, I shouldn’t forget that one truth.

I should open up that door again and leave, I tell myself. I should just get out of this car and go back to my dorm and get an early night like I planned. But as he puts the car in reverse and turns in his seat to look out of the back window, I do none of that. Instead, I flick on the radio and let it settle on a station, and try to calm my wolf as he paces in his cage. He wants to have some fun tonight. It’s the feeling I get before the full moon, when all he needs is to howl and to hunt.

I can still hear Levi’s heart beating beneath the songs on the radio. I listen to the sound all the way down into Trost. Levi finds a spot to park in Westgate and as we climb out and he locks up, neither of us speaks a word.

An hour and three drinks later and Levi is decidedly more vocal. Namely, because I’ve managed to pluck up the courage to tell him Thomas is coming to town.

“What the fuck,” was his initial response. And then; “I knew you didn’t have what it takes to handle this by yourself.” But he’s not being mean, he’s grinning at me, taking the piss, trying to get a rise out of me in this crowded bar.

We’re sitting away from the worst of it, in a curved booth down the far end of the place. We’ve got the booth all to ourselves, thanks to Levi’s charm. He had marched straight over to it when the doorman let us in earlier and scared away the couple who were sitting here before us with one look.

When I had asked exactly what he had done to them, he shrugged and said languidly “it’s just an old vampire trick,” as he relaxed against the back rest.

Turns out vamps with old blood (which Levi has in abundance, so it would seem) can convince people to act in whatever way they want to, with enough focus. He called it “persuasion”.

“It makes victims more willing,” he explained, making me choke on my drink. When I came back up for air he smiled, “Or it used to. Back when I had victims. Now I just use it to get people to move out of my way.”

“That’s…uh huh?” I said and he gave me a look. I huffed at him. “Stop, you know you can’t just drop a bomb like that and act like everything is totally fine.”

He looked smug as he sipped his drink.
I shuffled closer to him round the table and hissed, “how many people have you killed?”

“Oh a few,” he said, with a gleam in his eye, “but this was a long time ago. Centuries ago. I haven’t killed any of your precious humans for a while, don’t you worry.”

“But still!” I said, and it came out at a higher pitch than I meant it to. “That’s so bad, Levi.”

“Are you scared yet?” he asked, voice low as he leaned in closer to me, making me shiver. That drop of excitement slipped back into my stomach again and as I thought about it, I knew I wasn’t. My wolf hadn’t registered Levi as a real threat to us in some time.

“No,” I admitted.

“Not even a tiny bit?” he checked.

“Are you scared of me?” I countered, expecting him to laugh.

“Oh Eren,” he purred, titling his head and looking at me through heavy lashes. “I’m terrified.”

He’d ordered another round of drinks after that. I was glad for the interruption because I couldn’t actually tell if he was being serious or not. It was infuriating how little emotion he felt. I didn’t realise until I started spending so much time with Levi just how much I relied on peoples’ emotions to betray what they were really thinking. Talking to Levi always felt like traversing a mine field because I didn’t know what was true with him and what wasn’t. Even my wolf was useless to help me.

When he slid back into the booth, spilling a drop of my beer on the table top in the process, he asked me; “So what was so important that you couldn’t tell me earlier?”

And in one big rush I told him about who Thomas was and how he was coming to Trost to help us solve the case of the omega once and for all.

And now he’s sitting there taking the piss out of me. Ce la fucking vie.

“Big Bad Alpha,” he laughs, leaning back with one arm slung over the back of the seat, easy and confident. “I can’t believe all along you’ve been begging for help.”

“Shut up,” I say, jabbing him in the ribs. He grabs at my hand, but he’s too slow to catch me. “I didn’t ask for help, they just sent me Thomas.”

“Because clearly they can see you’re struggling,” he goads.

“Well I’d like to see you try to lead a Pack and deal with dangerous omegas left and right.” I scowl.

He grins wide and leans closer to me. “But you know what I would have done with those omegas instead,” he says, and there it is again – the voice of a predator.

“Yes,” I snap, anger swelling. “You would have killed them without thinking.” I take a sip of my drink before I can say what else I’m thinking.

I wait for Levi’s quick retort, but it doesn’t come. Instead his smile drops and he sits back again, subdued. I feel a wash of regret, and I don’t know if it’s mine or his but it’s gone when he says “Sorry, shit joke.”
I take the apology for what it is.

“None of your jokes are good,” I point out.

“Oh, but they don’t have to be,” he says, like he’s surprised I haven’t realised it yet. “Not when you’re sitting right there.”

It takes me a minute to register that he just effectively called me a joke, and as I’m taking a breath to berate him with, a woman interrupts us.

She stands at the open end of the booth, long legs, cute dress, brunette ringlets, and stunning smile. She looks at Levi and giggles. Drunk. (In a bar? No!)

When she speaks, her voice has a northern lilt to it. She’s local, then.

“You wanna dance?” she asks. Levi, to his credit, doesn’t look surprised by the request. Instead he looks at me and raises one brow.

“What do you think Eren?” he asks, and a little alarm bell starts to ring in the back of my head. “Should I dance with this pretty thing?”

He turns back to look at her and offers his hand, palm up. An old-fashioned gesture. The woman giggles again, clearly loving the attention, and places her hand in his. I watch him as he leans forward slowly, never breaking eye contact with her, and places a kiss against her knuckles. I can smell the arousal washing off her from across the table.

You have no idea what I could end up doing tonight.

“No,” I say, perhaps a bit too loudly. Levi smiles, lips still touching the back of the woman’s hand. She looks at me in confusion, as if to say “but I wasn’t asking you,”.

“No, I don’t think that’s a good idea,” I say, firmly enough. I want her away from him. She has no idea what he is, but I do. He’s dangerous, he’s impulsive, and she can’t have him.

“Then I must decline,” Levi says with a sigh, leaning back and letting go of her hand. He waggles his fingers at her. “Run along now.”

And with that she goes. She doesn’t look back. I wonder if that was his persuasion at work again, or if it was good old human embarrassment on her part.

I watch her go and when she’s lost in the crowd by the bar I turn to find Levi watching me.


“Careful,” he says, and his voice still has that purr in it that makes my heart beat faster. “You were starting to sound a bit possessive there.”

“You what?” I say, for lack of a better response. He chuckles. Shakes his head. “Seriously, Levi. If you think I was just going to let you lure some poor girl—”

“To where? The dancefloor?” he tuts, and I know he’s making fun of me again. I growl a warning, slide even closer to him in the booth so I can’t be overheard.

“Drop the act, Levi. You’ve been reeking of hunger all evening. I’m not going to let you toy with some girl and do god knows what with her, just because you’ve had a shit day.”
Levi leans in closer too, and I can smell the alcohol on his breath as he murmurs in that husky voice of his, “Who says I’m looking for a girl, Jaeger?”

I swallow. Wind in my sails? Oh, that’s gone now. Because I’m here with this being of immense power, and he’s looking at me like he wants to devour me, and it’s not just booze I can smell now, oh no – it’s desire. Pure, unfiltered desire. I swear he’s doing this on purpose.

“Well whoever,” I manage to valiantly continue. “You’re not having them.”

“Am I not?” he asks, evenly enough. “Why not? Are you going to give me a better offer?”

“What?”

“Because I was looking forward to dancing, actually. And you’ve just spoilt my fun. If I can’t dance, I’ll just have to find something else to pass the time…”

“Oh for fuck sake,” I spit, exasperated, standing up and glaring down at him, both of us knowing full well what he’s doing is working. “If you want to fucking dance, let’s go.”

The smile that he gives me makes me weak in the knees.

The music isn’t bad, all things considered, and Levi certainly seems to enjoy it. I’m having a hard time not enjoying it myself, but – I tell myself – I am here merely as a means to keep Levi away from any innocent humans that get too close.

I wonder what a sight we are. The smaller man clearly having a wail of a time, whilst I loom close by, furiously dancing my way between any other prospective partners he might have. I think that mostly what he’s enjoying right now is just the fact that he’s stressing me out, because he hasn’t actually made a move to dance with anyone, and his emotions are considerably less *ehem* thirsty.

“Want another drink?” he asks as one song ends and the next begins. I shrug (anything is better than this, please just make it stop) and he takes me by the hand and pulls me to the bar.

He manages to squeeze his way to the front, clearly taking advantage of his smaller stature, and tries to flag down the attention of a bar tender.

As I stand there and catch my breath, happy for the time being that he isn’t about to jump anyone, I check my phone. It’s almost 2am, I realise. So much for my early night.

Thomas made it safely to the motel he’s staying at for the night. His last message was to remind me that he’ll be in Trost by 10:30 tomorrow morning.

I shudder.

“Hey, Levi,” I say, push my way closer to the bar, so he can hear me and I’m not shouting. The heavy cloud of alcohol envelops me, and I remember why I’m not a fan of ordering for myself. I tell him, “I’ve got to get back soon. I’ve got an early start.”

“We both have,” he agrees. The person behind me stumbles and pushes me forward, and I catch myself on the edge of the bar to stop from falling. I’m pressed up against him now, hardly any space between us, and I catch that familiar scent of his cutting through the alcohol haze and I breathe in deep. A tension I hadn’t realised I had been holding leaves me in one go and my wolf
croons. His reaction takes me off guard and I raise a hand to steady myself against the nearest surface, which end up being the small of Levi’s back.

He doesn’t comment, just turns back to the bar as four shot glasses are placed down in front of him and picks two of them up. I accept one without bothering to ask what’s in it, still far too aware that my hand is touching him and I can’t seem to lower it.

We chink the tiny glasses together and down them in sync.

Tequila slides down my throat and I’m not surprised at all that’s what he ordered.

“What time is Thomas arriving?” Levi asks, taking the empty glass from my hand and placing it on the bar. I can feel the muscles in his back moving beneath my palm as he does so.

Too distracting.

“Um,” I say, “10:30?”

“Gives us eight hours,” he shrugs. “Don’t see what the rush is.”

“Levi,” I start, and then I catch sight of his grin as he turns back to me with the next shot.

“Last one,” he promises, “then I’ll drive you home.”

There’s a chorus of “no!” from the patrons closest to us, and Levi knocks the shot back and lets out a satisfied sigh. I do the same, and I swear he pushes back into my touch, but really that could easily be put down to either of us swaying from being slightly tipsy at this point. Yea, I’ll put it down to that.

It isn’t until the fresh air hits my lungs that I realise how beyond “slightly tipsy” I am. Isn’t that always the way?

“Car’s this way,” Levi says, and starts to walk in the opposite direction to Westgate where we parked. I laugh and jog after him, world spinning only slightly.

I catch him. He blinks down at my hand on his arm and then back up at me. “Two things,” I say, trying to ignore how easy it is for me to reach out to him now. “One: the car is not that way, and two: you can’t drive it.”

“Well only if you’re being a pussy about it,” he mutters darkly, but allows me to guide him to the end of the street where the taxi lane is. It looks like business is going well for them tonight.

We only have a ten minute wait, and during that time Levi decides he wants to be quiet for the first time this evening. If he’s lost in thought or just doesn’t have anything to say, I don’t know, but I let the silence lie. I’ve got some shit to work through, myself.

Tonight has been… fun, I realise. Despite my initial fear over Levi being a complete fucking nightmare, it actually turned out okay. At any rate, it was a distraction, which is kind of what I needed. And it looks like the vampire genuinely did just want to blow off some steam, and not terrorise the locals as he led me to believe. Plus, it was a bonus that he paid for the drinks. (My wallet needed the break.)

As I watch him scroll through his phone and then light himself a cigarette, I wonder if this relaxed,
mischievous Levi is the real him, or if it was just an act meant to toy with me. Could he really be that awful as to lure me into letting my guard down, only to use that to his advantage as a means of holding power over me? Could he be spending this much time with me as a way to win over my wolf, and therefore declassify himself as a threat in my eyes?

It’s likely, I have to admit. With no real way to gauge what he’s feeling (and therefore thinking) it’s entirely possible that all of this is an act to get me to do whatever he wants, just like he did with that couple earlier. He feels me looking at him and catches my eye, almost as if he’s aware of what thought is on my mind. He doesn’t smile, doesn’t glare. He just holds my gaze for a while as he blows smoke into the night, and then turns back to the taxis.

I realise that if this isn’t an act, and this is just him as he is beneath the monster posturing, then I can live with that. Maybe not the smoking, but the man definitely.

“Wanna have breakfast with me tomorrow?” I ask, and he turns back, clearly caught of guard. I realise what I’ve said and how it sounds, and clarify; “I meant us—the Pack and Thomas. Do you want to come and have breakfast with me and the Pack and Thomas tomorrow?”

“Sure, mutt,” he agrees, dropping the half-finished cigarette into the gutter as a cab pulls up to the curb. He pulls open the back door and slides into the darkness within. I follow suit and buckle up.

I brief him on the way back to the university about what he can and cannot say around Thomas. I inform him that Thomas is aware he is a man of supernatural intrigue, and Levi doesn’t look particularly happy about it. He doesn’t complain though, maybe because he knows there’s nothing he can do about it now, or maybe just because all the alcohol and dancing has mellowed him out.

“I’ll be on my best behaviour,” he promises as we pull into the parking lot behind my dorm building. I hesitate to get out, not fully trusting him to be telling the truth right now.

He holds his hands up, a gesture of surrender. “Vampire’s honour, kid. I’m actually looking forward to meeting a werewolf whose balls have already dropped.”

I stop hesitating and get out of the car.

“Cheers for the beers,” I say, and shut the door perhaps a little too hard. I hear him laughing as the taxi drives off into the night.

Have I just made a grievous error?

Fuck it, I need to sleep.

10:00 ticks around way too fast, and I’m on the road before I’ve really woken up. I have to pick up Sasha and Connie first, and oh boy oh boy are they mad thrilled to see me. Connie answers the door and I’m hit with the emotional equivalent of we-missed-you-and-we’re-re-nervous. Great. That makes three of us.

I accept the much-needed hug from them both, Sasha somehow managing to weasel her way in between us and almost tripping us up, and as I breathe in their familiar scents, everything settles and stills.

“You guys ready?” I ask. I can almost feel Sasha vibrating, and her excitement is kind of infectious.
“More or less.” Connie speaks for them both. I huff and press my forehead against his.

“You’ll be great. Just think of this as a way to learn some tricks from one of the best Second’s I know.” I stand there with them wrapped around me for a moment more, enjoying Sasha’s energy and Connie’s building pride as they help to zen me out and remind me of how strong we are together. Goddamn I made a good choice agreeing to Alpha them. This is exactly how being with Pack should make me feel. Safe. Anchored.

“Right,” I clear my throat. They untangled and straighten up, game faces on. “Let’s go introduce you guys.”

Thomas and I had settled on a restaurant called The Rose Garden earlier that morning, which looked fancy as fuck from the website and meant we had to dress more up-market than we usually would for breakfast. The guy had expensive tastes. So what? If I earned what he did in a year, so would I.

As it is, I only own one outfit that could be classed as “semi acceptable” for a place like this, and I’m starting to feel pretty constricted by it. If the deep distain my wolf was expressing when I buttoned up my shirt earlier is anything to go by, he’s right there with me. We’re more of a tank top and skinnies kinda pair, us. Right now I feel like I could burst a seam if I moved too suddenly.

I smooth down the front of my shirt as I inform the waiter of our booking and hope to dear god that my hair is behaving itself.

“This is like a really serious date,” Sasha stage whispers to Connie as we’re led through the expansive restaurant to our table. She’s wearing a black mini dress with a pattern of brightly coloured flowers embroidered all over it. The back is open and the sleeves, although long, are made of a mesh that shows off the colour of her pale skin. Her hair is pulled back in its usual plait, the few dark strands that are too short for the style tucked back behind her ear. Oh, and she’s wearing golden heels.

All in all, she looks absolutely stunning, so I tell her; “You look stunning.”

She grins at me, all teeth and life. Connie throws a betrayed look at me over his shoulder and I roll my eyes.

“You look pretty fucking fine too,” I reassure him. His emotions betray how please he is by the praise. And it’s true, he looks good. He’s opted for a pair of grey slacks with a lilac shirt tucked into them, the top few buttons open to tease the strong line of his throat and the sharp rise of his clavicle. His shoes smell of new leather and his hair smells like product. They’ve both put effort in. It damn near brings a tear to my eye.

We sit, Sasha and Connie on one side of the table, and me on the other opposite Sasha. I’ve got a spare seat on either side of me, and Sasha puts her bag and Connie’s jacket on the empty seat next to her. It’s strategically the easiest way to keep Levi as separated from Thomas as possible, whilst also not putting him next to my betas. If the waiter thinks our clearly predetermined seating arrangement weird, he doesn’t mention it, merely hands out the drinks menus and starts rattling off the specials as is his job.

When the waiter offers to take our drinks orders, and my betas hesitate, clearly uncertain as to what exactly they can order considering they’re not being expected to pay tonight. I take the decision out of their hands and order myself a fancy special with gin and mint and passion fruit in the
description. I don’t even know the price, and I sure as hell don’t care that it isn’t even lunch time yet, I just know it sounds expensive and lavish and the sound of it makes Sasha light up.

“Make that two,” she says. I’m such a bad example.

“I’ll have a latte?” Connie offers, and before the waiter walks away I add a hasty caramel macchiato to the order. Connie raises a brow at me, the question clear.

“Levi’s joining us,” I explain, realising I had conveniently forgotten to mention that before now. I swear to god the guy deflates.

Sasha leans against him and puts her head on his shoulder. She whines, quiet and comforting and Connie shifts so he has his arm around her, hand on her waist. He lets out a sigh.

“Yea, I figured he would be,” he says, but it isn’t enthusiastic by any means.

“You did?” I ask. I mean, it has been a last minute decision of mine made in the early hours of the morning. I swear I can’t remember mentioning it, so how…?

“You’ve been hanging out with him a lot lately. I guess that means you’re cool with him now.” He shrugs, dislodging Sasha enough that she sits back up straight. “Whatever. He just better behave himself or I’ll have to cause a scene in this fancy restaurant and get us all kicked out.”

“Connie.” I make my tone admonishing, and he grins at me. I roll my eyes. Of course he’s being a cheeky shit about this. “The whole idea of us all doing this meet and greet in public is to encourage us not to make a scene.”

“I know that,” Connie says. Sasha nods her agreement. “Does Levi?”

“Oh Eren made it very clear to me last night, yes,” Levi says nonchalantly as he slides into the seat on my left, arm thrown over the backrest, body turned towards us, taking up more space than such a slim man really should be able to. I see Connie and Sasha jump a collective foot off their seats and although I am now beyond immune to Levi’s sudden appearances, I have to sigh.

“Not off to the best start,” I say to him. He tilts his head, looking entirely too pleased with himself for sneaking up on them, the bastard.

“What do you mean ‘last night’?” Connie asks, suspicion clear in his voice, and my wolf pricks up his ears as a teeny tiny alarm bell starts to ring. I try to think of a way to steer the conversation away from my night out with our increasingly-less-sullen vampire.

“You both look lovely,” Levi says before I can come up with anything. He turns to Sasha with what looks like genuine warmth in his eyes, although there’s no emotion I can sense behind it. She gives him a small smile and looks at Connie, who, I notice, has puffed up his chest somewhat.

Really guys?

“Oh for god sake people.” I let a little Alpha authority slip into my voice, and Connie sits back in his seat. “Can you all please just get along for an hour? We’re supposed to be a united Pack, not acting like a bunch of children.”

Levi hums. “I’m not a part of the Pack, though,” he points out. Connie mutters a “yea,” although it’s quiet due to the fact that it’s Levi he’s agreeing with.

“Well pretend you are,” I snap, and my Alpha voice has a little more force behind it this time, my
nerves at Thomas’ imminent arrival getting the better of me. Levi lifts his chin a little, a small but noticeable challenge, as mostly everything is from him. My wolf cocks his head to one side, as if to ask me what I’m going to do about that. Just like every other time, I let it slide.

“You know,” Levi says, eyes narrowed and calculating. I get a little sense of uh oh as he continues, “I don’t think I’ve ever been on such a tense date before.”

“Date?” Connie scoffs, despite the fact that he was making the same comparison with Sasha earlier. I can sense his frustration. He’s getting defensive again, not nearly thirty seconds after I let the wolf in me command him to calm down. Fantastic.

“Isn’t that what this is?” Levi asks, voice innocent in that bland way of his. I kick his foot with mine under the table and he shoots a look at me. I can see the humour sparking in those grey eyes of his and he knows he’s pushing his luck.

“Enough,” I warn, letting a little bit of a growl mix in with the word. His lips twitch with a smile that he catches at the last second. I shake my head but know that this time he’ll let it be.

“He’s messing with you, Connie,” I say, turning to my beta. “Pretty sure if you ignore him, he’ll lose interest.”

“Like a wasp,” Sasha nods, a deep wisdom in her voice, and Connie looks at her for a second before smiling. And then they’re off, compiling a list between them of the things that Levi is almost like (all of them easily squashable, much to Levi’s feigned annoyance) and I am so very very grateful that Sasha knows her boyfriend so well, and equally proud that she’s completely overcome her initial fear of the vampire enough to poke fun at him.

And speaking of which…

I glance at Levi and he’s watching them, a slight frown on his face, clearly trying to understand what the fuck they’re talking about as they snort and giggle in between half finished sentences.

“You get used to it,” I say, which explains absolutely nothing to him. He tuts.

“Somehow I doubt that,” he says, but there’s a softness to him as he watches them that I know I’m not imagining. Perhaps today will go better than I thought?

The waiter appears with our drinks and the gin thing is an instant win with Sasha and me. Tangy and minty and refreshing. It doesn’t bother me that I’ll have to drive later – werewolf metabolism being what it is means that alcohol burns off me pretty fast. Connie doesn’t even wait for his drink to reach the table, he’s lifting it from the waiter’s hand and furiously blowing cold air on it as soon as it’s near him, eager to bring it down to a comfortable drinking temperature.

Last to reach the table is Levi’s caramel macchiato and I can tell by the way the small sound he makes that he wasn’t expecting it.

“You ordered for me,” he states, not exactly a question. He regards his drink as if he doesn’t understand what it is. I swallow my mouthful.

“Caramel Macchiato. Is that a problem?” I ask, trying to sound like I don’t think it should be. And yea, I did think that maaaybe he would have something to say about it, because ordering your frenemy their fave drink over brunch at a fancy restaurant could be regarded as suspect by some, and I know Levi does enjoy teasing me mercilessly if he thinks it’s entertaining.

I kinda wish I hadn’t placed the order now. I kinda wish I hadn’t asked that question.
“It’s…” he searches for the right word and I swear I’m not holding my breath. He shrugs. “It’s fine.”

Of course.

I breathe out again as subtly as I can.

“You’re welcome,” I say, because I was raised to have manners goddamnit, and honestly I’m relieved he’s not making a thing out of this.

He turns towards me in his chair again and brings the cup up to his lips, takes a sip. He lets out a little pleased hum.

“Thank you,” he says, and that soft smile is back again.

Are my ears burning? Pfft. No. Is my heart beating a teensy bit faster than it really should be right now? Pish. Why would you ask?

I’m suddenly aware that beneath the noise of the restaurant around us, Sasha and Connie have gone awfully quiet. I shoot a glance at them and find them watching us, glee evident in Sasha’s face. Mortification in Connie’s.

And now I’m praying that they don’t make a thing out of this.

Wonderful.

Before anything can be said further, however, the scent of another werewolf in the building washes over us, carried on a gust of air coming from the open door. The three of us with a wolf’s hearing straighten up in our seats, conversations of a moment ago completely forgotten as our supernatural sides bristle and prowl, our keen senses picking through the noisy room around us as we train in on the restaurant door closing shut behind the man we have all gathered here to see. None of us move a muscle.

It’s finally happening.

Levi has gone still beside me. I know he’s noticed too.

We wait there, the four of us utterly alert, as Thomas is lead across the room to us. My wolf is thrumming with excitement the closer he gets to us, and I know the others are picking up on it too. Connie and Sasha spot him first, and it takes a great deal of focus for me to turn around at a normal human speed, but finally I manage it.

He looks exactly like he did the last time I saw him – his blonde hair growing down into what I refer to as his Old Man Sideburns, his tanned face breaking into a smile that creases at the edges of his brown eyes, shoulders back and relaxed – and I am hit with such a sudden yearning for home and my family that it knocks the breath out of me. Sasha whines. I realise I’m gripping the edge of the table top with white knuckles, but I can’t seem to loosen my grip.

Thomas waves the waiter off as he closes in on us, and we haven’t broken eye contact yet. I wonder, distantly, if this silent scene looks weird from the outside, but as Thomas smiles down at me I really don’t care.

“Sorry, kiddo, couldn’t get parked” he apologises, deep voice so earnest and familiar, and at the
sound of his voice my wolf *whines*. I’m on my feet and going in for a hug before I’ve even
registered I’m on the move, and he’s wrapping his arms around me too, clearly expecting this to
happen.

The scent of my old Pack hits me, and a lump starts to form at the back of my throat as I realise just
how much I have *missed* everyone. My wolf is shaking, whimpering, trying desperately to break
out of his cage just to get closer still to this man who has been a part of our lives for so long he’s
like another parent to me. I feel the power of my wolf flushing through me, and I close my eyes,
unable to keep the gold from showing. We stand there for a few glorious moments, just breathing
each other in, and I can tell from the relief and the love flooding off of him that he’s missed me as
much as I’ve missed him.

Thomas squeezes me, and then lets go, steps back, and I somehow find the facility to do the same,
blinking the colour out of my eyes.

We sit down, Thomas to my right, and he puts a hand on my shoulder as he takes in the rest of our
squad, keeps that physical connection between us with such an easy gesture.

My betas have their big wide eyes trained on Thomas, and they both look like they would be
wagging their tails round about now if they could.

Thomas laughs, unable to keep the elation we both feel at being with one another again from his
voice. I can’t stop smiling.

“You two must be Connie and Sasha,” he says. They both nod vigorously. “Eren talks about you a
lot, and I can see why.”

“Because we’re so adorable?” Sasha blurts out, her excitement getting the better or her, and
Thomas laughs.

“Because according to him, you’re the best betas he could have hoped for,” Thomas answers
sincerely, and I swear to god Connie looks about five seconds away from bursting into tears of joy.

Why the hell did I worry about this? Why was I so certain that something bad was going to happen,
or that they weren’t going to accept him into their territory? This is *Thomas*. He’s the calmest, most
caring, trusting man I know. So why was I worried?

And then Levi says, “And what has Eren said about me?” and I remember, oh yea, that was what I
was worried about. The electric joy fades fast and my stomach flips with something closer to dread
as I watch Thomas turn and look at Levi properly for the first time. I feel like a kid again, holding
my breath as Thomas and my uncle deal with whatever problem has come knocking on our front
door this week.

Thomas doesn’t give away what he’s thinking, just looks the vampire up and down. Connie and
Sasha go still across the table top. I try to calm my twitching wolf, hope no one picks up on the
tension I’m feeling.

“Oh, this is Levi,” I say by way of introduction, and Thomas holds out a hand in front of me, a
clear invitation for Levi to shake it. Levi hesitates for a moment, the soft edge he had been
displaying earlier replaced by the familiar old steel we all know too well. He leans closer to me
and accepts Thomas’ hand in a firm shake, knee pressing against mine under the table as he does
so. My wolf zeroes in on the point of contact and to me it feels like such a possessive little thing, I
have to swallow.
“You’re aware of what I am?” Levi asks my old Pack Second. He already knows the answer.

“I am,” Thomas answers plainly. Unshaken as ever.

“And your thoughts?” Levi presses.

“I don’t particularly have any. I don’t know much about your kind, but from what Eren’s said you’re an ally. If my boy trusts you to help, then so will I.”

Well then.

They unclasp each other’s hands, but I notice that Levi doesn’t sit back just yet, stays close to me as Thomas continues, “I don’t want to cause any issues with Pack dynamics, here. I plan to help you get control of the situation with the omega, but if at any point I overstep, please do let me know. That goes for you, too,” he says to Sasha and Connie, who nod in sync.

“There won’t be a problem,” I say with confidence that I find comes easier to me than I thought it would, and I’m speaking for the four of us. My Pack.

“There will be if we don’t get to order soon,” Sasha sighs, and the tension around the table falls slack. Levi eases back into his seat, but keeps his knee pressed up against mine. I don’t shift away, just leave the contact between us, wolf prowling the cage of my mind as he tries to figure out what’s changed here, uncertain what this means coming from someone for whom touch isn’t an integral part of their existence. Connie tries to flag down a waiter to ask for the menus, clearly worried about what Sasha might do if her hunger is left unchecked for much longer, and Thomas smiles.

I can sense a hint of pride there, and I can’t stop the smile that spreads across my own face as I realise that this might actually just work.

Without thinking, without even looking at him, I slip my hand onto Levi’s knee and give it a squeeze, try to convey that I’m fucking grateful he didn’t act like a bitch to Thomas. I hear him suck in a sharp breath, but other than that, he doesn’t react.

When I take my hand back, I swear my wolf whines.

Once more with feeling, boys: well then.

We go out to the edge of Parkwood that afternoon, just me and Thomas. Sasha and Connie both have lectures to attend, and Levi makes an excuse that no one is particularly convinced by, but hey if he’s had enough for one day, he’s had enough for one day. It’s a free country.

So it’s just me and Tommy-boy, who hates being called that.

“I’m impressed,” he says as we’re nearing the treeline. I grunt.

“Impressed by what?” I ask, wondering if it’s the university he’s talking about here or what.

“By your betas,” he elaborates and oh. Yea. My betas. I try not to seem too smug as he goes on to say; “The three of you have clicked, haven’t you? You’re all balancing each other out nicely, keeping the wolf in check without any struggles I’d guess? Yea. You’re a very good fit for each other.”
We pause beneath the shadow of the woods and Thomas bumps my shoulder with his. We’re the same height, have been for years, but I still feel small when I’m next to him.

“This is what you’ve needed for a while now, isn’t it?” he guesses. And honestly?

“Not really,” I admit. He seems surprised, so I explain. “When I got here I was so determined to not get involved in any of this supernatural stuff. I told myself I just wanted a normal human college experience. And then Connie and Sash found me and I kinda ended up doing the exact opposite.” I chuckle and he smiles.

“Sounds about right. Your plans have never really worked out the way you wanted them to,” he says, and oh boy do I know that to be true. I always seemed to be unfairly graceless as a kid, coming home with scrapes and bruises all over just from doing dumb shit like jumping out of trees because I thought I could land on my feet and failing. As I grew up and when I became a part of the Pack for the first time, it didn’t really stop there. The scrapes and bruises healed quicker, but this time around I had the instincts of a wolf to drive me.

(I may or may not have been hit by a car during my first summer with the Pack is all I’m saying. Totally not my fault.)

We turn and walk along the treeline, just talking. Neither of us are in a hurry to start hiking it just yet, each perfectly content to catch up on the real stuff now that it’s just us and the sun is finally pushing through the clouds overhead. I ask him about home, and the Pack I left behind. He tells me how things haven’t really changed, just that everyone is feeling the absence I’ve left. Hannes keeps saying it’s been too quiet with me gone, apparently.

“I’ll remember to mention that when I talk to him next,” I say. I try not to let the homesickness set in, but it’s difficult. God I can’t wait to go home at the end of this semester and see them all again. Shame home is too far away for a weekend visit. Shame, also, that my weekends have been ever so busy with bizarre supernatural occurrences lately to even think about planning one.

Eventually the conversation cycles back around to my current Pack and Thomas has some questions about our mouthy tagalong.

“And how did you end up with a vampire in your Pack?” he asks, and I frown at the way he phrases it. It’s not like him to be so blunt.

“I bumped into him a few times on campus,” I explain (not a lie!) “and he was actually the one that made me aware that there was something funny going on in the forest outside of town. He’s been helping,” I finish lamely. Thomas is quiet for a while. I listen to the sounds of the campus to our right and the woods to our left, the steady rhythm of our footsteps separating the two worlds.

“Eren,” he says at last, and his tone is so serious. “Do you really trust him?”

The questions throws me. My wolf stills, the predator assessing, calculating, gearing up to defend. I shake my head and try to block him out.

“Well, yea,” I say, uncertainty clear in my voice. Where’s he going with this? “I guess—”

“No, don’t guess,” Thomas cuts me off, and my wolf’s hackles rise, surprising me even more than Thomas’ sudden change in character. “I need you to be very clear with me right now, because the thing I met earlier today, the thing we had breakfast with was not human, and I need you to be completely honest with me, Eren. Do you trust him?”
My wolf is growling now, teeth bared, and what the hell? Where is all of this coming from.

“I don’t understand,” I say, both to Thomas who is so serious and cold, and my wolf who is a building pressure beneath my skin, wanting out.

“Hannes sent me here to help you deal with an omega,” Thomas explains. He puts a hand on my shoulder and my wolf damn near snarls. It takes all my focus not to follow through on the action myself. What the fuck is happening? This is Thomas. Why the fuck is my wolf acting like this?

I try not to let my panic show.

“But Eren,” Thomas continues, and although his voice is as familiar to me as my own, this firm and cold tone is foreign. “This Levi is dangerous. Vampires are dangerous. I need you to understand that if he turns, if he tries to hurt you or any one of your betas, I will kill him.”

What the actual fuck?

I splutter, try to get the words out for myself, but my wolf’s blind anger is choking me now. I can feel the claws starting to push up beneath my nail beds as he coils and writhes in me, desperate to dominate now. I’m keeping my cool, I’m keeping my cool.

The look Thomas gives me is almost like pity. “Hannes has been doing some digging. There’s a reason they were all wiped out, kiddo. They’re pure predators. They aren’t human, no matter how innocent they look.”

I’m begging my wolf to back down now as Thomas’ words pile on top of me. At the mention of Hannes’ name, it feels like betrayal. I feel like I’m drowning. He goes on, says that vampires exist to destroy, to twist and torture their prey and at the last second go for the kill. I’m shaking my head, trying to understand what he’s saying, what he’s implying. Where is this coming from?

I had wondered, hadn’t I, if Levi was playing nice just to get close to me, to get under my guard? I had thought that.

And with Thomas, a man I have trusted totally for the last five years, standing there with his hand heavy on my shoulder and his eyes pleading me to listen, I think: Maybe there’s some weight to it after all? Maybe Levi has been toying with me, playing me all along just to get me under his thumb and then do away with me as soon as he’s satisfied? Last night I watched him coerce people into doing as he asked without even hesitating. What’s to stop him from taking advantage of me in the same way?

As the thoughts, the doubts, pile up, I think back to the first time we met. The explosive challenge that he had thrown at me, the strength in him as he had lifted me off my feet, and the burning anger in his eyes. It chokes me, even now, to remember how things were between us.

But then I realise; that hand tightening around my throat that could have crushed the air from my lungs is now a welcome touch. That voice, deep and ice cold as he threatened me, now teases and tempts. Those eyes, so fierce and furious, now hold something close to trust. Trust in me, my wolf whispers.

“No,” I say like a whip crack. Thomas takes a step back. He instinctively knows he’s made a mistake, but the confusion in his face says he’s not too sure where.

“Enough,” I spit, jaw aching with the teeth threatening to slice up through my gums. “He’s not the enemy. I trust him,” and as I’m saying it I know it’s true. I’ve gotta run with my instincts on this
one and every single nerve ending in me right now if screaming at me to *defend*.

“I trust him,” I repeat. Thomas reeks of confusion, of hurt, and beneath it all is a hint of fear. My wolf closes in and pounces on it. “I’m Alpha here,” I claim, bold as you like. “You’re here on my wishes to help find a scared omega and bring them home. That’s it. I *will not*—” I spit the words, taking a step towards him “—have you threatening my friend just because Hannes has read a wiki article and thinks he knows what’s best. I *will not* have you trying to spread doubt in Connie or Sasha either,” I add for good measure. My wolf urges me on. “Levi might not be the nicest of men in the world (in fact, he can be a huge pain in my ass when he wants to be, which is most of the time) but he is a part of my Pack now and that means that moving against him is the same as moving against me. I trust him. You need to trust me and accept that he’s not a threat. Think you can do that?”

And halleluah my wolf is howling now. Levi is Pack. God that feels so right when I admit it. The bitch of a vampire who initially *was* a big ol’ threat of mine is now without a doubt under my wolf’s protection. And sure, maybe *logically* thinking that shouldn’t be the case, but there’s really no point in arguing with the power of a wolf who has made up its mind.

My shoulders are heaving, the passion in my heart blazing as I show my old Pack Second exactly what kind of an Alpha I am now.

Thomas looks stunned. He raises his hands, breaks that connection between us. Peace gesture.

My wolf flicks his ears in distaste. I’m guessing neither of us was anticipating this turn of events.

“I think I can do that,” Thomas agrees, as reassuring as he can be. Always was one to keep the balance. He lowers his eyes, lowers his hands. Makes himself seem less threatening, submitting to the Alpha authority I’m exuding right now. My wolf accepts the admission and retreats a step, and I uncurl my fists, claws that once threatened to break through withdrawing as our collective energies calm down.

Thomas looks up at me after a moment of silence broken by heavy breathing.

“Christ, kiddo,” he says, offers a small smile. I can sense the shock, the amazement, coming from him right now. I start to feel a bit bad. “That’s one hell of an Alpha voice you’ve got there.”

“I’ve been practicing, I guess,” I shrug. Wolf now subdued, I’m feeling more sheepish, a bit guilty of how far I took it. “Was it too much?”

“To defend a member of your Pack?” Thomas asks, shaking his head. “No. I took it too far. I forgot who I was talking to. You’re in charge here, and you’ve clearly got some strong alliances in place with the local supernaturals. I’m sorry, Eren.” He steps closer to me but doesn’t initiate any contact. I take a breath and make myself smile, feel some of the tension drain out of my shoulders.

Am I absolutely shitting it thinking that I’ve ruined the relationship I have with one of the people closest to me? Oh absolutely. Thomas might as well be a mind reader because he shakes his head like he’s telling me I’m wrong.

“We’re just worried about you,” he says, gentle, like he’s afraid I might not believe him. And really now, I can’t fault him for that. “With everything you’re getting involved with, we just want to make sure you’re safe. You’re still family.”

“I know,” I sigh, and I close the distance between us and give him a tight hug. He doesn’t hesitate to return it, much to my relief. “But I’m fine, I’m strong, and I’m manging. You don’t have to keep
We break apart and start trudging again, and as we fall into step beside one another I know something has changed. Thomas has seen me as I am now, an Alpha in my own right and ready to defend my Pack against anything that might threaten them.

As we walk along the treeline, I don’t feel as small beside him as I used to.

We talk shop. Serious werewolf business. Hannes has managed in the past few days to find some more information about the probable victims of the Alpha attack. One of the hikers has been found by another Pack and was taken in accordingly until everything settles down for them. I have to admit that’s good news, but it still leaves three people missing – their partner, a teenager, and a woman who is by now heavily pregnant.

So we start to assess what we know about the omega in our woods and compare its behaviour to that we would expect from a newly turned wolf of each calibre. As I take him out to where we found the last bone yard, I tell him about the kills out by Cedar Lakes, the way they were arranged, like a warning. Thomas nods as he listens, like it’s making some kind of sense to him. I remember just how many decades experience he has of werewolf life and figure yea he’s probably seen something similar in his day.

The kill is long gone when we get to the clearing, carried off by the real wolves of the woods no doubt, but the apprehension in me is still there.

“That takes some doing, hunting down kills like that and arranging them to present a warning. Seems to me like this beastie feels threatened,” Thomas says, and I nod. We’d come to the same conclusion, after all. He adds; “not of you, though.”

“That who?” I ask. Thomas looks up at me over his shoulder. He’s crouching in the clearing we found the latest bone yard. I’m standing a few paces behind him, not overly eager to be back here. I can’t shake the feeling that I’m being watched but as my wolf hasn’t raised his head yet, I know that’s just my good old human paranoia kicking in.

“Therein lies the question,” he says. I don’t like him not knowing the answer. He narrows his eyes in thought. Stares out between the trees surrounding us.

“The Alpha that made it might still be following,” he thinks out loud, “but we’ve been reaching out to the Packs around here and there’s been no Alpha moving through territory that we’ve heard of. You haven’t bumped into one either, so clearly they’re not close by.” He shoves his hands in his pockets and looks up at the sky above, the trees without their leaves letting bleak rays filter down to us, the air punctuated with birdsong.

“We haven’t encountered the omega, either,” I say, filling in the gaps. “We’ve been looking, sure, but so far we’ve not come close. This kill here was the freshest by far, but if the omega made it because it felt threatened by us then why not just run?”

“A very good point,” Thomas concedes, and he sounds surprised. “You’re thinking like an Alpha now.”

I frown at the comment. He pushes on; “If I was a scared omega, miles from home, and I knew there was an Alpha with their Pack running through these woods, I’d book it.” He looks at me. “So what’s stopping it?”
The conversation I had with Levi about the protective and vengeful nature his mother exuded when she fell pregnant springs to mind. It’s something I considered in passing before, but as I stand there and turn it over in my mind once more, I start to get a clearer idea, piece some things together.

“Maybe it can’t,” I say. Thomas cocks his head to one side, listening to me. “Maybe the person we’re dealing with can’t run. Maybe because they’re not in a fit state to get very far away on their own. Hannes said one of the people missing was pregnant. So maybe the omega we’re looking for doesn’t want to be found by anyone because they’re not just protecting themselves?”

Thomas looks at me like he’s starting to connect the same dots. He nods slowly, takes a step towards me as he picks up where I’ve left off. “I’ve not got much experience with being pregnant myself, but I can imagine that getting turned probably put a bit of a strain on things. Maybe that’s why they ran like they were being chased?”

I take over, begin pacing myself in a mirror of him. “Maybe they were being chased because a freshly turned wolf with another on the way is a big pull for an Alpha with issues?” I estimate. “Maybe they ended up here and they figured they were far enough away, or their wolf told them that continuing to run would put them at risk this late in their pregnancy? Maybe the panic started to wear off as they realised exactly what was happening wasn’t going to stop any time soon. They put their safety first for long enough, but now they’re out of options? I don’t know, it’s a lot of maybes,” I finish more hesitantly.

But the air around Thomas is spiked with excitement now as he grabs what I’m saying and adds to it. We’re both prowling round the clearing, watching the other as they theorise. I’ve seen Hannes and him do this a lot over the years, but now I’m in pole position I’m feeling a little giddy.

“So, pregnant werewolf, running from the Alpha that turned her.” Thomas checks the points off on his fingers. “Reaches as far north as she can run, finds a nice secluded forest not too far from civilisation but hidden enough in the mountains that she feels safe, and then stops running any further.”

“Right,” I agree. So far it sounds like a good theory, but here’s the kicker. “If it were any of the others, this far away from the Alpha and this long after being turned they would have come back to themselves. They would have come into Trost in the search of something human to anchor them. We would have found them by now – they’d be desperate for someone to help them make sense of it all.

“But. We’ve not seen a hair of them. So there must be something else going on. Something big enough to keep them in the woods and keep them scared.”

“Something like being pregnant and having instincts telling them to protect that pregnancy at all costs?” Thomas supplies. I nod. Yes. That’s the only thing that makes sense.

“The bone yards weren’t a warning for us,” I say. “They were there to keep away any predators. They were a way for the wolf to provide for her child and ensure its safety before that child has even been born. She’s scared because she doesn’t know what’s happening or how it’s going to affect her baby and that’s keeping the wolf in control.” I think about what Levi said. “A mother’s instincts gone mad. I think being an Alpha in charge of a Pack can be stressful when I think they’re being threatened. Imagine being a mother in fear of her own life and not understanding what’s happened to her or why. God, I’d completely lose it.”

“Start killing and making a show of it,” Thomas agrees. “Big displays with little provocation because she has to do something, and running isn’t an option anymore.”
We look at each other. We’ve been slowly circling inward to the centre of the clearing and now we’re an arm’s distance apart from one another, both breathing heavily.

“Kid,” Thomas says slowly. “I think you’ve got something here.”

“Great,” I say back to him. “What do we do now?”

We head back into Trost. Thomas wants to grab some gear and I need to wait for Sasha and Connie to get home so I can talk to them about this, catch them up to speed.

Thomas and I decided in that clearing in the woods that regardless of who this omega really is, be it the pregnant woman or one of the other missing people, we need to do something about it now. Especially if it’s who we think it is.

And sure, we haven’t been able to find the omega yet ourselves, but we haven’t been through Parkwood all that thoroughly – we were focusing mainly on the area around Cedar Lakes, where the first kills were found. If Parkwood is where this omega is hiding, Thomas is hoping that we can lure them out into the open with some good old fashioned wolfnip (and by that I mean burning anise). Plus, four wolves can cover more ground than three, and if we can get Levi in on this that makes five. I consider messaging Jean, purely for number’s sake, but I did give him my word that I would leave him out of any Pack issues, so in the end I decide against it.

Five should be enough. Five should be plenty.

As I drive us back down the hillside into the heart of the city I find myself worrying about how Connie and Sasha will react to this. Sure, we’ve discussed the possibilities of who the omega might be, but I know that they responded the worst to the thought that it could be the pregnant woman. We’re all wishing it’s not her, but hey it’s gotta be somebody, am I right?

Regardless of who the omega is, it’s crunch time now. We’ve got to find them.

We’ve got the manpower and the drive to do this, and really at this point I don’t think we’ve got a choice either way. Time to go out there and try to bring this poor soul back home.

I drop Thomas off at his hotel (and of course it’s one of the most expensive places he could book at such short notice, the rich fucker) and then I turn my truck around and drive out to the student housing, pull up on the curb outside Connie and Sasha’s place, and let myself in with the key they’ve given me.

To my surprise, they’re home.

“What are you guys doing here?” I question as I round the corner into the lounge and see them curled up together on the sofa, worry lacing the air about them. They must have heard me coming cos the tv’s switched on but it’s muted, just playing to a quiet room. Even as I stand there they don’t make a move towards me.

Something’s wrong.

“What is it?” I ask, fear spiking deep in the pit of my stomach. Connie whines and finally stands. “Why aren’t you in lectures?”

“We felt you earlier, man,” Connie says, and he’s moving across the room to stand in front of me. Sash stays curled up on the sofa. I notice she’s got a blanket pulled around her. It makes her look
“What do you mean?” I ask. Three “what’s” in a row from me. I’m on a role.

“We could feel it like your wolf was going crazy. We thought something bad had happened. We didn’t know what to do, so we just stayed here,” he explains, and he’s fidgeting, bouncing the toes of one foot on the ground behind him, balancing on one leg almost. He looks a bit lost in all honesty, and my wolf whines at me to comfort him.

“Hey, no,” I assure him, bring up my arms and pull him into a hug. He pushes his face into the crook of my neck. I feel his hot breath against my skin and breathe him in in return, close my eyes.

“Nothing happened to me. I just had a bit of an argument with Thomas.”

“Over what?” Sasha pipes up from the sofa. I look at her and smile gently.

“He had some things to say about Levi that I didn’t like,” I admit. Connie goes still in my arms and I see Sasha’s eyes widen a bit.

“Fuck,” Connie mutters. “Eren, you fuck. We thought someone was in danger.” He pulls back and scowls at me. I shrug.

“My wolf responded a bit more strongly than I thought he would. Guess it’s just because it was coming from Thomas and we’re not technically a part of the same Pack anymore, so he knows we outrank him now. Think my wolf just wanted to throw his weight around.” I try to make it sound light, like it’s no big deal. Connie doesn’t look convinced. He crosses his arms over his strong chest and levels his gaze at me.

“Be straight with me, man,” he says. “What’s going on with you and Levi?”


“We could feel how defensive you were from all the way down here, bro. He’s more than that, isn’t he?”

I look at them both. Look at the mess I’m making of them with my stupid out of control emotions. I throw my hands up in defeat.

“He’s Pack,” I say. Might as well let the rest of said Pack in on my decision.

“Seriously?” Connie demands, but he doesn’t sound angry.

“Yea,” I admit, duck my head down despite my wolf telling me that now’s not the time to be backing out. “Kinda been feeling it for a while, but today it just made me realise for good that I trust him.” I look up at my Second, stand my ground. “I’ll protect him if I have to, just like I’ll always protect the two of you.”

“Do you think he’d do the same?” Connie asks, derision lacing his tone ever so slightly. That’s fair.

I shrug. “I hope he would, but honestly that doesn’t matter to me. He’s been there when I’ve needed him, he’s actually been helpful with everything going on recently, and I really don’t think it’s good for him to be on his own either right now.”

“Do vampires have Packs?” Sasha asks, and she’s sitting up now, the blanket forgotten.
“I don’t know,” I say. I sigh. “He had a family once, but from what he’s said they died a long time ago. I think it’s just him, guys.”

We all stand (and sit) there in silence for a moment. Them processing what I’ve just said, and me immediately regretting my life choices. This wasn’t what I even came here to talk about.

Eventually Connie groans, “Fuck sake,” and the silence is broken. “You really want him with us?”

“I do.” Positive now.

“Then I guess I’m fine with that.”

“Really?” I try not to sound too amazed, but clearly I did a piss poor job at it because Connie does a full body eye roll and goes and flops down on the sofa next to Sasha.

“You’re in charge, man,” he says, a small smile on his lips. Next to him, Sasha grins at me. “I guess we can’t complain really. You took us in, you took Jean in and gave him back his control. You wanna make Levi your bitch, you can. But he’s not joining in our Pack piles.”

“Oh, putting your foot down?” I tease. He huffs a laugh and uses said foot to kick out at me where I’m still standing in front of him. I dance back, out of his reach.

“Whatever,” he says, and I can see he’s trying not to smile. I come and sit down next to him on the sofa and pull him against me with one arm.

“You’re always going to be my Second,” I say, and it’s the first time I’m really confirming it out loud. Guess it’s a day for big announcements.

“Good.” His short and snappy answer is betrayed by the flood of pure love that washes over me, and I bring my other hand up to tangle in his messy grey hair. Always, huh?

“I mean, I’ve only known you for three months and I’m already completely head over heels,” I continue, trying to get a bigger response out of him that just one word. Sasha smirks at me over Connie’s head.

“Is it the way he can burp the alphabet?” she guesses. Connie lets out a little betrayed squeak and she snickers.

“No, it’s definitely the sight of his hairy toes,” I claim, and at that Connie shoves me off the sofa and tackles me to the ground, all mock-fury. I let him, and then I flip him, straddle his hips as he growls up at me.

“Take that back,” he demands. Is this a sore spot, I sense?

“Nah,” I say, lazy as you like. He bucks up and I fall forward onto my hands to brace myself, stop myself from falling over completely. I press my nose against his and grin. “You really think you can take your Alpha?” I ask. He’s still now but I can see the mischief in his eyes and I only have time to think oh fuck before Sasha is barrelling into my side, shoving me off her boyfriend and to the ground. I laugh, and it feels good to tussle with them, the memory of our wolves playing together on full moon runs making me feel almost nostalgic for a sweet moment.

Eventually I let them pin me, one on either side, holding my arms down to the ground, Connie’s knee on my stomach and Sasha’s other hand on my chest. They’re giggling, and the joy coming from them makes my heart swell.
“It’s not fair when you team up against me,” I pout. Sasha gives me a little growl and Connie says
“no shit! It’s not fair that you’re twice as strong as us.”

I concede defeat with grace, pulling them both down into a hug on the carpet.

“Levi’s not having any of this,” I tell them. “Don’t worry. You’re all mine.”

I give Connie a playful nip on the tip of his nose and he sticks his tongue out at me. Sasha fists her
hand in my shirt a little tighter.

“I don’t mind him that much,” she says like she’s sharing a secret. Connie groans, long and loud.

“Not you too!” he accuses, but there’s no malice in it. He’s only complaining to keep up
appearances at this point.

“Well, he keeps buying us food, so I think he’s alright,” she defends.

“Me too, pup,” I agree. We wait for Connie to add his agreement – really make the deal binding.

“Oh fine,” he says. “What the hell, me three. He’s not as bad as he used to be.”

“I’ll let him know,” I laugh. I allow us to lie there for a moment longer, just easing the stress out of
my bones before I bring us round to business.

“So,” I say at last. “Are you guys up for a little omega hunting this afternoon?”

“We’re ready,” Sasha claims. To be fair, she sounds convincing.

“I can’t leave you to do it all by yourself,” Connie agrees. I roll my eyes.

“Thomas is getting us some anise to flush the omega out,” I tell them. I can right away sense the
confusion from Sasha, so I explain: “Anise is kinda like a siren call to a werewolf when it gets
burned. It’s like catnip. If we all spread out to cover as much ground as possible, we should be able
to flush it out of its hiding place with a little luck. Then it’s just down to whether or not I can bring
it back from the edge and claim it as a part of our Pack.”

“You sure you’ve got it in you to claim another monster today?” Connie prods.

“I don’t think I’ve really got a choice. If I can’t help this omega then they’ll just keep suffering,
and someone could end up getting hurt as a result. We owe it to whoever it is to help get them
home.”

“I guess we better go pack a bag or something,” Sasha says. “Last time you helped out an omega
you spent two nights as a wolf. That could happen again.”

“Very true,” I murmur, and we start to pull ourselves to our feet. Sasha runs upstairs to pack
clothes for the three of us and Connie heads into the kitchen to grab some food and water just in
case it’s a long night. It’s weirdly reminiscent of the routine we have before a full moon, but this
time there’s no moon in sight and there’s a very high chance of tonight ending in violence.

I know without even thinking about it that if trouble comes their way I’ll be putting myself in front
of them. There’s no question there.

My phone buzzes in my pocket.

[From Thomas]: omw, text me the address.
I send him the street name and number and call out to the others, “Thomas is on his way. You guys almost ready?”

I get a chorus of “yea!” back and slip my phone back into my pocket just as my wolf, with no prior warning, floods through to all of my sense and tells me *be ready.*

I don’t have time to wonder *be ready for what?* before something slams full force into the glass sliding door behind me and my wolf damn near jumps into my skin.

“What the fuck was that?” Connie shouts, running back into the room, and I’m already halfway over to the door, on high alert, when whatever it is slams into the door again and I realise with a sickening rush of terror that it’s the elongated, clawed, bloody hand of Jean who’s collapsed on his knees on the porch outside, mid-shift.

My stomach drops as he looks up at me with fear-tinged golden eyes and my wolf takes over, gets my legs to move before I can recover from the shock.

“Jesus Christ,” Connie is saying over and over, trying to get the door unlocked. Sasha’s in the doorway to the lounge behind me and I can feel her concern, her mounting fear.

I watch as Jean shakes, closes his eyes in pain as the bones in his jaw start to lengthen.

The door opens in a *whoosh* and I’m out in the cold air of the afternoon in a heartbeat, falling to my knees beside him, hands hovering, wanting to touch but unsure if that would help or hinder at this point, as my wolf commands me *protect our beta.*

“Jean,” I say, and at the sound of his name his head whips round to face me, a strangled sound escaping his lips as he leans towards me, and I catch him as he falls. I let the power of the Alpha flood through me and try to say as calmly as I am able; “Jean just breathe.”

Connie is pacing the garden, looking for any signs of danger. Sasha is framed by the open back door, face pale with worry. She doesn’t know what to do. I hardly know myself, I’m just running on instincts at this point.

Jean twitches against me and I feel the crashing wave of supernatural energy that tells me he’s almost close to breaking point. I let my eyes flood to gold and wrap both of my arms tighter around him and hold him through it, keep telling him to breathe, that he’s okay, that he’s safe.

Connie comes to crouch next to us, looking at me, asking me what I need him to do without saying it out loud, and I shake my head at him as Jean tenses up all over.

“Give us space,” I command, and Connie complies, backing up.

I focus back on Jean. “It’s alright,” I say. “It’s just us here, and there’s nothing that’s going to get passed us. Just hold onto yourself, Jean. You’re human. *Focus* on that feeling of being in your own body and being here with me and we’ll get you through this.”

He’s digging claws into my arm now, clinging to me as he shakes, scared little whimpers escaping him as he grapples with a wolf he has barely got control over. I ignore the pain as blood swells up and start to trickle down my arm, staining the air around us. It don’t matter. I’ll heal. *He* matters.

“Come on, Jean. You’re so strong. You’ve got this. You don’t even need an Alpha, remember? You don’t need me, but I’m here and I’ll help you in any way that I can. Just breathe. That’s it, just breathe.” I rock him gently, hoping it will help.
“Shut up.”

It’s so quiet that I almost miss it, but no he definitely said it.

“I’ll shut up when you’re in control enough to make me,” I tell him, and that gets a strangled laugh out of him that quickly morphs back into a whimper. Yea, holding back the shift hurts so fucking bad, but he’s powering through it with enough coherency for speech. It makes me wonder just how often over the past few months he’s had to do this, literally claw his way back from the edge.

My wolf watches through my eyes as I comfort the beta I’ve hardly even got, watches me hold this boy and soothe him and call him back to his human self again. The strength of that other being inside me never ebbs, never weakens. We hold steady and Jean leans into us and breathes in our calm, and then finally finally the tremors stop and he’s clear of the worst of it.

I ease up my hold on him as he let go of the grip he had on my arm, claws retracting and the bones of his hands sliding back into the normal positions as the blood flows and my skin starts to knit itself back together.

I don’t say anything now, just give him some time to collect himself. He looks exhausted, stinks of adrenaline and wolf and fear.

“I found it,” he says. His voice is gravelly from the near shift he just endured, and I turn to the open back door, hoping to find Sasha there so I can ask he for a glass of water, but instead seeing Sasha, Connie, and Thomas all standing there staring at us with open mouths. I don’t even remember hearing Thomas arrive, as focused as I had been with Jean at the time.

“Water?” I ask. Connie goes for it. Sash comes out of the house a step, and Thomas hangs back. I realise I haven’t really mentioned Jean to him at all. Fuck knows what he’s thinking right now.

Connie remerges with a glass, dripping water over the wood of the porch in his haste to being it to us, and Jean accepts it from him with shaking hands. I can sense his discomfort with having an audience right now, and I suppose that the others must be picking up on it too because they all gravitate back inside the house. I know they’ll be listening, but at least they’re not a physical presence to Jean right now.

“Better?” I ask, after Jean is done downing the glass. He wipes his mouth on the back of his arm and nods, still not looking at me directly. I sit back on the hard porch decking with an oof to give him some space.

“Want to tell me what happened?” I try. He shrugs a shoulder, looking really like he would rather not. I wonder if he meant to come here at all or if he was just acting on instinct.

“I was in Packwood,” he says. Makes sense, his boyfriend lives there. “I went for a run. My stomach kept turning, so I figured some fresh air might help, you know? I ended up running to the woods, don’t know why.”

A pinch of guilt hooks me as I wonder if the same spike of Alphaly activity that Connie and Sasha had felt all the way down here had somehow affected him to. We are connected, after all, even if that connection is weak.

He turns to me and his eyes are big, that fear rising, adrenaline seeping in again.

“There was a wolf,” he whispers. “I could feel it by the trees, so close to campus and Marco, so I ran after it. I thought I could chase it off, but…” he trails off and it’s like he’s looking through me. I try not to let my panic show at the admission that the omega was near the campus enough that
Jean could sense them. There’s no putting this off any longer, I think as Jean plays through the memory of it. We need to find them today.

“It was feral,” he says. States a fact. I swallow. All the more reason to stop them wandering any closer towards fresh student bodies. “You said you were looking for an omega but I didn’t think it would be that bad.” I don’t know what to tell him so I stay quiet. “Is that what I could have ended up like?”

“Is that what triggered the shift?” I ask, avoid giving him an answer he doesn’t need to hear right now.

“I think that’s what I would have ended up like,” he says, quieter. I put a hand on his shoulder, comforting and grounding, and I know that right now it’s all that he’s likely to accept from me.

“I wouldn’t have let that happen,” I say truthfully, and his shoulders fall. He looks down.

“I’m glad you didn’t. That shit was terrifying.”

“I know. Imagine what it must be like for them.” At that, Jean’s head whips up and he meets my eyes with something like trepidation. “I’m going to help them. Or at least I’m going to try. We’re going to go find the omega as soon as you’re okay to move. We can even drop you off on the way if you’d like.”

“You’re going after it?” he sounds incredulous.

“We’ve got to. If it’s this close to campus, there’s no knowing what it will do next. We can’t risk anyone getting hurt. Just because it hasn’t attacked a human yet doesn’t mean it won’t next time.”

“You’re crazy,” Jean breathes. I crack a smile. He’s not wrong.

“I guess I am, but it’s worked out for you so far.”

Connie calls Levi as I drive, tells him to meet us in Parkwood by Marco’s place and explains that Jean’s with us and he’s pretty shaken. Thomas is up front with me, my three betas in the back, Jean in the middle. Safest seat in the car.

“You ran all the way here?” Thomas asks, watching him in the rear mirror. I try to keep my attention on the road.

“I guess,” Jean says. He’s looking out the window, not making eye contact with any of us. We’re all thinking that it’s a hell of a way to run with a wolf tearing its way out of you. He’s tense under Thomas’ watchful eye. I don’t blame him.

Hell, we’re all tense here. The air in my truck stinks so bad of nerves and adrenaline that I have to open a window as I begin the climb up to the uni campus on the hill. No one asks to have the radio on. No one attempts to lighten the mood.

“I was panicking, I guess my wolf just ran me right to its Alpha,” Jean continues, and it’s the first time he’s really referred to me as anything close to Alpha. My wolf yips, smug as fuck. I tell him to shut it, that this is hardly the time to be happy for ourselves.

“That’s quite a way to run on instinct,” Thomas muses. He’s watching me now and I don’t know what to say, so I keep quiet, just drive.
Five minutes and we’ll be there. Focus on that.

“So, you all say you felt it when Eren was upset earlier?” he asks to the car as a collective, and ouch. Make me out to be the problem here, why don’t you? Never mind the reason I was upset in the first place had more to do with the way you were talking about my Pack then it did with me being emotional. Sure.

“Is that what that was?” Jean mutters, and I wonder if he’s resenting me. I can’t pick up anything from him except the anxiety though.

“I didn’t mean to stress you all out,” I say. “I’m sorry.”

In the rear mirror, Connie and Sasha smile at me, and Jean nods, although he’s still staring resolutely out of the window with his arms crossed over his chest. I’ll take it.

“I wonder if that’s what woke the omega up too,” Thomas theorises. I frown.

“But the guys felt it because I’m their Alpha. There’s a connection there. How’s an omega I’ve never met and never claimed feel what I go Alpha on someone?”

“No,” Thomas agrees. “You’re probably right. It’s just the timing that made me wonder.”

I pull off the main road into the uni village that makes up Parkwood and drive slowly through the streets now there’s more pedestrians about. As we pull up to Marco’s I spot Levi’s red car parked neatly in the driveway. At least we won’t have to wait around for him to catch up.

I switch off the engine, and as I do so, the front door to the house slams open and Marco runs out barefoot, real worry etched across his freckled face.

There’s a choked sound in the back seat and Jean literally climbs over Connie to get out of the truck as soon as he sees his boyfriend. I hear Connie swear and I’m pretty certain he’s just been kicked in the shin, but he doesn’t complain, just jumps out of the truck after Jean and hangs back, watching as the two guys run at each other, pull each other into a fierce hug, Jean’s face buried in Marco’s neck and Marco’s hands treading through Jean’s hair in steady motions.

I wait for Thomas to climb down from the truck, make sure we’ve got our bags and lock up, hang back a bit to give them their moment. I notice that Levi’s standing in the open door to Marco’s house. I figure he must have caught Marco up to speed. Honestly I’m glad he did.

Levi sees me and makes his way down the drive. Gives Marco a pat on the back as he passes them.

“Such a cute couple,” he comments to me. I grunt and hand him my bag. He takes it, raises an eyebrow at me.

“Spare clothes in case things go sideways. You should probably hold onto it,” I tell him, and he tilts his head to one side as if he’s trying to figure out exactly how wrong I’m expecting today to go.

“Are we ready?” Thomas asks. I look around at my Pack; Connie and Sasha standing determined and strong, Levi trying to appear as uninterested as ever, and Jean safe and sound with Marco. I’d say we’re done here.

“Let’s get going,” I agree.

As we start to walk away from the house in the direction of the woods, Jean pulls away from
Marco and calls out, “Wait.”

I turn to see him standing there, looking uncertain and embarrassed, hand clasped firmly in Marco’s. He looks at his boyfriend and then back to me and takes a deep breath.

“If you’re going out there, I should come with you,” he says, and I can see the conflict in him that says it’s really the last thing he wants to do, but he still needs to make the offer, be brave. That wolf instinct urging him to stay with the Pack, where he’s stronger.

“Absolutely not, kid,” Thomas says, and I growl lowly at him before I can stop myself. He closes his mouth, realising that he’s just spoken over the Alpha. He’ll have to stop doing that, or we’re going to have a problem. I turn back to Jean.

“You don’t have to,” I say gently. “We’ve got this. You can stay here and keep Marco safe.”

I’m silently begging him to do just that. As much as him being a part of the Pack would bring joy to me and my wolf, I’m not too sure our first bonding activity should be hunting down an omega that’s already spooked him to hell and back.

Marco gives his hand a squeeze and Jean shakes his head.

“I can keep Marco safe by helping you.” And yea, he’s starting to sound more certain now. “If we can get this thing taken care of right now, then it solves the problem for real. I—I’ll help you.”

“It’s sound logic,” Levi says, like he’s not really bothered either way. And it is, I guess. But still.

“Are you sure?” I give him one last chance to back out. The guy squares his shoulders and looks me directly in the eye, lets go of Marco’s hand who’s looking more pleased right now than he probably should. Proud, I realise. Marco’s proud of him.

“Let’s get going,” Jean echoes, and I smile.

At the treeline of the woods, I can feel his confidence dimming somewhat, his steps faltering.

It’s getting dark overhead, and although we’re all perfectly matched in the night vision department, I’m keenly aware of the fact that my betas are all drifting closer to me as we walk across the grass, letting me lead them, even though it’s Jean who knows where he’s going.

We’re behind the science buildings, right at the edge of campus, and I realise as I’m looking around that this is the exact place Levi and I fought things out. I glance over at him standing off to the side, and he’s looking at me in the fading light. I can feel the intensity of his stare and wonder if he’s thinking the same thing. I jerk my chin up a little, asking what’s wrong. He shakes his head and focuses back on the trees ahead. I’m sure we’ll talk later – I’ve got a few things I need to say to him.

“Alright, huddle up.” I break the silence. They huddle up. Connie on my right, Levi on my left, Sasha next to Connie and Thomas next to Levi. Jean stands opposite me, Sasha giving him an encouraging smile.

Thomas slips the bag he’s been carrying off his shoulder and hands it over to me. I pull the ziplock bag of anise out and start handing out wads of incense sticks to the gang. At the faint smell, I can see the wolves among us perk up a bit. Levi looks utterly unimpressed.
“You burn it,” I explain. “If the omega catches a whiff of this they’ll be inclined to investigate it further.”

“And that’s all it takes?” Levi asks, eyebrow raised. I shrug.

“Well, that and the presence of six supernaturals walking through the woods should get it’s attention, yea.”

“You have a point.”

“He doesn’t have a ‘presence’, though,” Jean comments, nodding at Levi.

“Oh, he does,” I assure him. “He’s just good at hiding it.”

And on cue the crashing wave of Levi's real nature envelops us. For a moment, it feels like I’m plummeting into this cold, dark cloud, but I can still feel my feet on solid ground. I see the others flinch, Thomas taking a step back from him. I forget how shocking it is the first time. It still takes me a minute to readjust, for my wolf to calm.

“See?” Levi says, like a child proving a point. His pupils are slits, giving him a more chaotic look. His scent lifts with a hunger; the desire for a fight.

“I’d day that’s enough to catch anyone’s attention,” Thomas admits.

“Yea, but I kinda want to throttle you right now,” Connie’s says, not sounding at all sorry. “You’re like a walking challenge. If the omega senses that they’re gonna go batshit.”

“That’s why Levi will stick with me.” I say it firmly, make it clear it’s not up for debate. Connie looks less than pleased, but he doesn’t make it heard and for that I’m grateful. “He’s the one of us most likely to be approached, so he’ll stick with me.”

Levi looks incredulous. I’m clearly throwing off his bad guy vibe. “You’re using me as bait?” he accuses.

“Yes.” I don’t sound sorry. “And this way I can make sure that if the omega goes for you I can stop you from killing it.”

He narrows his eyes at me, but before he can say anything else, Sasha speaks up.

“So, what do the rest of us do?” she asks. Right.

“You hold the perimeter. You make sure that if it spooks, it doesn’t head for the campus. You burn anise and you howl if you see it. Keep your distance, don’t lose it. Me and Levi are the fastest, so we’ll come to you.

“We’ll head north from here and keep going until we reach the river. I’ll text you if anything changes. All good?”

I get a grim nod from each of them, like a sombre Mexican wave. I have no idea if this will actually work, but Thomas had suggested it and I know he wouldn’t have brought it up to me if he didn’t have faith in the method. And there’s logic to it. If we were trying to catch someone’s beta, this would work.

Now it’s time to put it to the test – put us to the test – and see if we can’t catch ourselves a crazy omega.
My wolf itches for me to let him out. As the pale moonlight shines down on us from between the clouds, I let my eyes flood to gold and breathe in through my wolf’s lungs. The scents of the woods surround me.

“Allright, spread out,” I command, and they obey the order without delay, slipping in amongst the trees. Soon it’s just me and Levi left on the edge of the woods, and for the first time this evening I’m able to look at him properly. I have the strongest urge to reach out and touch him, to push the few loose strands of black hair back from his eyes, but I don’t.

“Do you think this will really work?” Levi asks, and I’m conscious that my betas aren’t out of earshot yet. I give him a smile that doesn’t reach all the way up to my eyes.

“We’ve got to make it,” I say.

In the distance, I hear a wolf begin to howl.

Chapter End Notes

Hope this chapter was kinda cohesive with the rest of the work - it's been a while and despite re-reading some stuff, I'm sure I've forgotten most of what's happened. Sorry!

Kudos and comments are always appreciated, even if those comments are just to chew me out for the long wait <3
Small Victories

Chapter Summary

Eren and the Pack go hunting, and you'll never guess what happens next.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

I’ve planned this so I’m directly following the omega’s scent trail left after its altercation with Jean earlier this evening. The others are spread out in a line on either side of us, heading in the same direction, north to the mountains, listening out for each other, keeping an even distance, letting me lead the way even now.

Levi’s close by my side, the supernatural aura surrounding him tonight a steady reminder that he’s impossibly strong but he’s here and he’s willing to follow me to. An ally, a friend, a Packmate. Whatever you want to call it, he’s by my side and at least for tonight, his power is mine to command. To my wolf and I, he feels ancient and unreachable – there’s a history behind him that I don’t understand – but as I quicken my pace into a light jog and he mirrors me, I begin to think that maybe there’s space between us for something new; a partnership between vampire and Alpha, a push and pull of power that could see us as equals.

That’s if he’ll allow it.

“Why are you so desperate to help it?” Levi asks me, and he’s talking about the omega. He sounds genuinely curious; no hint of derision present now it’s just me and him beneath the trees.

“Can you scent its trail?” I ask, not exactly deflecting, just wondering.

“No,” Levi says. “Not like you can. I’ll know when it’s close by, but right now I’m just following you.”

“Well I can scent its trail,” I tell him, and I catch the quick purse of his lips that warns he’s about to make a snarky comment, so I continue before he has the chance. “After Jean sensed the omega by the campus, he ran. It could have chased the threat – we tend to be more confrontational when the wolf side is in control, so Jean was clearly expecting it to pursue him – but it didn’t. It turned and ran back into the woods, into its territory. We’ve been following for what? Ten minutes now?” I look at Levi and he shrugs as if to say yea I guess.

“And this whole time its trail stinks of desperation. Fear and fury.” I shake my head. “It’s more wolf than human right now. It was turned by an Alpha who wasn’t in control of what they were doing, it was chased across whole states by that Alpha, and now it’s here, hiding in the woods, defending its territory during full moons with bone yards and displays of aggression, but it didn’t go after Jean.”

“So what does that mean?” Levi asks, and I was hoping he would.

“It means that the wolf is what’s driving it – those instincts to protect its territory and keep threats at bay is what’s causing the behaviour patterns, that much is clear. The kills we’ve found all
happened during the nights of the full moon, when the wolf was fully in control. It’s defensive and angry, but beneath that animal there’s still a very scared human that wants nothing more than to understand what’s happening to them and find some way to make it stop.

“I’ve been that scared human before,” I explain, “and it’s terrifying. You’re constantly battling this thing that’s got control of your body. I think the omega ran when they saw Jean because they didn’t want to give in to that monster, they didn’t want to lose what was left of their humanity by attacking him.”

“How noble,” Levi says, and sure it’s a bit of a shit thing to say but I can see he’s clearly processing what I’ve told him, weighing up the facts, making what he knows fit with what he doesn’t. “So you think that because it didn’t attack Jean, it’s still human enough to be saved?”

“I fucking hope so,” I mutter. Either way, Jean clearly spooked it. It’s wary and defensive right now, but it chose the flight response, not the fight response, and I’m hoping I can use that to my advantage.

We continue in silence for a while. The trail twists eastwards and I alter our course without talking, the cold wind carrying the faint scent of anise our way now, waking me up inside. It really is noticeable. Levi keeps close, and I can hear my Pack in the woods around us keep their distance too, letting me lead them to the omega.

It’s the first time I’ve been able to catch the trail so fresh, and the first time I’ve been able to analyse it in any detail beyond the stench of death that clung to those bone yards. It sure smells more like wolf than it does like human, but the fear that clouds it is growing weaker the further we get from the campus. This far out and there’s no sounds of civilisation, just me and Levi and the Pack as we jog between the trees, letting our wolves’ eyes shine through the darkness.

“I’ve seen it happen, you know.” Levi speaks the words into the space between us, and the way he says it is softer than usual, like it’s a secret he’s now willing to share. He doesn’t talk much about his past to me, so I don’t interrupt him, just give him the space he needs to open up.

“I’ve watched a werewolf lose its humanity.” I hear him swallow, and I taste as hint of regret ripple over him. “It was bad.”

“Bad’s an understatement,” I say, before I can help myself, and he raises his eyes to look at me, slows his pace from a jog to a walk, and then stops. I can’t quite pinpoint what emotion I see in those grey eyes of his, but I can’t look away.

“Eren,” he says, and he’s serious now. “I’ve hated werewolves for a long time. Loathed them, really.”

“Fantastic! Where are you going with this?” I deadpan, not feeling particularly stellar. He tuts at me.

“I’m trying to say that, despite my grievances with your kind, I don’t envy the struggles you face. I’m not human, but what I am is just one thing; just me. But werewolves have a part of them that isn’t them, and I’ve seen what can happen when that part wins out.” He breaks eye contact, turns his head to the side and bites his lower lip as he composes his thoughts. Right now I’m trying to figure out what the hell kind of a life he’s had where he’s been witness to the full on breakdown of a werewolf, but I know he won’t answer me if I ask.

I’m dimly aware that we’re wasting time, standing here, but I wait for him to finish.
“I understand that you’re doing this out of the goodness of your heart, to save the poor beast,” he says, and it’s only slightly mocking, “but I’m heartless, and I’ve killed plenty poor beasts in my time, so I don’t have that excuse. I’m here because I told you I would help you, and I intend to keep my word on that. We’re going to help this omega, kid. You’re going to be the hero you clearly want to be, and I’m going to help you.” He turns to me again, and he looks determined, shoulders squared. “I’m going to make sure you never know what it looks like when the wolf side wins. Tonight, we’re winning.”

And honestly? Yea, I’m pretty moved. Sure, his speech did mention that he had killed werewolves in the past, but now he wants to help me save one! You know what I call that? Growth.

“Come on,” he says and brushes past me. “We’re wasting time.”

I try not to smile as we begin our jog again. I can hear the distant sound of my Pack some way in front of us, waiting for us to get moving again, and I realise that it’s not really my ears that are picking up on them right now, but rather my wolf’s ears. He can track their locations through our shared Pack bond. I don’t remember it being this strong before, but I’m not complaining.

I wonder, as Levi and I cover the distance, if they could hear our conversation; if they heard the promise Levi just made me.

I think that maybe I would prefer it if they didn’t, if this was just something between me and Levi for a change.

“Have you always hated werewolves?” I ask him as I pick up the trail again. He laughs, and it’s just air blown out of his nose.

“Not always,” he allows. And yea, I so pounce on that.

“Really?!”

Again, he tuts.

“I’m several hundred years old, kid. You think you’re the first werewolf I’ve ever tolerated?” He sounds amused, but in that way where he wishes he wasn’t.

“Aw, you tolerate me?” I tease, and then the trail takes a sharp turn north again and I follow it instinctively, crashing into Levi as a result. He glowers at me.

“Some days are better than others,” he says, but falls in step next to me again without any further complaint. I wonder if he’ll give me anything else, any other titbits of his past.

He doesn’t. He’s silent as we run, weave our way between the trees, the omega’s path changing back on itself more frequently now. The fear it had felt earlier had driven it from the campus in a straight line, but now this deep into the woods and it seems to be more relaxed, moving through the undergrowth in a way that’s more playful, at ease. That can only mean one thing.

I take my phone out of my pocket, wincing as the bright light of the screen cuts through the darkness, blinding me momentarily as I scroll through my recent contacts and call Connie.

He picks up on the first ring, and I can hear his breathing over the line as he runs.

“Be on your guard,” I tell him. “The trail’s changing now. We’re getting closer, so we’ll take it slower.”
“Uh huh,” he says. “I’ll pass the message along the line.”

I hang up. He’ll let the others know.

“We’re in its territory now,” I explain to Levi as I drop our pace so we’re jogging, then walking. “This is where it feels safe, so we’ll have to move slower. The trail is probably going to get more erratic now it’s not running based on fear.”

He nods, adapting easily to the situation. The ground we’re hiking over is getting more uneven now, the trees thinning in places as the path we’re cutting through the undergrowth starts to climb a little steeper. Trost is nestled in a valley, with the university on higher ground to the rest of the city. The forests that surround it eventually give way to the mountains beyond, and as we’ve been running for almost half an hour now, it doesn’t surprise me in the least that we’re heading up hill. You can only run so far before you reach a peak, no matter which direction you’re travelling in.

I can imagine Sasha complaining to herself right about now. No doubt Jean is, too.

The low temperature is more noticeable now we’re not running, and as I typically burn hotter than a human would, the fact that I’m noticing it must mean it’s uncomfortably low to someone with a more human metabolism. I don’t know how Levi’s faring right now. The few opportunities I’ve had to actually touch him haven’t really given much away to me in terms of his average body temp.

I glance at him as discreetly as I can, try to figure out if he’s cold or what.

“Stop watching me, it’s creepy,” he says almost immediately. I huff and turn my head to openly stare at him.

“Just wondering if you’re cold yet or not,” I tell him, my wolf encouraging me to care for my Packmate.

“Doesn’t matter what I am,” he answers, and okay? Why so defensive? My reaction must have been written all over my face because he sighs and then says, “Yes, I’m a bit chilly. Happy now?”

I shrug my hoodie off so I’m left in just my shirt (it has long sleeves, I’ll be fine) and offer it to him. He raises an eyebrow delicately.

“I’m not wearing that,” he says, all childish defiance. “Green isn’t my colour.”

I huff and say “Fine,” and keep on moving, treat him just like my old Alpha would treat me when I was being stubborn. I don’t bother putting the hoodie back on, just walk with it hanging in the crook of my elbow, easily accessible should he change his mind. I know it’s probably a pride thing with Levi, the reason why he doesn’t just admit to discomfort, and I’ll play along and act like I don’t care if that makes it easier for him to accept help when it’s offered.

Levi was clearly expecting me to fight against his stubbornness because it takes him a moment or two to register that I’m not slowing down, and then he follows me, jogging slightly to catch up. When he’s level with me again, he silently takes the hoodie from where it’s hanging.

_That was quick._

He puts it on and I pointedly do not watch him do it. I hear the zip as he does it up, hear him hum in approval at the warmth.

“Better?” I ask without turning.
“Moderately,” he allows. It’ll do. My wolf’s need to provide for his Pack is sated for the time being and he focuses back on the task at hand. I try not to think about how that hoodie will smell like him now. I try even harder not to think about how warm that makes me feel.

The omega’s trail takes us back downhill, and in the distance I can hear the sound of rushing water. Heading towards the river that runs through the valley, then. Closer, I can hear my Pack alter their course to keep a steady distance from me. I’m actually fairly surprised we haven’t stumbled across the beastie yet. Sure, it’s been nice to stretch my legs and breathe in the scents of the woods even if they are now laced with a faint whiff of anise (and to talk to Levi, however brief and awkward) but I’m kinda getting itchy to just get this thing over and done with now. Weeks of trying to find the damn omega and it’s still eluding us.

“There’s a river,” I relay to Levi, who nods. “Fresh sources of water are appealing, so stay vigilant – it may be nearby.”

“I’ll let you know if I spot it, mutt,” Levi says, and the nickname doesn’t have any venom left in it these days. As I glance at him over my shoulder, I realise just how big my hoodie looks on him. He’s done the zip all the way up to his chin and he’s got the ends of the sleeves folded inwards to cover his hands, and there’s still material going spare. He’s got his arms crossed over his chest, clearly feeling the cold now, and when he realises I’m watching him he scowls.

“What?” he asks, defensive. I look away from him so he can’t see my grin, shrug, and say; “Nothing. You look cute.”

There’s a beat of silence, and I hear his footsteps falter, and then he smacks me over the back of my head. I laugh.

“Don’t ever call me that again, Jaeger,” he warns, and he’s totally fronting. He probably would have punched me if he meant it. I turn round fully so I’m walking backwards and grin down at him.

“Oh no,” I tell him. “I call it as I see it. I tell you you’re an asshole when you’re being an asshole. I tell you that you look like shit when you look like shit. But right now? You look absolutely adorable in that massive hood—”

He throws a rock at me.

I yelp and run, and he gives chase, murder in his eyes.

“Take it back!” he demands, and I just laugh at him. He grabs my arm and spins me, and I trip on a root, my back colliding with a tree trunk, pulling him with me. He’s got me pinned here against the cold, rough bark of the tree, and he’s still scowling but I can see a smile starting to threaten the corner of his lips.

I lean my head down, stare right into those grey eyes, meet his challenge. The sound of the river is thunderous now, we must be right by it. Beneath the rushing water I can hear his steady heartbeat. I lick my lips and he glances down at the movement. He’s breathing a little heavier than I am.

“You can’t keep denying it,” I tell him, voice low, teasing.

“Denying it?” he echoes, like he’s not really listening.

“You know you can just say you think I’m funny,” I say, and he flicks his eyes back up to mine. The pupils are big and round, almost consuming the grey.
“I’ll never admit to something that isn’t true.” And he shoves my face away from him, taking the opportunity to step back out of my space. I shake my head.

“Whatever you say.” I grin at him but my smile fades as I realise something. “Hey, you’re feeling awfully human there.”

He frowns at me. “What the fuck are you on about now, kid?”

“You eyes…” I trail off, and what I mean starts to register with him. His presence, his power is only a whisper of what it was earlier, barely noticeable. There’s no way the omega would be able to pick up on this. How long has it been hidden for?

“Shit,” he mutters, clearly annoyed at himself. Then that flow of strength is back and his pupils are slitted once again and my wolf yips at the back of my mind. “Sorry, I—”

He’s cut off by the keening howl of a wolf.

It’s close. Very close. Not one of my betas, or Thomas. My wolf knows it for what it is, and my breath catches in my throat.

“That’s the omega,” I whisper, staring in the direction the sound came from, wolf straining to run free now, to claim it as his own.

Levi moves before I do.

“Come on,” he commands, and his voice is cold. I follow, abandon the scent trail we were following, head straight for the sound of that howl, wolf drumming against the bars of his cage the whole time, demanding freedom.

We reach the river, the bank lined with bushes that we have to push our way through, the branches catching on our clothes, our skin. The water meets us on the other side, the rush of the river powerful and uncaring. I strain my hearing, try to pick up any movement on the other bank but I can’t hear anything over the sound of the water rushing by.

“It’s close now,” Levi tells me.

“We’ll have to cross,” I say, talking about the river.

I wonder if this is how the omega has been keeping from our radar, by staying on the other side of the river to the woods where we run. Our wolves on full moon nights wouldn’t take us over the water, knowing that we wouldn’t appreciate the swim back the next morning. This particular river runs into Cedar Park. The omega must have followed it east when it realised me and my Pack were hanging nearby.

“I’m not going over there,” Levi says, and I’m brought back to the here and now.

“What do you mean?” I ask, not happy that he’s playing the stubborn card now. “If the omega’s on the other side, then that means we should be too. Come on, Levi, we’re so close.”

“I can’t cross it,” Levi says again, arms crossed over his chest, and I remember a myth about vampires not being able to cross running water and curse my bad fucking luck.

“You’re kidding me,” I huff, pulling my phone out of my pocket to call Connie and tell him to cross the river. “Of all the shitty fucking myths about vampires, this is the one that has to be true?”
Connie picks up.

“I heard that howl,” he says. “What do you want us to do?”

“You by the river?”

“Nearly.”

“Cross it,” I tell him. “Omega’s on the other side. Shift if you have to, but keep your distance, stay in control.”

He grunts and hangs up. If he’s feeling anything close to what I’m feeling right now, it won’t take much to bring on the shift. I leave him to get the message out to the rest of the Pack and turn my attention back to Levi.

“I’m going to have to leave you here,” I say, kicking off my shoes. As I begin to unbutton my trousers he says, “wait, what are you doing?”

“I’m going across the river,” I huff, trying to ignore the impending sense of shift shift shift that my wolf is pushing through me right now. “I’m not swimming it like this. I’ll be better off letting my wolf take care of this one and if I get jumped by a pissy omega on the other side, at least I’ll have my claws out.”

I yank down my trousers and hear Levi make a sound in the back of his throat. I throw my jeans at him and pull my shirt over my head, and goddamn am I close to the edge now.

The mud of the riverbank is cold and wet beneath my feet, and the night air is frigid against my skin. It pushes through my hair and makes goosebumps crawl up and down my spine, and my wolf is alight with energy now. He wants to run, to chase, to howl.

“I’m coming too,” Levi says.

“You just said you couldn’t?” It’s not really a question and I sound unimpressed. He looks away from me.

“Well, I can cross the water,” he admits, and what the hell? Make up your mind. “But I can’t swim.”

“Oh,” I say. Wait, what? “How the hell are you like a thousand years old but you don’t know how to swim?” I’m frustrated now. I can easily go by myself, shift and swim it, but I’d rather have Levi there to back me up if it’s an option, and if he can’t swim it then we’re screwed. It’s not like I could doggy paddle across with him clinging to me like a limpet…. Oh but wait. I’m struck with an idea; what if there’s a way neither of us have to swim it?

I sigh loudly for the drama of it and push my hand through my hair, get it out of my eyes.

“So what’s your big plan?” he asks.

“We jump.”
“Jump?” he looks past me at the river, gauging the distance. It’s wide here, and the waters are freezing and fast flowing, heading into the rapids downstream before the torrent forks through Cedar Park. If you fall in here without a life jacket or the power of a wolf to save you, you’ll drown, no doubt.

There’s a lot of doubt in Levi’s eyes.

“You really think you can make the leap, mutt?” he asks, and oh ho ho! Is that a challenge I hear?

“It’s you I’m worried about, grandpa,” I shoot back. I see something in those feline eyes of his flicker to life, and he smiles, slow and predatory.

“Then please. Lead the way,” and he bows, hand waving towards to waters edge. Fine. Guess I’ll go first.

I take a run up. Just a few paces. Enough ground to give myself the speed I need to launch myself across. If I overshoot, I’ll end up in the bushes, but if I undershoot, I’ll end up in the raging river. Not the end of the world, because at least I can swim, but considering the freezing temperatures, it’s really not the preferable outcome here.

As I start to sprint towards the edge of the bank, I let the strength of my wolf flood down into my legs, the bones in my feet elongating, claws bursting out and digging into the thick mud, the surge of power giving me that edge that helps me coil the muscles, and release.

And then I’m soaring, wind whipping at my face, stinging my eyes as I hurl myself over the force of nature tumbling by down below. My wolf sings in my bones, the thrill of being free.

I only have a second to appreciate how exhilarating it is before gravity takes a hold and the ground comes rearing up to meet me.

I end up in the bushes with a manly yelp of “Fuck!”

I heave myself out, pull the twigs clinging to my pants off me and turn back to face the river and Levi still standing on the other side. I wave at him, beckon him over. I’m sure he can do this.

He hesitates a second more and then takes the same run up I did.

I watch as his lithe figure sprints towards the edge of the river, face determined, eyes on me. I’m standing there with my arms open like I’m gonna try and catch him or something, but I hope it looks encouraging.

He leaps, and I hold my breath. It’s like time slows down as I watch him leave the ground. He cuts through the freezing air towards me like he’s born to do this, knees drawn into his chest, making sure his feet will be the first thing to connect with the earth, and I can almost see him calculating it in his head. I can feel myself grinning wide. He’s going to make it, no doubt.

As he gets closer, I realise that he’s going to make it and I am in the way.

I see the moment he comes to the same conclusion; the confidence on his face turns to concern, and he brings his hands up in front of him and time is moving very quickly now as he hurtles towards me and I’m still rooted to the spot.

He overshoots just as I did, body-slams full force into me, and we both end up back in the bushes.

“Oh shit,” he mutters, face smooshed into my chest. I’ve had the wind knocked out of me, but I
hope the wheeze I make echoes that sentiment.

“Get off?” I manage after a moment of spluttering. He sits up, with very little grace. He’s straddling my hips, frowning down at me as he rubs his nose, clearly sore from where it connected with my sternum. The right side of his face is covered with a fine splatter of mud, and I realise that I’m pretty covered now too. We sit there for a moment, each catching our breath. As Levi pulls his hand from his face, he realises that his palms are coated with mud too, and he’s just done a marvellous job of spreading it all over his nose.

“You missed a spot,” I tease.

He huffs, frown deepening. He’s still straddling my hips.

I open my mouth to make another misguided comment, but before I can get the words out, my wolf snaps into me full force and Levi’s head whips to the side.

Danger.

There’s no time to prepare for it.

Levi tries to stand, tries to get off me, but he’s not even half way vertical before a mass of fur and teeth and claws tears out of the bushes to our left and slams into him, sending them both rolling back down the bank to the edge of the rushing water.

“Levi!” I shout, almost snarl, as the wolf in me claws its way to the front of my mind and screams at me that this is it. This is the threat. This is the omega.

And I don’t need a second pair of eyes to see that.

I’m sprinting after them before I even have time to register it, slipping in the thick mud of the river bank. The only thought right now is Protect Levi. Protect my Pack and handle the threat.

The omega is snarling, all white hot rage at having it’s territory invaded like this, and so far it hasn’t even acknowledged me, so incensed by the power of Levi’s presence. I know that as soon as I give into my wolf and let it take over, we’ll have a very different scenario on our hands, but right now I need my voice.

“Run,” I growl at Levi above the raging water and the snarling beast as he kicks the omega off him, its claws swiping at his throat as it rolls to the side. He doesn’t look at me, but I know he’s heard. “Get back from it, don’t hurt it, I’ll handle the rest.”

Levi runs. He climbs the muddy bank, hands grabbing at roots and dirt to pull himself up, and as he reaches the top I reach the omega. Its eyes are on me now, and they’re completely gone. No gold left, no sign of life beyond the madness of the wolf and the rage and the fight.

A cold, hard dread hits my stomach but I drown it, refuse to think that maybe this is one wolf here that can’t be saved.

“Look at me,” I command, letting the Alpha into my voice, and the omega shakes, growling, teeth bared, and jaws parted. I stand there, between the omega and the vampire, and I spread my arms as I did just a moment ago, inviting a very different beast into them.
“We’re here to help,” I tell it. And really? I don’t even know if there’s enough of a human left in there to register what I’m saying, but if I can keep a lid on my own wolf long enough to get even a sliver of this message across then it’ll help. If this omega recognises me as human, someone it can come back to, then maybe I can persuade it to let go of this animal rage.

Its head snaps up, and it leaps.

It goes right over me, aiming for the bank, going for Levi, and I realise that the Alpha in me has no control here. It doesn’t react to me as Jean did, and I know that we’re too late. This isn’t a werewolf as I know it anymore.

I also realise that its stomach is swollen. Pregnant.

I feel sick.

I need to do something. I can’t just stand here and watch the inevitable happen.

My wolf, lodged somewhere in my chest now, drags in a breath and howls for me, calls our Pack to us, splitting the night open. I give over to him, let him move my legs as we climb back up the bank after the omega and the vampire, feel the heat flood through me that heralds the start of the shift, and I urge it on, drop to all fours as my body becomes his body and the Alpha in my eyes shines in the dark of the forest like a beacon.

I hear four answering howls from my betas and Thomas, and I can feel them closing in on me now.

My body shakes, bones shifting, and it doesn’t hurt now I’m welcoming it. Fur sprouts all over, the fabric of my jeans ripping, seams bursting as our body changes and my wolf stands tall and proud and strong, unleashed and furious.

The omega ran past us, didn’t even give us a second thought; more than that, the omega went straight for Pack, and now that Alpha side of me that’s more wolf than man is thoroughly pissed. I let that animal indignation fill me up and we howl again, let the sound carry through the trees as we give chase to the omega and her quarry.

We’re on them almost instantly. The omega’s crouched in a clearing, back to me, attention trained on a figure perched halfway up a tree. As we approach, slower now, we watch the omega leap up, front paws swiping. She misses, catches her claws on the bark, carving out chunks as the vampire pulls himself a branch higher. We huff in satisfaction, pleased that he’s managed to get himself away, that he isn’t hurt.

The omega lands and turns, eyes focusing on us as we prowl towards her. She positions herself between us and the tree, and that pisses us off even more. How dare she get between an Alpha and his Packmate? How dare this omega challenge us in such a brazen way? This isn’t a game she’ll win.

My wolf snarls in warning, the sound cracking through the clearing and filling the air with the power of Alpha, and the omega backs up a step, uncertain.

Good.

The rest of our Pack is close now, our betas running to meet us, and as we take another step towards the omega she hesitates, that rage that had coursed through her so steadily until this moment filtering out into panic as she realises she’s being surrounded.

Another step closer and she’s hunched down low, stomach pressed to the floor, moving backwards
away from us, snarling out in warning as we circle closer still. She’s going to bolt, eyes flicking to either side, gauging when it’s safest to make a break for it.

The moment doesn’t come.

Out of the treeline behind her pad our betas, their strength a solid wall at her back. Jean and Connie, standing shoulder to shoulder in the forms of their wolves, golden eyes gleaming and fixed on the cornered omega we have in our midst.

We growl lowly at them, instructing them to keep their distance. I know they’ll obey Alpha.

The omega bolts away, tries to make a break for it across the clearing, away from my betas and me to the open forest, Levi clearly forgotten now the game has changed.

A growl erupts from in front of her and she skids to a stop. Sasha stalks out of the darkness, smaller than the two other betas but just as powerful, a wolf in full control tonight. She sniffs at the omega, and the omega backs up a step, eyes wide, fear palpable in the air.

Her terror rises as our Pack closes in on her, and my wolf takes a little more control from me, lowers his head and catches the omega’s eye. Her ears are flat back, white of her eyes showing, teeth still bared in a silent snarl.

Alpha prowls towards her and she backs up another step, shaking now under the intense pressure of this much raw supernatural power in one place, air filled with the panting and growling of his betas. She keeps her stomach to the ground as Alpha closes the distance, protects her most vulnerable spot, head whipping from side to side as she tries to look for a way to escape, terrified now.

Another step and the panic in her snaps.

She lunges forward, and Alpha meets her easily, catching her under the legs and flipping her onto her back. Our betas back up, give us space as we pin the omega, careful not to touch her stomach. We assert the dominance of true Alpha over her, commanding her to submit.

If she submits to Alpha, we can claim her. We can win.

She kicks out with her back paws, claws slicing through the flesh of our side and our stomach and my wolf flinches. The claws catch and dig in and the omega uses her strength to throw us off, send us rolling across the clearing, through the dirt and the leaves as she stands again and faces us head on, rage flooding her senses so fully we can all taste it.

My betas growl and snarl, stamp the ground, as I roll us back over onto all fours and my wolf shakes himself out of his momentary shock. He takes the reigns back from me and I gladly let him. He knows better than I do how to make a wolf submit, and right now he’s got more chance of succeeding than me – this omega with the eyes of a rabid animal can’t be called back to herself by any human wolf. No, it’s going to take a full-shifted Alpha to stand any chance at having her submit to us.

So he does what he does best when our body is his to command – he runs.

The omega doesn’t have time to move before he’s on her again, trying to pin her, trying to bite at her throat to hold her down. She flips and writhes under him, yelps in fear and in pain. Alpha growls, dislodged by the incessant movement, and the omega takes the opportunity to turn her head, open her jaws, and bite down hard on his shoulder.
Alpha roars.

The omega holds on, shaking her head, tearing at the flesh in a desperate attempt to get him off her, get him away. Blood streams across her pale muzzle, her eyes wild and feral, wet snarls threatening to drown out those of the Alpha above her.

And then two hands grab at the nose of the omega and ply her jaws apart, free Alpha enough so that he can stand back and see the vampire wrestling the head of the omega away from him, away from us.

Levi. The strength in him envelops us as he forces the omega’s head down to the ground, turns it to one side in a mockery of submission.

He grins up at us, a feral little thing with all his fangs on display and a life in his eyes I’ve never seen before; pupils dilated slits, so catlike under the light of the stars, and the irises are a deep blood red. It sends a shiver down my spine.

“You’re welcome,” he hisses.

Alpha accepts his help in an instant, recognising the vampire as his equal here, and he takes the opportunity Levi gives us to throw our head back and howl.

We howl for all we’re worth, pulling on the power of our Pack bonds, our betas, our vampire, our strength of Alpha to claim this omega and bring her back to herself.

Levi grunts as the omega writhes again, desperately trying to throw him off. His eyes are gleaming in the dark and his teeth are gritted together and I think he looks beautiful under the pale moonlight as he fights to control the rabid beast between us.

My wolf howls again, as full as we can, and the omega still struggles, eyes staring up in crazed panic, gold glinting in their depths.

It’s working, we know it’s working. We can feel the power surrounding us and flowing through us, and we know the rest of our Pack can. They’re howling too.

But the gold fades from the omega’s eyes and it’s panting, bucking up against us, and now Alpha starts to panic. It was working – the howl was working like it did with Jean, reconnecting the wolf with the human in the omega’s mind – but it’s not enough. How is it not enough?

“What’s wrong?” Levi grunts at us, forearm pressed against the omega’s throat. She’s yelping at the pressure, claws scrambling at the dirt, trying to throw us off, but he doesn’t give in. “Why isn’t it working?”

It’s not enough.

The power of this Pack, this vampire, this me isn’t enough. The omega is almost gone, so completely animal now that not even the howl that brought Jean back to his senses is enough to help her.

My wolf wants to whine, panicking at the thought that maybe we aren’t strong enough to claim her after all. Alpha isn’t strong enough.

No. I growl. We have to be. We cannot abandon this woman to her fate. We cannot condemn this poor soul to a life of pain and isolation. We cannot walk out of this forest without her.
There has to be something more we can do. There has to be something more.

My wolf stills.

We stare into the blood red eyes of the vampire before us and we know that there is something more. Something that’s always been there from the beginning, that neither of us ever wanted to regard as a part of us. Something left by the Alpha that made us.

It might be enough, my wolf supplies, and I agree. It might. As much as it sickens me to touch any remnants of that part of my history, I know that the life of this omega – this woman – suffering beneath us, is worth what it might to do my wolf and me.

Levi is saying something else, but I don’t listen. Instead, I close my eyes and give full control over to my wolf, let him push me out of his senses, push me deep down to the heart of us, draw the power of Alpha over and around us as I reach down and down and down into the very core of our connection.

Past the power of this new Pack, past the bond I once had to Hannes my old Alpha, back to the very conception of the boy I was made into that night five years, to the shattered connection to the beast that bit me.

Waiting there for me in the dark of who I am is a terror far greater than any other I have ever experienced. Its jaws are a gaping maw, dripping flesh and viscera and the blood that stained my skin as it bit and tore and unmade me. Red eyes gleam in the darkness, a taunting mass.

It takes my breath away.

Distantly, I feel the omega buck up again, hear the chanting yips and snarls of my betas in the clearing around me, hear Levi’s voice, a murmur calling out to me, calling me up to the surface, to the here and the now.

I unlock the door to that cage deep inside me, and I pull free the power I was cursed with.

My eyes snap open, red and full of power, and I’m in control again now, shaking in my bones as the blood-hot fury of my past comes bubbling up to the surface. The air around us shifts as my Pack feels the change in me, and Levi sucks in a gasp of surprise as my wolf gives way to the rage of my first breaths and I roar for all I am worth.

Every ounce of power in me, every fibre of all I have ever been is poured out into the night and I channel it into a call, a claim, a plea.

The omega beneath me goes still.

The clearing around us is silent, filled with the scent of awe and shock and fear.

I let the note hang in the air as I catch my breath, my wolf returning quick as he can; stamping down the clawing rage in me, pushing it back deep down to where I keep it, locking it away. I feel the gold return to my eyes, chasing out the red, and as the rawness of that power subsides, I feel drained.

We pant down at the omega beneath us and she stares at us, eyes wide and gleaming a beautiful gold that fills us with pride. She turns her head to the side. Submits. Gives in to Alpha.

My wolf would howl with joy again if we weren’t so wiped. Instead, he settles for nosing at the column of the omegas throat, licking up along her jaw, behind her ear. She whines.
Levi releases his hold on her and stands, backs up as we snuffle and breath in her scent, let her hesitantly do the same to us. We step off her, careful of her stomach, and she stays down as our other betas come forward, whines at us again in uncertainty of the three other wolves.

We huff, try to show that there’s nothing to be frightened of here, and let Connie be the first to approach. Our Second. He rubs up against our side, and then lowers his muzzle to the omega, lets her come to him.

She does.

She rolls over onto all fours and shuffles forward so her nose bumps against his, and then lets him nuzzle along her jaw like I did. Her tail is wagging now, the energy in her a spike of adrenaline that’s so much clearer and purer than the fury of before.

Connie stands back after a moment and the omega mirrors him, pulls herself up on shaking legs. She faces us, her Alpha and Pack, and I recognise in her wide golden eyes a very human note of sadness. She looks lost.

Time to test if this thing has really and truly worked.

My wolf knows what I mean, and he gives in with ease. He wants his new beta to be safe as much as I do now that the hard part’s over, and he gives me control of my limbs again, lets his power ebb away as I stretch and shudder and become a man once more.

The wolf watches, captivated, as I stand. I wonder if the same thoughts are going through her head that went through mine when my uncle called me back to myself all those years ago. It hadn’t occurred to me, back then, that I could become human again, so absolute was my wolf’s control. When I tried it for the first time, it was like pulling off my fingernails it hurt so much, but I came back and I stayed human and I cried like a baby for hours at the sheer joy of it.

The omega whines and shakes, and Connie nudges up against me with a wet nose. I clear my throat.

“Shift back,” I tell him. “Show her it can be done.”

I turn to the rest of my Pack and see that Thomas is already standing on two legs again, fully clothed, and it occurs to me that I didn’t see him in his wolf form at all. I wonder if he even shifted down to begin with, or if he left this entirely in my hands. He’s watching me with an indecipherable look on his face. I’m sensing another Big Conversation on our horizon.

Connie shifts. To see him do it is to appreciate the absolute control he has over his wolf half, the connection he’s had all his life lending itself to him effortlessly.

“He makes it look easy,” I say to the wolf, who is watching in earnest. “And it will be over time, but right now it’s going to be real scary to even try.”

I kneel down, make myself smaller, less threatening, more approachable. Connie steps back from me, recognising the angle I’m going for here.

“But I need you to try,” I say. I’m appealing to her human side, that part of her that must have been shut off for weeks if not months. I call her name; “Mina. Come back to yourself. You can do it. We’re all here for you, and we’re not leaving you.”

“It’s alright, Mina,” Thomas says from behind me, and I hear him walk slowly towards the shivering wolf. He smells calm, completely at ease. This is the side of him that my uncle has found
so indispensable all these years – the thing that makes him such a good Second. He offers his hands, palms up; a sign of encouragement and amity. “You’ve got nothing to be afraid of now. We’ve come a long way to find you, and we promise that we’ll help get to you to somewhere safe.”

“It’s okay,” Sasha pipes up behind my left shoulder, and I realise that she’s shifted back too. She stands beside me, puts her hand on my shoulder, but doesn’t move any closer to the wolf than that. She smiles, gentle and soft. “I’m new to this too, and I know it’s pretty crazy. But it’s okay. You’re not going to hurt us, and we’re not going to hurt you. Promise.”

“You can trust Eren,” Jean says, and I feel a surge of pride flow through me that doesn’t just come from me but from him as well. “He helped me out when I was scared just like you were. He helped me control myself again. You’re going to be fine with him.”

I’m not crying but I’m bloody close. My Pack stands around me, a solid, real bond between the four of us that pushes away the chill of the night, reaching out with warm hands and warm hearts to the fragile new beta before us.

“Come on, Mina,” I whisper, hold my hand out to her. “You’ve got this. One more push and you’re home.”

It’s a messy shift, and we all feel it when her bones crack and merge back into the form of a human. She shudders and whines through it, but she keeps on fighting, keeps on pushing, and when she’s panting with human lungs and grabbing at the earth with human hands again, we know the worst is over. I kneel beside her and rub soothing circles into the small of her back as she shakes, little ripples of movement twitching through her as her body and mind settle back into that of a human. I try my best to ignore the strong instincts telling me to comfort her for the logic that this is most likely a hugely traumatised naked pregnant woman who probably doesn’t want to be touched right now.

But then she turns and sags against me and I have to wrap my arm around her dirt-covered shoulders to stop her from falling backwards. She’s shaking properly now – be it from the cold temperature tonight or weakness, I don’t know – and I don’t like that one bit.

Connie’s already dressed again and Sasha’s pulling her own clothes out of the bag Levi’s patiently holding for her.

“Is there anything of mine in there?” I ask. Sasha pulls out a shirt and chucks it at me. I try to catch the eye of the exhausted woman leaning against me, push the matted black hair back from her face to find tired, grey eyes peering up at me beneath. Her cheekbones are prominent, the circles under her eyes are dark. She looks awful, and it makes my heart pinch in pity for her. I lift the shirt so she can see it. “Hey Mina?” I ask. “Do you think you could try and put this on for me?”

She lifts her hand and takes the shirt from me, but clearly doesn’t have the energy or the co-ordination it requires to put it on. Thomas helps me keep her steady as we pull the fabric over her head and shoulders, and feed her arms through the holes. I can feel the bones under her skin. She seems so fragile, I’m scared to move her.

She tries to say something but her throat is dry and she ends up just coughing, wheezing. Sasha is there with a bottle of water at once, and Thomas helps her drink in small sips.
“We’ve got to move,” he says. “She can’t stay out here, she’s freezing.”

“Take this, too,” a voice says to my right, and it’s Levi standing there holding out the hoodie I had lent him earlier. He looks passive, unreadable; there’s no sign now of his true nature, of that vicious elation he was radiating as he helped me pin her wolf.

I take the offered hoodie from him and help Mina pull it on over the shirt. At least that’s her top half sorted, but we don’t have any pants that would fit her with her stomach this big. I curse myself for not thinking about this part, but then realise that there probably wasn’t much I was able to do to prepare for this situation short of going out and buying a bunch of maternity clothes, which I definitely didn’t have the time to do beforehand.

And speaking of clothes, me and Sasha are still stark naked.

“Alright,” I say, standing. Thomas picks up Mina in his arms and she clings to the front of his shirt with weak fingers. “Sash, you want to shift back and lead us home? You’ve got the best nose.” I pick up the bag of clothes from the floor of the clearing and sift through it for a spare pair of pants that could fit me. Sasha, bless her, has packed my black trackies – the comfiest pair I own. I pull them on and grab a shirt of Connie’s that I somehow manage to squeeze into.

As I do so, I realise that the wounds I has sustained during my scuffle with Mina have completely healed. Fuck, I hadn’t even noticed. I’ve been so concerned with everything else that’s happened that I hadn’t even given myself a second thought.

Well, I’ve got plenty of time to worry about myself once this night is over and we’re all back home safe. I yank the shirt down over my head and focus back on the task at hand.

Sasha is standing to attention on four legs again, ears flicking in the direction of the river, nose twitching as she scents the air. Jean is in wolf form again too, circling around the edge of the clearing. I recognise his stance as defensive, protective. He’s ready for danger, ready to defend us.

Connie is talking softly to Mina in Thomas’ arms, helping her eat bites of a candy bar that I know she’ll probably be puking back up at some point later this evening if my past experience of omega-hood is anything to go by. She’s been so used to digesting the diet of a wolf that her body is going to take a little while to readjust to human-based additives.

Levi stands to one side, facing away from the rest of us. I walk over to him, to check in. As I approach, I can scent that the air around him is a mess of emotions, and it’s so uncharacteristic for him that I halt in my tracks. He turns to me, and in his eyes is a look of anger and hurt and accusation.

What have I done?

“Levi,” I start to say, confused by the sudden backlash I’m facing from him. He was fine just a minute ago. “What—”

“Let’s go,” he says, brushing past me both literally and figuratively as he ignores my almost-question and marches back to the rest of the Pack. “The sooner we get out of these fucking woods, the better. I’m starving.”

“Sure thing,” Thomas mutters. He looks over his shoulder at me, eyebrows raised in a question at Levi’s sudden sour mood. I shake my head. I’ve got no fucking clue mate, not a scooby.

“What about the river?” Connie asks, and shit. Fuck. I hadn’t even thought about the river. It’s fine for us to jump it or swim it, but when you add a very pregnant, weak woman into the mix it
becomes impossibly dangerous to even think about trying any of those options.

“There’s a bridge northwards,” Thomas says. “It’s on a dirt road that I think we can follow back to Parkwood.”

“You can,” Mina croaks. “Used to run that way. Goes to people. I—I don’t know what—”

Connie tries to shush her, tells her not to use her voice too much, to just rest. She doesn’t argue.

“Then that sounds like a plan to me,” I say. I call; “Sasha – you want to lead the way for us?” and my beta yips and darts off into the treeline.

“Guess we better keep up,” Connie says with a sigh. “As soon as she gets that scent, she won’t want us to stop moving.”

“Go then,” I say, and he and Thomas follow the wolf into the trees, heading north. Jean pads over to me, and it’s the first time I’m seeing him properly through human eyes. His coat is a patchwork of light and dark browns, lighter around his muzzle and between his ears, down the fronts of his legs and in a line down his tail, and darker across the majority of his body, his back legs, and under his stomach. He’s tall; heavily built. A fighter, crafted from the time he spent without a Pack. His wolf has honed itself into something built to defend and protect; to survive without an Alpha to shield it.

He nudges my hand with his nose and I’m surprised his wolf is willing to do this. Jean’s not exactly on the friendliest of terms with me.

I wonder, as I look into the golden eyes, if maybe his wolf accepts me a little more than the human does. He’s waiting for a command.

“Run the perimeter,” I tell him. “Keep them safe. I’ll catch up.”

He huffs and bounds off into the trees, following the others. Jean’s status as a wolf is becoming more of a surprise with every day that passes, it seems.

With him gone, that just leaves Levi and me in the scuffed-up clearing.

The air hangs thick with the scent of blood and fear – residue from the fight earlier – but above that is a very keen note of something more sickly emanating from Levi. He still hasn’t moved, despite being the one eager to get us all going

I walk over to him as calmly as I’m able.

“What’s wrong?” I ask, try to catch his eye. He doesn’t look at me. This close I can tell it’s something verging on hurt that he’s feeling – that same tang of betrayal from earlier that doesn’t make any sense to me. My wolf growls low at the back of my mind.


“Well clearly it does,” I snap, “because the whole clearing is stinking of it.”

He looks at me then, eyes full of anger and defiance. He snarls.

“Drop it, Eren. I don’t want to discuss it here.”

“Fine,” I say. He wants me to drop it? I’ll drop it. “But we’re discussing it later.”
“Fine,” Levi echoes, but that taste of anger is still clinging to him.

“Let’s run.”

We catch up to the Pack after the bridge. Sasha is up front, leading the way. Jean pads gently beside her, keeping pace. As Levi and I close the distance, he drops back sniff at us, yips in satisfaction, and then darts off ahead again. I fall in step beside Thomas so I can check up on Mina who is now unconscious. I panic at first before Thomas reassures me that right now she needs her rest. This is just her body’s way of making sure she gets it.

Levi hangs back. He doesn’t say a word to me and as I glance back at him over my shoulder he shoots me a look that says he doesn’t want to. He’s brooding on something and my wolf is a whining mess of anxiety that I’ve somehow done something to upset him. As soon as we’re back to civilisation I’ll sit him down and ask him what gives, but my priority right now is Mina.

“Hey Connie,” I say as the dirt track we’re following starts to filter into gravel. “Wanna run ahead and grab my truck? If this track leads us back to Trost then you can meet us half-way and pick us up.”

Connie nods. He can see that I don’t want to be separated from Mina right now, but he also appreciates that the longer we’re out here, the more risk there is to her health. She needs to be somewhere warm and the fact that we have to walk is slowing us down.

“Sure thing,” Connie says, and I toss him my keys. He catches them deftly in the dark and runs.

“Jean, go with him,” I call over my shoulder, and the dark form of Jean’s wolf bounds past us a second later, tearing after Connie. They’ll keep each other safe. I don’t want any of my Pack to be alone right now.

Sasha stops in the middle of the path a few feet ahead and huffs at me, head tilted to one side, clearly annoyed that I sent Jean and not her. I can see the indignation clearly in her wolf’s eyes, and I smile at her in apology. I hold out my hand as we get closer and she noses at my palm, walking slowly beside me to keep pace.

“I want you here to make sure we don’t get lost. I’m beat, Thomas probably can’t smell a thing but the scared lady he’s carrying right now, and Levi can’t pick up a track to save his life.” I hook a thumb over my shoulder at the vampire who has been silently following us this whole time. Sasha does her best approximation of a chuckle and loops back to him.

I watch them over my shoulder; the man looking smaller than ever beside the huge wolf. Sasha has to drop her head to sniff his hand. He copies my movement from earlier and flips his hand over, lets her bump her nose against his palm. He’s watching her with a softness around his eyes, and I know that whatever crabby mood he’s in right now isn’t impacting on how he sees my betas – no, it’s just me he’s angry at. Great.

Sasha lets out a soft whine as Levi brings his hand up to scratch behind her ears, and the sight makes my heart pinch. She’s so comfortable around him now. They all are; even Jean who arguably has the least reason to like him considering how they met. Connie is mellowing out towards the vamp, Jean hasn’t been hostile towards him at all, and Sasha is straight up wagging her
tail right now as he scratches behind her long ears. I can feel how at east she is, and it solidifies in my mind that yes: Levi is Pack for us, and if the way he’s treating Sasha and the way he listened to me earlier as soon as we found the omega is anything to go by, he’s starting to feel more at ease with us to.

Sasha’s question from earlier comes to mind (and god does it feel like that happened weeks ago). Do vampires have Packs? Maybe not. Or maybe they have something close. He had a family once – a big family, from what I’ve gathered. Maybe they worked and lived together like a Pack would.

Or maybe this is the first time he’s been faced with this dynamic and he’s still testing the ground here. Either way, my wolf and I know we’re willing to give him a place among us – to let him know he’s welcome.

I’ve gotta talk to him about that though. This isn’t like it is with Armin and Mikasa, who my wolf views as Packmates even though they’re human. Armin and Mikasa can’t know about what I am. But Levi is someone that’s already in the know, so really it’s only polite to give him a heads-up about just how my wolf is feeling towards him these days. Can’t just go around acting like an Alpha to him without warning him first.

I turn back to Thomas and Mina, the latter of which is looking worse and worse by the minute, but maybe that’s just my eyes playing tricks on me in the dark. It is always difficult to tell when I’m using the night eyes gifted to me by my wolf. One thing I do know is that even in her sleep, she’s shivering. She’s coated in mud, there’re scratches all along her legs and arms, and half the forest floor seems to be stuck in her hair.

She is, quite frankly, a mess, and my wolf is eager as all hell to get her home and clean her up and get something substantial in her stomach.

So far, she’s been very calm. Part of that might be to do with the after effect of my wolf’s claim on her, and judging by how much power I had to put behind it, I’m going to say that she’ll be feeling that connection to me for a while. Hopefully it’ll help her adjust.

When an omega is claimed, that new connection to their Alpha that is forged is usually stronger than a bond created between an Alpha and a made wolf, for example. Hannes told me that it acts as a tether, an anchor of sorts, stabilising them until they’re aware enough of what control feels like to start exerting it over their own wolf themselves. A lot of the fatigue I’m feeling as we walk along the track is shooting down through that connection to me from her, and I know that the strength I’m lacking is as a result of loaning it to her to keep her human.

With Jean, the control I gave him was minimal. He was on edge, and jumpy, sure - his wolf was a lot closer to the surface than it should have been – but he could still have come back to himself. I claimed him to prevent anything bad happening to him or anyone else in the future, because that would have been very hard for him to want to come back from.

But Mina didn’t think she had a surface to return to, tonight. For her, wolf was everything. She was drowning in the current of that out of control power, and if I hadn’t have claimed her, she would have been pulled under and lost for good.

I know how that feels. I’ve been there, been that helpless. Those red eyes burning away in me right now are a testament to that – to the power of the beast that controlled and consumed me.

When I came back to myself, the connection I had to Hannes was so important to keeping me sane. If I didn’t have him there, I don’t know what would have happened.
So right now, no matter how tired I am, no matter how much energy it takes out of me, I’ll keep my connection to this new beta of mine strong for her. I’ll help her in any way I can when she wakes up. I’ll make sure she’s safe, and make sure she doesn’t feel lost again.

She’s going to be fucking hungry though.

And scared shitless.

It’ll be a miracle if she has any solid memory of what’s happened over the past months. Explaining to her how much time she’s lost is going to be tough, for us and for her.

I hear the distant sound of tyres over gravel and hope it’s Connie and not some rando coming up here on a midnight hike. It occurs to me that there must be houses up in the mountain if there’s a track leading to a bridge out here.

Fuck.

Sasha barks and runs past me, Levi abandoned in the face of the approaching vehicle.

“What is it?” Levi asks.

“There’s a car coming,” I tell him. We move over the edge of the track, ready to disappear into the treeline if it turns out to be anyone other than Connie.

The sound of tyres crunching gravel gets louder, closer, and then I hear Sasha running back this way, the thuds of her paws unmistakable. There’s someone else moving with her, and I realise that it’s Jean, which means it must be Connie in my truck come to rescue us from this cold night. I feel a weight lift from my shoulders at the thought.

Sure enough, Sasha and Jean come skidding to a halt in front of us, Sash looking very pleased with herself, and Jean panting from the exertion of running all the way up from the uni. We wait where we are for the truck to reach us, the beams from the headlights cutting too sharply through the dark. I’m squinting, eyes watering, as Connie pulls up next to us and reaches over to open the passenger door.

“How’s she doing?” he asks, concerned as hell by the sight of Mina unconscious now and Thomas looking very tight lipped and Worried Adult as he holds onto her.

“All things considered, it could be worse,” he supplies. And to be fair, he has a point. At least we’ve managed to bring her this far. At least there was enough Mina to bring back at all.

“Get her in,” I say, and Connie is already out of the truck, letting it idle as he pulls open the back door on the other side and climbs into the back, ready to take her as Thomas slides her onto the seat, positions her in the middle as Thomas climbs in after her. The two men settle on either side of her and I jump up behind the wheel.

“Sash, Jean,” I call to the wolves who are standing alert in front of the truck, focused on the forest around us, scanning the trees. They turn at the sound of their Alpha. “You guys okay to run back?”

I don’t get an answer, they just go, racing through the forest by the side of the road, the dirt and pine needles of the forest a much smoother surface than that of the road. I can hear them crashing through the underbrush and I’m pretty sure they’re racing each other back to campus, but never mind. They’ll wait for us when we get there.

I pull my door closed.
“All buckled in?” I ask in general, checking in the rear mirror. I get nods from Connie and Thomas in the back, and Thomas has his arm around Mina still I notice, holding her so she rests her head on his shoulder. That might get uncomfortable given the road we’ll be driving along isn’t smooth by anyone’s account, but I’m sure he’ll make it work.

“Good to go,” Levi says, but it lacks it’s usual zing and again I’m struck by the feeling that he’s mad at me for something.

**Problem for later. Get this car in gear.**

I do just that, turn us around, and drive us back to campus as fast as I dare.

I slow to a stop as the road emerges from the woods and I realise that we’re actually pretty much back amongst the houses of Parkwood. There’s an open field in front of us that acts as the unofficial boarder round the uni housing, and I recognise it from a game of soccer that I agreed to take part in back during fresher’s week when the weather was actually still bearable and sports were still a thing.

I know where we are.

“Why are we stopping?” Levi asks as I turn off the engine.

“Jean and Sasha,” I explain. “They need to shift back but we’ll be out in the open after this point so we’ll have to give them time here.”

“Where are they?” Thomas asks, peering out of the back window. I’m looking around too, trying to spot them in the darkness. I catch two sets of eyes gleaming out at me from the treeline to my left and roll down my window, beckon them over. They come.

“Jean, do you want to shift back now or are you okay to make it to Marco’s from here?” I ask. The larger wolf cocks his head to one side but doesn’t make a move towards us so I guess that’s settled then. “Sasha?”

Before she can answer, there’s movement in the back of the truck, and Thomas says “Eren,” in a voice that has me on high alert instantly. I turn in my seat just in time to see Mina crack open her grey eyes, register that she’s not somewhere she’s used to, and then scream.

The wrench of power it takes from me is staggering. Her wolf tearing at the bond between us, and I have no doubt that if we don’t calm her down right now she’s going to start to shift again. I unbuckle my belt and sort of squeeze myself between the driver’s and passenger’s seat so I can reach her in the back, take a hold of one of her flailing arms, and try my best to calm her.

Her scream cuts off second’s after is starts, but that’s mostly due to her cracking voice, the coughs that begin to wrack through her body evidence of that.

“Mina, it’s okay,” I tell her as she tries to pull her arm free of my grip. I make sure I’m not holding hard enough to hurt her but keep her from smacking Thomas or herself in the face. “Mina, you’re safe.”

“Who—” she tries to ask, but her throat closes up on her and she starts to cough violently again. I can smell a tang of blood in the air from her cracked lips and I have to swallow the knot in my
throat to answer the question she couldn’t get out.

“My name’s Eren,” I tell her. “That’s Thomas and Connie next to you, and this is Levi here,” I say for good measure. Levi’s watching, impassive to the untrained eye, but I know he’s on edge, ready to move into action if he needs to. He’s expecting her to shift, I realise.

No. She won’t go through that again, not whilst I’m here to help her.

“Mina, sweetie,” I try for the soft approach I know is a winner with Sasha when she’s scared. “You’ve been through something so awful, but it’s over now, okay? It’s over.” I rub soothing circles into the grubby skin on her forearm, and she’s not struggling to pull away as much now. I push the soothing through the bond between us, too. Hope it helps.

“You’re so strong, you know that?” I continue. “You managed to survive all by yourself. You kept yourself safe all this time. Now we’re here to make sure you never have to go through that again, alright? But I need you to calm down now. I need you to just let go and trust us to help you. Do you think you can do that?”

And I hope to fuck that the Alpha in me is enough to make her believe it, because if this was just some half-naked, terrified pregnant lady we’d found in the woods and tried to bring back to civilisation, waking up in a truck full of strange men would absolutely be the last thing she’d want.

Mina stops struggling.

She starts to cry.

“Is this better?” Levi asks, and I almost growl at him to shut the fuck up but a surprised laugh bubbles out of Mina and I shut my own mouth at that. I look at her, and she’s got tears streaming down her face, snot running from her nose, dirt rubbed just about everywhere, and her hair looks like something died in it. But she’s laughing with a broken voice and cracked lips, hands in her lap, no strength left to raise them.

She looks up at me, and that sense of loss envelops me once more.

“I don’t know who I am,” she hiccups.

I tell Thomas to drive her back down into Trost. We debate, briefly, if the hospital would be an option, but upon the revelation that Mina actually doesn’t remember she’s Mina at this point, we know it’s no place for her. True, we need to get her checked up and honestly I don’t even want to think about what all of this shock and trauma has done to her unborn baby, but if we take her to the hospital in the state she’s in right now, we’re all going to get arrested.

We agree that taking her to Connie and Sasha’s to clean her up and get some food and water in her, and maybe ascertain exactly what she does remember, is our first priority. Then we can let the human doctor’s take a look at her and hope it all goes well.

So Thomas drives and Connie sits in the back with Mina who is crying softly now, no energy left to do anything else, and Sasha hops into the truck bed at the back, still in wolf form. She hadn’t shifted back and I think that might be because she’s stressed, but at least she can hunch down in the back of the truck and under the cover of night you can’t tell there’s a fuck off big wolf in there.
I pull on the spare pair of sneakers I keep under the back seat for occasions just (not really) like these, and Levi and I head back into Parkwood with Jean. I text Marco as we’re parting ways with the rest of the Pack, just to let the guy know that we’re bring Jean back in wolf form, and to be ready to receive. I don’t get a response, but we don’t want to wait out in the open all night for the guy to look at his phone, so we head out all the same. If he’s not there and waiting for us, we’ll just have to wing it. That’s largely how this evening has gone anyway.

All the way my wolf is screaming at me that I should have gone with the others, I should be protecting Mina, making sure she’s okay. But firstly, I want to make sure Jean gets back safe. Mina will be fine with Thomas, Connie, and Sasha. They’ll be in the privacy of their house, where they won’t be walked in on by any unsuspecting human housemates, and Mina can come to terms with her own mortality in private.

Levi needs to head to Parkwood to collect his car from Marco’s, and he agrees that he'll take me with him down into Trost, although he does leave me hanging in silence for a moment after I suggest it.

He doesn’t say anything to me as we cross the field to the student housing.

I can hear a mix of music blaring across the night to me from the student parties, and it’s jarring against the evening of adrenaline and fear and lupine power I’ve just experienced. It’s so oddly human that I suddenly feel a lot older than I really am. I honestly don’t know how Hannes has been an Alpha for so long without losing it. This shit is exhausting.

“Some night, huh,” I try as we reach the housing and make our way down alleyways, Jean keeping back in the shadows. There’s no fear of being discovered – we’ll hear anyone coming with plenty of time to spare.

Levi doesn’t say anything. Jean huffs at me, obviously amused that I’m getting the silent treatment (or maybe he’s just agreeing with me? I like to think he's just agreeing with me).

“You tired too, or is it just me?” I try again. Again, I’m met with silence. Come on, Levi. You'd normally be laying into me right now about being such a lightweight or someshit. What’s wrong?

The alleyway spits us out into a square with uni houses surrounding us on either side. There’s lights on in a lot of them, but the curtains are all closed. I jog out into the centre of the square, and after a cursory look around, I wave Jean out and he bolts across for the alley on the other side. I kinda know where I am now. We’ll be on Marco’s road in no time.

Which means it'll just be me and Levi in his car in no time, an unwanted voice in my head says. Great. Now I’m torturing myself.

Jean hooks a right about halfway down the alley and we follow, trekking down a much narrower space caught between the back fences of gardens, the wooden walls on either side of us interspersed with gates at regular intervals. If someone stumbles upon us down here it would be very difficult for us to make a clean getaway, short of physically climbing over someone’s back fence, and I’m pretty sure that would just draw more attention to us.

I don’t have to worry about it much longer as Jean comes to a stop in front of a gate on our left and barks. I shush him and he lowers his head, but I can see his tail wagging between his legs and he backs up so that I can reach over the top of the gate and try and find the latch that should be somewhere along the top.

I struggle.
Levi sighs behind me, the first sound I’ve heard from him in a while, and then I hear a whoosh of air and I register that he’s just very neatly jumped the fence in one smooth movement. He didn’t even touch the bloody thing.

Someone’s showing off.

The bolt of the gate scrapes open and Levi pushes it outwards into the alley and stands back as Jean bounds through, catching his back hip on the fence in his rush and causing the whole thing to shake up and down the alley. I hear a surprised shout of “hey!” from a couple houses further down, and quickly make my way through the gate before they come out to investigate the disturbance.

Jean is at the sliding back door, pawing at the glass like an over grown house cat and I hope to every god that’s listening that none of Marco’s housemates are home right now. The only light that’s on is coming from an upstairs window, but as I cross the garden another flicks on downstairs. I can see the distant glow from the back of the living room through the sliding glass door. Someone’s coming.

Jean barks again, and I wonder vaguely if someone will call campus watch to report hearing a dog in Parkwood, but then the living room light is blinking on and the pyjama’d form of Marco is moving swiftly to the back door to let us in. He raises a hand at us in greeting, and I hear Levi close and lock the garden gate behind us.

Mission accomplished.

The door slides open and Jean races through, almost knocking over Marco in his eagerness. Marco sighs as he moves out of the way, like he’s done this exact thing before a bunch of times, and turns to Levi and me, not even batting an eye at the state of us both coated in mud.


Marco laughs and I realise that in my very tired state, I have just said that out loud.

“I heard that!” I hear Jean call from somewhere behind Marco in the house, and oh look.

“You managed to shift back all by yourself!” I congratulate him, sarcastic as you like. Hey, with Levi clearly off his game someone’s gotta step up. Jean stumbles back into the living room, trying to pull on a pair of trackies and scowl at me at the same time, and it fails miserably in both respects.

“Good night?” Marco asks to the three of us, gesturing for me and Levi to come into the living room out of the cold. I hesitate, the wind gone from my sails. A ball of guilt slips into my stomach as I realise that right now I’m wasting time that could be better spent going to my betas, who need me.

“No and yes,” I admit. “I’m sure Jean can fill you in. We’ve actually gotta run…”

I look for Levi over my shoulder and he’s on his phone, typing something fast. He nods without looking at me, agrees that yes, yes we do have to go. A little dash of irritation climbs up my spine at seeing him just standing there texting, barely paying attention, but I shake it out.

“Well, okay?” Marco says, and he’s looking between me and Jean like he’s not too sure he should really be letting us head back out into the cold so soon. Jean moves to stand behind Marco so he can loop his arms around his boyfriend’s waist. He nods and plants a kiss on Marco’s neck, backing me up, and Marco shrugs.
“You guys needs to come over for a drink though,” he offers, and I tell him that yes, absolutely, I’d love nothing more than that. Jean says he’ll be down to Connie’s when he can and asks me to give him updates. I promise him I will, and tell him to get some sleep. It’s been a long night, and I’m aware that although his control has improved massively, it’s still a lot of excitement for anyone to deal with.

They let us cut through the house instead of us walking all the way around, and Levi’s unlocking his car before we’re even out the front door. I can’t tell if he’s impatient or not. Fuck, I can’t tell anything with him right now. There’s no emotional response, no verbal response, no nothing to anything I do or say to him. He’s brooding, alright, but over what I don’t know.

I wave bye to Marco and Jean and hop into the passenger seat.

The scent of Levi surrounds me and I relax at once. I hadn’t realised how tense I had been until now, and sure I’m still worried as all hell, and will be until I’m with the rest of my Pack again, but I know that Levi’s going to drive me right to them as fast as he (legally of course) can, and that’s enough to let me unwind a bit regardless of Levi’s bad mood.

The journey out of Parkwood and down the hill passes in silence. I watch the trees fade into buildings, fade into the crowded streets of the city, and I can’t believe that it was only last night that we made this exact same journey together in the hunt for a good bar and a couple of beers. It’s crazy that it was just last night Levi had lent into me with that hunger in his eyes and dared to me get out, to walk away. My stomach flips at the memory, and then flips again when I realise that the air around Levi is saturating with a sense of unease that should never have a place anyway near him.

Levi’s the most frustratingly confident person I know. For him to feel uneasy, something major must have happened. I swallow down the question that’s lodged at the back of my throat and let him drive in silence.

He knows the way to Connie and Sasha’s without me having to direct him, so there’s no need for me to talk, and clearly no desire from him to speak up. We just sit there, lost to our own thoughts, stewing on our own problems. I hear his phone buzz in his pocket and wonder who he’s been texting. Only last night he had laughingly joked that he didn’t have any friends, and whilst I’m sure that’s not true, it just rubs me the wrong way that he’s been texting someone so distractedly after a night like this.

It’s enough to push me into opening my mouth and firmly biting the bullet I find there.

“Are you mad at me?” I ask, and why oh why do I sound like a petulant teenager?

“Why would I be mad at you?” he answers evenly without looking at me and okay, he’s definitely mad at me and I guess we’re playing the guessing game.

“You aren’t speaking to me;” I state.

“Funny, I thought I just did.” His phone buzzes again and he shifts in his seat. That lick of irritation in me rises.

“Did I do something to piss you off?” I can’t keep the annoyance from my voice, the question sounding stubborn and defensive all at once. I spent the drive back to Parkwood wondering what it could have been, what I could have done to upset him, and I came up with nothing. So what gives?

“Just drop it.”
“But—”

“I said drop it,” he cuts me off, and I can sense the anger roll off him as he does so. I shut my mouth. “I’ll give you your lift and then we’re done.”

“What do you mean?” I ask, wondering what on earth he could be talking about. He stops at a junction and he’s watching the traffic, deliberately not looking at me as he answers. I want him to look at me.

“We’re done, Eren. We were only working together to get this omega issue sorted.” The sound of the indicator fills the silence in the car, ticking the seconds that pass as I sit there, taking that in. “Omega is human again. Looks like the issue is pretty sorted to me.” He makes the turn.

“So that’s it?” I ask, and my voice doesn’t really sound like mine. I’m still spinning his words over in my head. *We’re done, we’re done, we’re done,* echoing back and forth. I can hear my heartbeat and it’s unusually fast and loud. Why do I feel like I’m falling?

“That’s it,” he says, and the finality in it snaps something in me that was fragile enough to begin with. That’s it, and the curtains close. That’s it, and my anger at him just sours and coils in me like a poison. That’s it.

I don’t know what to say, so I say nothing.

We’re almost at the house, and I wish Levi would do another loop of the block so I could collect my thoughts and give him something that’ll change his mind. *Do I want to change his mind?*

I had just earlier this evening recognised him as Pack, claimed him as bold as you like in front of Thomas. I had stated it, out in the open, gone to Connie and Sasha with it. They’d agreed, they’d accepted him, and it had all felt so right to me. He would have fitted in so easily, that it stings me how easily he’s put his foot down. How he’s backing out.

Did this friendship, this *partnership* really mean nothing to him after all?

No. It meant something. I *have* to believe it. My wolf wouldn’t have accepted Levi in the way that he did if it had all been one sided.

Something had changed out there in the woods after I claimed the omega, after I showed my true potential, and whatever it is, it had made him shut down, go back to how he used to be with me; cold and detached and superior.

I had scented fear on him, and anger and hurt, and all of those things had been real. Whatever’s going on here is something personal, and if Levi doesn’t want to talk about it now then I’m not going to push him, but I’m not going to let him just push me away like this either. Not after all we’ve gone through to reach this point.

I remember how Levi had walked behind me earlier and scratched Sasha behind the ear, how I had known that whatever was affecting his mood wasn’t affecting the way he regarded the others. Whatever his problem is, it lies with what happened between me and him and Mina when I claimed her. I wonder if he saw the red in my eyes and realised that there’s more there than he really wants to know about. I wouldn’t blame him if that’s the case. Not at all.

He pulls up to the curb and he’s not looking at me. His hands are on the wheel, knuckles white where he’s gripping them, and it’s the only indication that anything is wrong. He looks bored as he waits for me to unstrap and get out. The engine is still running. He’s clearly not going to be following me in.
I frown at him, and then sigh, the fight leaving me as I admit to myself that this is a battle I can’t win right now, and that there’s more important things I should be doing than sitting here potentially getting into an argument over something I’m not even certain of myself.

“We’ll talk about this when you’re ready,” I promise as I step out of the car. The door is barely closed before he’s driving off, and I don’t need him to answer me to realise that I’m certain of one thing with Levi, and that is that despite his cold words, his that’s it; for me it really really isn’t over yet. This might have started off as a tentative working relationship to catch an omega, but it’s developed into something stronger in recent weeks, and I’m not ready to just wave goodbye to that, not when I’m finally beginning to like him.

We’ll talk about this when he’s ready. That’s the promise I made, and I intend to keep it. He can decide if he wants to leave or if he wants to stay, but I’ll be there for him to talk to when he’s in a position to do so. Until then, I’ll give him his space.

That’s what Packs do.

The house is alive with movement when I step through the front door. Thomas is in the kitchen trying to cobble together a semi-nutritious meal for our house guest with the ingredients he can find in a uni student’s kitchen. He waves a wooden spoon at me as I pass, and it’s the one with the chunk missing from the end (happened in a freak baking incident where Sasha bit through the wood in her haste to taste the cookie dough we were making) and I tell him there’s another in the top drawer by the sink as I run up the stairs two at a time. He calls after me; “No Levi?” and I don’t grace him with a response.

Connie is in the spare room, frantically trying to make the bed, struggling with the sheet. I ask if he needs a hand, but he waves me off and then goes back to grunting as he pries up the corner of the mattress from the bed frame, only to have it ping back down as soon as he lets go of it to grab the sheet. Werewolf strength can only get you so far in life, it would seem.

Further down the landing is Connie and Sasha’s main room, the door to which is ajar. I can hear Sasha’s soft voice saying quiet things to Mina, and the splash of water that says she’s managed to get Mina into the bathroom and is most likely in the process of cleaning the mud off the poor woman.

I pause at the door, and if my wolf was following me, he would have run right into me. He huffs at me to get moving, Mina’s right there, what am I waiting for? I’m waiting for a sign from either of the girls that I’m welcome right now.

I hear the sound of something splashing into water, and then a plug being pulled. Water draining from the tub, Sasha helping Mina climb out.

I need a goddamn shower.

I’m still awkwardly loitering in the doorway to the bedroom when they emerge from the en-suite, Sasha soaked up to her elbows, hair stuck to her forehead where she’s clearly tried to get it out of her eyes. She’s leading a robed figure by the hand, and as soon as Mina registers my presence at the door, she stops, fear spiking.

“It’s alright,” Sasha tells her. “Eren’s our Alpha.”
“Alpha,” Mina murmurs, and Sasha nods in encouragement, turns and gives me her brightest smile. I can see the worry in her eyes, and I swallow.

“Hi,” I say like an idiot. I step into the room, just enough so I’m on the other side of the threshold, not wanting to push it, and Mina watches me. “Do you remember me?” I ask.

She nods, doesn’t say anything, those big doe eyes tracking my movements as I shuffle another step forward. My wolf is begging me to go over there and make sure she’s okay, but I firmly tell him that this is not his domain, this is mine, and I will proceed precisely how I see fit.

“What do you remember?” I ask, and I glimpse Sasha out of the corner of her eye shake her head at me ever so slightly. I keep my eyes fixed on Mina.

“I—I’m not too sure,” she admits, and her voice is still rough as hell. “You were in the woods. We were in a car, I think?”

“Yes,” I encourage her. “Yea, we were. We were bringing you back here. That’s good that you remember.”

And it is. It’s a start. She’s lucid, enough that she’s aware of what’s happening, and we can work with that.

“How about anything else? Anything before the woods?” I ask, and this is where I have to be careful. I don’t want to trigger anything that will upset her, but I need to know exactly how much she remembers about herself, both before the bite and after. “Do you know your name?”

“Mina,” she replies at once, and then looks to Sasha, unsure. “It’s Mina, isn’t it? I don’t really remember, but it sounds right when you told me.”

Sasha looks like she’s going to cry but she gives Mina the biggest smile she can muster and says, “Yea, that’s right. Your name is Mina Carolina. You’re from Montana.”

“You’re in Minnesota right now,” I tell her. She looks back at me, not quite comprehending what I’m saying. “You’re pretty far from home.”

“Yes,” she agrees, and my heart is hurting so bad for her right now. I had my control taken from me by my wolf after I first got turned, and I was running scared in the form of a wolf for over a month before Hannes found me. When I came back to myself, it hurt to even try to remember what had happened. It took me hours just to remember who Hannes was. I was scared and confused, and I had my wolf at the back of my mind pushing the instincts of frightened omega at me.

It was awful, and that was just over a month. Mina was out there for five.

“Here you go,” Sasha says, guiding Mina over to the bed. I can see she’s stacked the pillows up against the headboard, and she helps Mina lean back against them. She tugs the blanket up over Mina’s legs. The woman rests her hands over the bump of her stomach.

“I can feel it kicking,” she says, absently. That’s a good bloody sign as far as I’m concerned.

“Are you having a boy or a girl?” Sasha asks, as she sits cross legged on the bed next to Mina. Mina shakes her head.

“I don’t know,” Mina says, and her voice sounds empty. I move over and sit at the foot of the bed to be closer to her, to be there. Tears slide down her cheeks as she rubs at bump.
“I want to remember,” she whispers. “Why is there nothing there?” She looks at me, refocusing on the here and now. I see the desperation in her eyes, and my heart is breaking. I wish I could help her, but I can’t.

“It’ll all come back in time,” I promise, and as she fresh sobs wrack her fragile body, I hope against hope that it’s the truth.

We give her time to grieve what she’s missing, to let the tears fall. I’m amazed she’s got any left in her at this point.

Sasha helps her gulp down water as I rub circles between her shoulder blades.

“I don’t know why I’m crying,” Mina admits, and her voice is all croaky again. I shake my head.

“You’ve been through a lot,” I tell her. “I’d be worried if you weren’t crying.”

“You found me.” She’s looking at me with those big green-grey eyes again, like she’s remembering a thought she lost earlier. “You found me in the woods and you helped me—”

Her eyes widen, and I scent the spike of panic in her eyes. She pushes herself up the bed like she’s backpedalling, tying to get away from something.

“What the fuck—what was—there was something else in my skin,” she chokes out and yea. There it is. The shoe I was waiting for has dropped. She’s remembering her time as a wolf, and she’s rightly panicking about it. Honestly, I thought it would have taken a little while longer considering how heavily subdued her wolf is right now thanks to that bond I’ve been throwing all my power into strengthening. But there’s no going back now; no, all we can do now is let her remember and let her respond. She grabs at my shoulder and stares right into the heart of me.

“Who are you people?” she asks. “How did you know I was out there? What are you? What do you want?”

There’s too many questions for her to even think of, she’s just throwing it all out there at once, her heart hammering away in her chest as the panic rises up.

Sasha and I try to calm her, this time careful not to touch her as that’s definitely not going to help her not panic.

“I can answer your questions,” I tell her when she’s breathing normally again. “I can talk you through everything I know. But a lot of it might not make sense to you just yet, and there’s going to be things you don’t want to hear.” I let that sink in a little. She looks white as a sheet. She’s shaking.

“Mina, we don’t have to do this now,” I tell her. “We can get you something to eat, let you rest. We don’t have to go through it all at once.”

“No,” she croaks. She clears her throat and tries again. “No. I need to know. I—can I ask you some things? Just tell me the truth.”

“Scout’s honour,” I promise, hand on my heart, despite never having been a scout. “Ask whatever comes to mind and I’ll answer it as best I can.”
“Okay.” She takes a breath. “What are you?”

And oh buddy are we diving in at the deep end tonight.

She’s calm enough for most of it. I explain that I’m a werewolf, that yes those are things that exist, and she takes that one rather well. She asks if she’s a werewolf and I tell her that yes she’s correct there as well. She asks how long she was stuck like that for and I tell her that I don’t really know the answer to that question, but that I’d guess it’s been some months.

She wants to know about her past, her missing memories, and I’m hesitant to tell her anything because all I know of her is based around her disappearance, and I don’t want to bring any unhappy memories to the surface just yet. She’s still fragile. We need to ground her in the here any now before we let her jump into what was, or she’s going to lose it.

So, we satisfy her curiosity about the supernatural. I’m pretty sure her calm demeanour is mostly residual shock, a lump of fresh trauma, and a smattering of denial, but I’m rolling with it.

Thomas brings in a plate of food for her and she eats ravenously as he helps me go over the rules of being a werewolf. She listens and nods and chews. Thomas and I talk about full moons, about the freedom of controlling what you are, about the levels of familiarity within a Pack. She asks us about silver bullets and wolfsbane (both of which would kill any old human if applied liberally), and we debunk each myth she throws our way.

In spite of the gaps in her memories, her knowledge of pop culture remains pretty intact. To be fair, when I went through something similar after my first nightmarish shift, I can recall not knowing who the fuck I was but somehow being oddly aware that I knew exactly where I was, could still recognise the town no problem. It was like when the wolf had taken control of me, it had taken a part of me with it, and as I slowly gained that control back I took back my memories and my self-knowing too.

“So, you’re an Alpha,” Mina says, “and Sasha’s in your Pack?” I nod. We’ve already gone over this a few times, but she keeps coming back to it, like something bothers her. “And now I am too?”

“Yes,” I say. “I made you a part of this Pack and now you’re a beta.”

“It means you share the strength of the Pack, and the Alpha who leads you,” Thomas supplies. Mina nods, frowning, chewing on her chapped lower lip as she thinks.

“But why can’t I remember what happened before you showed up?” she asks, frustration eking into her words. “Why can I only remember tiny bits of it?”

“That’s your wolf taking control,” I tell her. She doesn’t look like that’s cleared anything up so I sigh and explain as best I can. “It’s a defence mechanism. When you’re frightened or sensing a threat, the wolf will take over and do what it needs to in order to keep you safe. Due to your pregnancy, we think your wolf basically tipped itself into overdrive and kept itself in control as much as it could. That’s probably why you can’t remember much from the past few months.”

She looks distraught.

“That terrifies me,” she admits, voice shaky. “What if I did something bad when I wasn’t me? What if—” She freezes all over, panic rising, terror piercing the air. And then, all in a rush she
Thomas had provided me with what little information Hannes had dug up on our possible omega candidates earlier today, before we had gone out into the woods after Mina. It’s how I had known her name. It’s also how I immediately recognised the name Jack to be that of her six year old son who was brutally murdered along with his father on the night Mina went missing. Judging by the state she’s in, she was witness to the whole ordeal.

“God they were—that thing just—” is what she manages to get out before she’s lurching up off the bed and racing to the bathroom on trembling legs.

She throws up, hard. Empties her stomach of what little was in it, retching dryly when there’s nothing but bile left. Sasha and I go after her.

My beta holds back Mina’s dark hair, rubs her shoulders, says soothing things. I find myself rooted to the spot in the doorway, listening to her heave, watching her thin shoulders shake as she sobs and groans against the pain of vomiting and of remembering.

She’s quickly unravelling in front of me as it all comes crashing back, and Sasha is whining quietly, high in her throat, at the emotions surging through the room. She cleans Mina up after the tremors stop, and then guides her back to the bed, the woman taking uneasy breaths as she plays through each painful memory her mind decides to throw at her.

I take the executive decision and move towards her, gingerly perch on the edge of the bed beside her so I can put my arm around her shoulders and hold her through it all. She’s sobbing without tears, just heart-wrenching gasps as she clutches at her chest, her stomach, the pain of the past all too real, and shit now I’m crying with her.

I’ve been through this pain before. It’s taken me years to move beyond it, and now I’m watching someone else endure the same terror, the loss and guilt I did. It’s horrendous.

She buries her face in my neck, holds onto me, blankets twisted around her legs as she lets me rock her gently.

“They’re dead,” she moans. “That thing killed them. They’re dead. They’re—why did I survive? Why the fuck did I survive?” And the last of her strength ebbs out of her as she sobs.

Sasha curls into her on her other side, offering comfort, support. Reassurance that she’s not alone.

Thomas, I realise, has quietly excused himself, taking the empty plate with him and closing the door.

After she settles, and the sobs turn to hiccups, I tell her my story. I do it as a way to distract her, mainly, but I hope she can find some comfort in my words. I hope she understands that she’s not alone in this.

“When I was a kid, I got turned,” I tell her, rubbing up and down her arm gently, encouraging her to
relax as I hold her against me. “I didn’t know what was happening either, and then afterwards, when I was shifted, I wasn’t in control of myself just like you weren’t. I didn’t know who I was or how I was ever going to be me again. I can’t remember much of what happened during that time. I still struggle to piece it all together, to be honest.

“I remember the moment it happened, though. I remember the pain of being bitten, of having something take over from the inside, and the fear of losing myself bit by bit. And I remember I blacked out from it. Woke up on the kitchen floor afterwards and my mum was lying next to me. There was so much blood.” Sasha whines, not liking where this story is going, and I’ve never told her any of this before. Never told anyone this story, really, beside Hannes who knew most of it anyway. Mina is silent beside me, listening.

“The Alpha that bit me,” I explain, “had killed her. Butchered her. I reckon it thought I was as good as dead too, which is why it left me there, but the wolf in me helped heal me. As I lay there on the kitchen floor, the power in me was already helping keep me safe.

“I remember the guilt and the anger I felt over surviving when my mum didn’t, and it pushed the humanity right out of me, gave the wolf all the control it needed, and it took it all. I was a wolf for almost two months before another Alpha found me and helped me come back to myself.

“I was terrified,” I admit. “The whole time; from the moment of the attack to the moment I came back. It scared me even more that I couldn’t remember what my wolf had done when it was in control. I used to feel guilty all the time because I assumed that it must have been bad.

“But now I know better,” I say, try to lighten the mood. I smile at the women watching me. “Now I know my wolf as well as I know myself and I know that whatever happened during the time it was in control, it was protecting me.”

“Does it ever go away?” she asks, and the evenness of her voice feels like a victory to me.

“The wolf?” I clarify. She nods. “No. But you can manage it and you can live with it. I honestly don’t know who I’d be without my wolf anymore, and I know for a fact that I wouldn’t have survived that night without it, or any of the nights after that.”

“Does that mean my baby will be one of those things too?” she asks, and that tremor of fear is back. She wants a definitive no from me, but to be honest the science isn’t all that clear cut when it comes to things like this. I have to go with my hunch, with what my wolf is telling me here. I trust him to be right. It’s not like I can google it.

“I don’t think so,” I tell her. “Your wolf was out of control, but it wasn’t strong. I don’t think the bond between anyone and a newly turned wolf is strong enough to pass on to their unborn baby. And you were pregnant before you got turned. I think—I think that’s the reason why you survived the attack,” I say, and oh boy could I take a wrong turn here. Tread carefully, Jaeger. “I think your wolf could sense the life inside of you, and it protected you. Protected your baby like any mother would.”

She’s silent for a moment, and I wonder if I’ve really put my fucking paw in it. Then she says; “You talk about the wolf like it’s something else. Like it’s a living thing?”

“It is,” I say, the tension releasing from me as I realise that she isn’t going to fall apart at the mention of the attack. “The wolf is a part of us, but it’s also its own thing. You have to let it out every now and again to keep in control, or the pressure gets too much. It’s a bit like owning a pet – you’ve got to let it go outside or you’re going to end up with a mess on your hands.”
“I can’t go back to that, though,” she says, and she sits up, pushes back from me so she can look me in the eye. I feel sorry for her, I really do.

“You don’t have to for now,” I tell her. “We’ll make sure you’re in control for as long as possible, I promise. And then we’ll be with you for the full moons. We’ll make sure you always feel in control.”

The silence drapes over us again like a blanket, as Mina settles back against me, and I listen to Connie keeping himself busy downstairs. I hear Thomas talking to Hannes on the phone, letting him know how our evening went. A pang of regret shoots through me, and I wish I was home right now with Hannes. It wasn’t just me who lost a mum on that night years ago – he lost his sister, the last of his family, and in a way he lost me too.

Mina shifts against me, pulls me out of my thoughts.

“Can I go back home?” she asks. She doesn’t really sound enthusiastic about it, more like she’s just testing the waters.

“Do you want to?” I parry.

“Maybe not yet. I—people must be looking for me. What do I even tell them?”

“We’ll think of something.” There must be someway to explain her five month long disappearance and sudden miraculous reappearance without incriminating her or us in the murder of her husband and son. Sure. I’ll say it again. “We’ll think of something.”

“I can’t go back to that,” she repeats, and I don’t think she’s talking about her wolf anymore.

I leave her in Sasha’s care for a bit so I can go downstairs, stretch my legs, and see how Connie and Thomas are doing. I’m aware that they’ve been listening in just from their very tense shoulders when I round the corner into the kitchen. They’re sitting at the table, picking at leftovers.

I pour myself a glass of water and chug it, then pour another to take back up to Mina. I look at my hands as the water runs, note the dried mud on my skin, the dirt under my nails.

I still need a fucking shower.

“How’s she doing?” Thomas asks to my back. I shrug.

“About as well as I was after Hannes found me. It’s coming back, and she’s pretty messed up over it, but she’s with us and I know that’s helping. Her control hasn’t slipped, she’s just going through it.”

“She remembers the attack?” Connie asks, and I put my finger to my lips, glance up at the ceiling. She might be new to it, but she’s still got the same keen hearing the rest of us do.

“Yea,” I say more quietly. “She remembers it, but she’s missing time from after her wolf took over. She said she can remember bits of it, which backs up our theory that her wolf just booked it out of there and stayed in control for the majority of the journey here.”

“Did she mention anything regarding the rest of our theory?” Thomas asks, cryptically enough that
she wouldn’t know what we were talking about if she was listening, but with enough emphasis that I know instantly what he’s referring to: our theory that the Alpha who turned her was giving chase.

I shake my head, pick up a fork from the table and shove a lump of chicken into my mouth. “Nothing on that, and I’m not going to ask her yet. I think she’s been through enough for one night.”

Thomas nods, and Connie adds; “High levels of stress won’t be good for the baby.”

And you know what? I really wish he hadn’t mentioned it, because I’m pretty sure if no one brought attention to the baby, the universe would have conveniently forgotten about it for one night.

But no. No, Connie had to go and mention it and jinx us all to hell.

We only have a few seconds of contented, blissful peace to ourselves in the dimly lit kitchen before Sasha shouts “Oh fuck!” from the room above our heads and we’re all bounding up the stairs three at a time to see what’s happening, food forgotten.

We burst into the bedroom to see a very panicky Sasha standing at the foot of the bed where a very panicky Mina is sitting with her legs spread, the blankets damp between them. At first inspection, it appears Mina has pissed herself. I feel like I might be missing something here but can’t quite grasp what it is until Thomas moves forwards into the room and says with an air of insight, “Your waters have broken.”

And oh fuck indeed, cos I know what that means.

That means the baby’s coming.

“Not yet it isn’t,” Thomas tells me, and I’m doing that thing again where I say what I’m thinking because I’m panicking. He turns to Mina and asks, “Do you want us to take you to the hospital?”

“Is there any other option?” Connie asks, amazed that Thomas is even thinking about not taking this woman to a hospital right now.

“If we go to a hospital, this situation is out of our hands,” I tell him before Thomas has a chance. “Mina’s been missing for months. You don’t think it’s going to flag up with someone when we give them her insurance details? Or how about the fact that us four turning up with a pregnant lady in a bathrobe who’s about to go into labour and can’t tell them anything about her isn’t going to look good either? Plus, they won’t let us stay. She’ll be all by herself surrounded by medical staff and the scents and sounds of a hospital. You really want her to go through that and then have to give birth?”

I look around at my Pack and Thomas, check we’re all on the same page here. They all look grim.

We know Mina doesn’t have the control to be by herself tonight. Fuck, we don’t know what will happen even if she’s with us tonight.

I turn to Mina. She doesn’t look panicked anymore.

“I’m staying here,” she says. And okay. It’s going to be a long night.
I call Jean sometime after 7:00 the next morning. He picks up, his voice still gravelly from sleep.

“Eren?” he asks, like he’s not too sure if he’s reading the caller ID right.

“Hey,” I say, and god almighty I sound just as rough as he does, and I haven’t slept a bloody winkle. I clear my throat. “So, uh. Quick update: Mina gave birth last night.”

There’s a split second where he registers what I’ve just said, and then I hear him sit up and take in a deep breath.

“What the fuck,” he begins, and ah yes. Jean has the attitude. Keep forgetting that. “Was she even due to... to give birth?” he says it like it’s a foreign concept to him, and I’m actually pretty resentful because I wish I could un-see some of the things I saw tonight.

I have to laugh. “Bit late to worry about that, mate.”

“But like, what happened? Did she wolf out?”

“Well, she went into labour about nine hours ago, and it’s all a bit of a blur after then actually. Connie just sort of took over. Apparently he’s helped his mum through a werewolf birth in the past, so he knew what he was doing.”

“Huh,” Jean says, filing that one away. “Go Connie.”

“But yea, just wanted to let you know that she’s doing good. She’s tired as hell and she could probably do with another bath, but she’s fine and so’s the baby.” Am I starting to sound delirious? I feel delirious.

“You sound wiped, dude;” Jean tells me, and he does sound concerned. I nod, even though he can’t see it. “You should get some sleep.”

“Gonna,” I tell him. It’s on the list of things I need to do, sitting close to the top.

“Thanks for letting me know,” he says. “Hey, can I come visit later? Would that be cool?”

“Thought you didn’t want to be a part of a Pack,” I remind him.

He gets all defensive. “Well, you dragged me out into the middle of the woods to find some pregnant lady. Feel like I should get to come and see how she’s doing now is all.”

“Course, Jean. Come over later. Come say hi.” And yea, I need sleep now.

He tells me to go lay the fuck down after that, complains that I’m setting a shitty example as an Alpha. I point out that it shouldn’t matter to him what kind of example I’m setting, unless he actually views me as his Alpha. He tells me I’m an idiot and then he hangs up.

Small victories, yea?

I plod back into the main bedroom and gaze down at the sight in front of me. Mina is lying curled up in the centre of bed, head in Thomas’ lap, sleeping soundly. Her accelerated healing has done wonders for her, although she was very close to losing it earlier when we told her the strongest pain meds we could give her were store-bought aspirin. She managed to fall asleep with no problem, exhausted as she was, and I’m intent on leaving her to get the rest she needs.

Connie is almost hanging off the foot of the bed, also fast asleep, although for how much longer before gravity takes a hold of him and rudely wakes him, I don’t know.
Sasha is sitting in the armchair by the window – it’s the one from the living room downstairs that I had lugged up at Connie’s suggestion earlier tonight. I walk over to her, quiet so I don’t wake the others, and let my gaze fall to the tiny form held in her arms. Born at 5:49 this morning, Anabel Carolina is a small victory all by herself. Wrapped up warm in a purple blanket, she’s fast asleep, just like her mother.

Just seeing her makes the breath catch in my chest.

“You look tired,” Sasha tells me. At the sound of her voice, the baby stirs, hand grabbing at the air, nose wrinkling. It’s the most adorable thing I’ve ever seen anyone do, and this baby has only been in the world for a matter of hours.

“She’s setting the bar pretty high,” I say, and Sasha sighs.

“I’m tired too,” she tells me, taking my half-formed thought as all the confirmation she needed.

“I can hold her, you two get some rest,” Thomas says, and I didn’t even realise he was awake – he had his eyes closed when I walked in. He reaches out with one hand, opens and closes his palm in a beckoning motion. “Bring her over here.”

I oblige.

The first time I held her, an hour or so ago, my wolf had almost cried with joy and pride. Now, as I take the tiny form from Sasha and walk softly over to the bed with her, the wolf in me watches contentedly. It’s like he’s trying to keep quiet just like the rest of us, but that swelling pride is still bubbling up from inside, and I feel it too.

It’s making me feel all strong and protective, holding this teeniest tiniest member of our Pack, and I’m filled with the need to check in on my other Packmates who aren’t here; on Jean, who I’ve only just called; on Levi, who apparently wants nothing to do with me now; on Armin and Mikasa who absolutely have no idea what’s going on, which is exactly how I’m going to keep it. I want to make sure they’re all okay, I want to take care of them and guard them.

I look down at baby Anabel in my arms. “You’re responsible for this,” I tell her. “I hope you know that.”

Thomas takes her from me and tells me to go to bed already. He doesn’t like it when I don’t make sense.

Me neither, mate. I’m going.

I take Sasha by the hand and pull her to her feet, and we both stumble out of the room and down the corridor, push open the door the spare room, and manage to make it to the bed before we collapse.

“We have a baby,” Sasha mumbles into the duvet, and girl I get it. I’m kind of in awe still, too.

“Mina has a baby, hun,” I correct. “We have a Mina.”

“I like her.” She turns her face to me, puffs air out of her mouth to shift her hair out of her face. I smile at her with all the strength I can muster. It’s not much.

“I like her, too,” I agree. “Now we just have to give her some time to figure out if she likes us. It’s going to be a tough few days.”
“But the baby makes up for it.”

“The baby makes up for it. Now, bed. Please. I can’t keep talking.” My eyes have closed of their own accord, so I don’t see her turn over, but I feel the mattress dip, and then her back is pressing against me. I throw my arm over her hip, let my tired body curl around hers, and breathe in her scent.

I still haven’t taken that shower, and now it’s too late – I’m sleep in my clothes and filth. I’m sure Sasha is beyond too tired to care at this point.

“Night, Eren,” she yawns.

Night, pup.

Chapter End Notes

Kudos and comments are always much appreciated. Feel free to come and find me on tumblr for a chat <3
Chapter Summary

Mina gets settled whilst Eren and Thomas figure out what to do.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A tentative peace settles over us, and for the next week we find a rhythm, fall into a routine of sorts.

Mina occupies the spare room with Anabel set up in a crib that Thomas very kindly buys the morning after her arrival, and I stay with Sasha and Connie in theirs. Thomas spends exactly one night on the couch downstairs before he decides that he’s too old for that to do him any good, and since then he’s been driving backwards and forwards from his hotel room in the city. We make sure that between the four of us, there is always at least one person in the house with Mina at all times, not that she notices who comes and goes.

At first, she is too exhausted to do anything but sleep, eat, and then sleep some more. Anabel, true to baby nature, does much of the same just on a completely different schedule. We tiptoe around the house, try not to wake either of them, and Connie runs to and from the store for the essentials. The third time we send him out in search of baby clothes, he scowls and drags Sasha with him “Because clearly I’m not doing a good enough job.”

But he is, they all are. This isn’t easy on anyone.

It’s on the third day, a Sunday, when Mina stirs for the first time.

We’re downstairs, all four of us sprawled out in the living room on couches and chairs, with Anabel asleep in her crib in the corner. A re-run of *Friends* is playing quietly on the tv, but no one’s really paying attention; more focused on scanning social media or flicking through the pages of a half-read book. A lazy Sunday that no one has the energy to do anything with. A day lost in thought.

When we hear movement above us, four pairs of eyes instantly flick up to stare at the ceiling, thoughts forgotten, ears pricked. None of us move, none of us say a word. We just wait.

Footsteps, slow and sluggish, and then a pause. More footsteps, but faster this time, the sound of a door opening. It’s clear from the tension in the room that none of us know what to do, that none of us know what to expect. This is the first time Mina has ventured out of her room and the urgency in her pace has us all on edge.

We don’t know what she’s thinking, or how she’ll respond to seeing us all again. She hasn’t spoken to any of us; not Sasha when she carries food up to the spare room three times a day; not Connie when he comes in to take Anabel in the morning; not Thomas when he goes to put Anabel to bed in the evenings; and not me, not at all. She’s stayed under the covers, fast asleep, or pretending to be.
I wonder what’s changed.

I glance at Thomas as we track the sound of Mina making her way down the landing towards the stairs, and Thomas puts his book down. I stand as Mina reaches the bottom of the stairs and turns the corner into the living room, stopping in her tracks when she sees us all, framing herself with the doorway for support.

She looks panicked, eyes scanning between me and my betas and then back again. She doesn’t look scared, though, I note. It’s almost like she’s searching for something.

“Anabel?” she says, and it falls from her like a plea. Oh, I think, and instantly I feel guilty for making her worry. That’s what’s wrong.

“She’s okay,” I say, stepping to one side so that she can catch sight of the crib behind me and the babe tucked up inside it. “She’s been sleeping. We brought her downstairs so she wouldn’t disturb you if she woke up.”

Mina visibly deflates at the realisation that her baby is fine, but she’s still holding onto the door frame for support. She looks exhausted; dark circles under her eyes, chapped lips and messy hair. She rubs a hand across her face, lets out a breath. I feel like I need to do something to console her, but I don’t know what – I don’t know where her head’s at, and I don’t want to push too much. I fucking wish there was a manual I could read on this.

I just take a stab at it and hope for the best.

“Hey,” I say softly. She lifts her head up to look at me, and my wolf forces me forward a step. She tracks my movement. I hesitate. “You—you can stay down here with us for a bit?” I offer. “We’re going to start cooking dinner soon. Want lasagne?”

She smiles sadly, and really it’s just lips stretching. It doesn’t reach her eyes.

“Maybe,” she says. She doesn’t move, so I take the first steps for her and cross the room to the crib, make sure she can see what I’m doing. I reach down into the crib and lift the sleeping baby inside, hold the tiny thing safe in my hands and lift her free of the blankets.

Mina’s lips part as she sees me lift her daughter into the air. She pushes off from the door frame and walks uneasily into the room. I imagine her instincts must be at war in her right now, torn between keeping enough space between herself and the rest of us as she can, and making sure her daughter is okay. She raises her hands to me, and I oblige, placing little Anabel in her mother’s grasp.

At once, Mina melts, and it’s clear which side of her instincts has won out. I guide her to the couch where I had previously been sitting, and Sasha makes room for her as I go and cram myself in on the other couch next to Connie and Thomas. We all wait in silence as Mina rocks the sleeping baby so gently in her arms; wait for any indication from her that she’s not okay with being here.

What we get are silent tears, and that’s so much worse. They slip free from her big grey eyes and trail down her pale cheeks. She cries and the only sound is the occasional sniffle. She keeps her head bowed down, gazing at her baby.

Sasha tactfully hands her the box of tissues, and she takes handfuls, bunching them up and wiping at her face. The swirl of emotions around her makes my chest pinch. There’s so much sorrow there, which is to be expected after her ordeal, but there’s relief too. Relief and a tentative drop of happiness.
“I’m fine,” she says, and she almost chokes on it. She looks up at us, and she’s smiling, tears still rolling. She sobs now, just once, and it’s a strangled thing, almost a laugh. She clamps down on it before it can settle in the room, thumb rubbing across Anabel’s tiny forearm. She catches my gaze and holds it, and I am blown away by how brave she’s being. “I think—I think I’m going to be fine.”

“You are,” Sasha tells her, makes the promise for all of us. “Because you’ve got us now, and we’re great.”

Mina laughs again, matching Sasha’s grin with a smile of her own, and some of that fatigue from earlier is unwinding from her, I can see. She leans back against the couch cushions and rearranges her hold on Anabel. Looks up at the tv opposite.

“Is that *Friends*?” she asks, and it takes us all a moment to register that she’s talking about the show. I’d completely forgotten it was on.

“Er…yea,” I say. “You wanna watch it?”

She nods, tears drying now. “Yes please.”

Okay then. Let’s watch *Friends*.

Connie turns up the volume.

And so it goes.

Mina spends more time with us after that. We sit through hours of Netflix, let her flick through channels until she settles on something she likes the look of. She eats meals with us, although she picks at her food at first until she sees the rest of us are eating. I say good morning to her when she comes downstairs each day, and if I’m not there because I’ve already left for my lectures I make sure to ask her about her day as soon as I’m back.

Between the four of us, we try to keep things nice and easy and normal around her; try to make her feel welcome; try not to bring up anything that might upset or anger her. There are moments when I think it might be working. Like when she smiles at something Connie says or at a small gesture of kindness from Thomas, or when Sasha has successfully distracted her to the extent that the sadness around her clears for a moment. And briefly, yes, it’s like we’re succeeding, and the last five months of hell are fading from her mind.

But then at night we hear her crying gently to herself in the room next to ours, and Connie and Sasha curl up tighter around me, whine high in their throats, distressed that they can’t go to her because to go to her right now would be to cross that line we all know is there. And what can I do but wait? Wait and wait and wait for that sign from Mina that she wants company in her grief.

That first week, under the tentative peace of things, I wait. And then, seven nights from the night we found her, she comes to me.

I’m sitting downstairs at the kitchen table, writing up notes for the lecture I have first thing in the morning. The main lights are off down here because we’re uni students, we’re not made of money. I’ve got the corner lamp to see by, and that’s enough.
It’s late – almost midnight – and I’m not expecting company, so I assume, when I hear footsteps on the stairs, that it’s Connie come to find me and drag me to bed. What I get instead is a sleepy Mina in need of a glass of water.

She hesitates when she sees me, clearly not expecting company either. I smile at her, then go back to my notes, give her a modicum of privacy as she crosses the floor barefoot and starts opening the cupboards. I watch her out of the corner of my eye, and my wolf flicks his ears.

“Next to the fridge,” I tell her after her fourth attempt fails. She huffs and pulls open the cupboard I indicate, whispers a small “Thanks,” and turns on the faucet full blast, getting cold water everywhere.

She shrieks, jumping back a step, and I laugh before I can help it, rising to my feet. The tap is still running, spraying water everywhere as it hits the bowls in the sink and ricochets off.

“Shit, shit, shit,” Mina chants as she reaches for the tap and shuts it down. I pass her a towel to dry off her arms with and she takes it without meeting my eye. I realise that I’m standing closer to her here in the dark kitchen than I ever have, and I take a step back, give her space. She pats at the front of her soaked pyjama shirt with the towel, which does absolutely nothing, and sighs in defeat, shoulders dropping, head lolling back to look up at the ceiling.

“Am I cursed?” she asks, and I don’t know if she’s addressing that question to me exactly but as there’s no one else here I decide to answer it.

“Hypothetically? Probably. But then so am I,” I say. She rolls her head to the right to look at me. She’s got her hair down and it’s brushed out and straight. Long. It falls in her eyes and she huffs it out with an upward breath. She looks at ease for once, and I don’t want to ruin this moment for either of us.

“And literally?” she asks. I shrug.

“Not that I’m aware of.”

“So it’s not a curse?” And she’s talking about the bite, about the shift and all that comes after.

“Not if you don’t want it to be,” I tell her truthfully. She looks down, and for a second I think oh shit, have I mis-stepped? But then she pulls her wet shirt away from her stomach and lets it fall, and sighs again.

“I think I’ve had enough bad luck.”

And honestly? She’s had enough bad luck for at least ten people, but I don’t tell her that. Instead I take the half-empty glass from the side, fill it up for her, and hold it out. She takes it but makes no move to go, just looks at me with a question in her frown.

“What’s on your mind?” I prod. She sucks on her teeth and I catch the scent of guilt as it flares around her.

“A lot,” she mutters, then turns and takes a seat at the kitchen table. “I’ve been trying to figure out all the shit inside my head and only some of it is making sense. Can we talk?”

And I say; “Sure.”

We talk, and I don’t get any work done that night. She tells me what she’s remembered, about the attack and her time under the control of her wolf. She ran a long way, she knows that, and a part of
her wants to keep running. She’s scared, paranoid, but of what she doesn’t know. I know it’s probably because the Alpha that turned her was the thing she was running from, and there’s a very high chance that they’re still out there, but I don’t tell her that. I don’t want to frighten her. We’ve done so well to keep things easy and normal for her, I don’t want to throw the supernatural nightmare she’s escaped from back at her now.

I get the feeling, as we talk, that she has something else on her mind – something she’s trying to figure out the best way to ask. It’s there, unspoken, in the breath she takes before each question, and in the nervous tapping of her foot under the table. I don’t push her, don’t make her bring it to the surface if she’s not ready. I don’t want her shutting down because I’ve rushed her.

When she asks me what it will feel like the next time she shifts, I give her an honest answer – it should feel like freedom. It should feel like her concerns just melt away and she’s able to breathe clearly. Like everything is balancing out.

Her foot is still tapping beneath the table, and she’s chewing on the inside of her bottom lip, but she nods like it’s the answer she was hoping to hear. I know just from scenting her mixed emotions (burnt anxiety and sorrow) that this isn’t what she’s been psyching herself up to ask, but it is as close as she’ll get tonight.

And that’s fine. Baby steps. No need to rush.

She yawns, then, and stretches. I catch a glimpse at the time flashing at me from the cooker past her head, and I swear.

“It’s very late,” I tell her. She turns to look, arms still stretched up above her head, and lets them drop with a sigh when she realises I’m right.

“We should go to bed,” she says, but again, makes no move to go.

“We should,” I agree. I gather my notes, close my book and shove it back in the bag by my feet. I stand and tuck the chair under the table, and Mina is still sitting there, hands clasped around the empty glass in front of her. She’s looking at the tabletop, and she doesn’t look happy.

“I can’t sleep,” she says. Admits. I swallow.

“Nightmares,” I guess, but it isn’t a question. I know that’s what’s troubling her; why, even after sleeping for so long, she still comes downstairs with deep circles under her eyes the next morning. I had them too, in the beginning.

“Want to talk about it?” I ask, and she jerks her head up to look at me, eyes wide. She shakes her head, and yep. That’s what she’s been trying-to-ask-but-trying-to-avoid all evening, and I’ve just put my foot in it. I quickly take it out again and back pedal as my wolf huff’s at me and my lack of tact. “Okay, okay. But if you change your mind about that, I’m here.”

I see her throat bob as she swallows, blinks, and then nods. She pushes herself up from the table and silently heads upstairs. I follow a few steps behind her, not knowing what’s going through her head but recognising the scent of unease she leaves in her wake.

She pauses at the door to the spare room, fingers wrapped round the door handle. Her shoulders are tense, and if I knew her, I’d hug her right now.

But I don’t know her. She’s as good as a stranger to me, and although we might have some shared experiences, I really have no place comforting her like that right now. As much as my wolf and I might want to help her, we know this all needs to go at her pace until she finds her strength again.
I’m about to continue on down the corridor to Sasha and Connie’s room, when I catch the scent of something sharp coiling around Mina like a wire, and I pause.

It’s loneliness.

I take in the set of her shoulders: pulled up, anxious. I note how her breathing has shallowed out, and I realise that if Mina wanted to be alone, she wouldn’t have sat downstairs with me at eleven o’clock at night, talking about what she can and cannot remember from the last five months of her life.

No, if she wanted to be alone, she would have done a better job of ensuring that she was.

If she wanted to be alone right now, she’d step inside that room and put the closed door between us.

I think back to the nights I had spent being stubborn in my grief – shutting Hannes out, despite him also feeling the same loss as me. I had been more than difficult, but he had never lost patience with me. In the end, his patient and accepting nature had made it so much easier for me to ask for help when I realised I needed it. It was only a matter of building up the courage to ask.

I wonder if maybe this is what Mina had been building herself up for earlier.

I wonder, also, if maybe I have less self-preservation instincts than I previously thought.

I decide fuck it, might as well find out, and take the plunge.

“Want me to stay with you tonight? Until you fall asleep?” I ask Mina softly, and time sort of hangs there between us as the question settles and I wait for her response.

She doesn’t say “No,” like I was expecting. She doesn’t turn around and slap me, either, like she might have done in a movie or something.

What she does, is take a breath and nod. Then she opens the door and steps into the lamplit room beyond without looking at me, without speaking.

And I think it’s safe to say that we both know the hardest part (the asking and the accepting) is over. So again, I follow her. Big Bad Wolf, promising to keep watch. I offer the same silent comfort to her that I accepted from Hannes all those years ago, and it feels like I’m paying his kindness forwards in a way.

It might not be much, but at least it’s a start. A baby step on Mina’s road to wherever she needs to be.

I sit in the chair by the crib, and Mina lies on her side and watches me with unreadable eyes in the golden glow of the lamp. The clock ticks quietly on the bedside table, and Anabel breathes gently in her sleep. It’s the only sound in the room as Mina settles and I try not to make it look like I’m obviously holding my breath.

“I want to trust you,” Mina says after a while, and I’d begun to think she was falling asleep. Guess I was wrong about that.

I lean forwards, rest my elbows on my knees, drop my chin into my hands. I feel like my heart is beating so loudly in this still and quiet room that I’m surprised she can’t hear it.

I’m very aware that this is a conversation I have to be careful with.
“What’s stopping you?” I ask, instead of insisting that she can. I know that trust needs to be earnt.

“I don’t know you,” she sighs, and tucks the pillow under her cheek more comfortably. “But I feel like I do. Is that a lie?”

“No,” I tell her. “You don’t know me. I met you a week ago.”

“So what gives?”

“Werewolf stuff,” I say, and it’s like I’m apologising. She yawns, eyes closing. When she speaks next, the words are softer.

“Is it always going to be like this? Am I just going to want to trust every werewolf I ever meet without question?”

“Well you’re questioning me just fine,” I point out, and she hums in agreement, a tiny smile dancing along her lips. “But no. No, you want to trust me because I’m….” I don’t want to say the word Alpha. I don’t know why.

“Because you’re my Alpha,” Mina finishes for me, and it makes me feel ashamed. She didn’t choose me. She didn’t choose any of this. The fact that I have to be her Alpha at all makes me feel so guilty, and I wish I could undo it all for her, give her her life back. Erase the last five months and the nightmares that have followed. The fear and the grief, the loss and the loneliness that have seeped into the gaps.

“Yes,” I say, and it’s barely a whisper. My wolf is silent, tonight. No comment to make. “Because I’m your Alpha.”

“I want to trust you,” she repeats. “Like the others do.”

I have no comment for that, either. I wish I could tell her that she can, or that she will, but neither of those options sounds like the right one.

No. Trust is to be earnt, and I need to work on earning it.

So I say nothing, just let her settle as sleep overcomes her, listen to her breathing even out in the quiet of the room.

She sleeps. Maybe even dreams.

I make sure to close the door quietly behind me.

It becomes a habit after that. When Mina goes to bed, so do I, and I stay with her until she falls asleep. She asks me a little bit about my childhood, about my uncle and friends growing up. She asks me about my uni course and what I want my future to look like. I answer all her questions and don’t pose her any in return. She’ll open up when she’s ready, she’s shown me that already. I’m not here to push her.

When she falls asleep, I say goodnight to my betas and I drive back up to the uni. The first night I spend back in my own bed is a weird one. I wake up at 2:00 and wonder where Connie went, then realise I’m not in their bed and go back to sleep feeling empty inside.
By the morning I’ve got Armin and Mikasa to deal with, and that emptiness slowly fades away, but not entirely. I know I’m wearing myself thin when they mention it, and the only excuse for my many absences over the past week is “a friend gave birth and I’ve been helping her out”. Nothing more. No mention of who the friend is and how/why I know her, or why I’ve never mentioned her before. They don’t question it, and I’m grateful for that.

Two weeks in, and my balance is returning. I’ve caught up on my studies and Mina is venturing out into the city a little more each day. Thomas goes out on walks with her around the local area so she can stretch her legs and get some fresh air, and I think he likes to feel like he’s helping. Certainly, seeing the very visible calm that settles over Mina as soon as she’s out in the November air is enough to make anyone feel better.

Marco and Jean make their first appearance at the house, and Mina (although very sceptical of them at first) allows them to ask her how she is and fawn over little Anabel. Marco even brings her a gift – a tiny little woollen hat in a pale shade of blue.

“For the cold nights,” he says with a shrug when the others look at him in betrayal. Despite the fact that the rest of us have been constantly providing for both mother and child over the past week and half at that point, we absolutely feel shown up because Marco’s gift has been hand-wrapped. Goddamn Italian.

So yea, all seems to be going well for Pack Jaeger, considering.

Well.

Everything except for Levi. Levi, who’s fucking ghosted me like he was born for it, the bastard.

Two weeks, not a blip. No texts, no calls, no “accidentally” bumping into him on campus. Nothing. It’s like he actually means what he says about us being done.

It’s starting to frustrate me, and if I didn’t have a hell of a lot more to be dealing with right now, I’d be actively trying to do something about it.

“I mean, what did you even do?” Connie asks for the hundredth time. I throw my hands up in the air, getting soap suds everywhere before dropping them back in the sink. We’re helping Thomas by washing up after breakfast. Go us.

“Not a fucking clue, mate,” I say.

“He’s such a prick,” Connie tells me. I nod.

“He sure is.”

“I mean, look at what he’s missing,” Connie says with great sarcasm, and then fwips my ass with the towel. I yelp and flick suds at him. He cackles as he dances round to the other side of the table, out of my grasp. Cheeky fucker.

“Hey, don’t get soap on the floor!” Sasha shouts from the front room. There’s a mewl of complaint from baby Anabel, who Sasha has been cuddled up with all morning, and we all hold our breath as we wait for the inevitable wails to start. They don’t come, and we thank our lucky fucking stars for that.
Connie quietly turns back to face me, and grins. “If I was him,” he stage whispers, “I’d be gagging after two weeks without—”

I throw the wet sponge at him, and he parries it with the kitchen towel, making a swoosh noise as if he’s brandishing a sword. The sponge hurtles across the room and smacks into the fridge door with a wet splat. His face lights up in pure delight and I roll my eyes, supressing a laugh because laughing only encourages bad behaviour (apparently).

“Congratulations,” I deadpan. “You’re an idiot. Now help me with this because I’ve got lectures in thirty minutes.”

“Yes boss.”

He helps me, and I pack up and go off to class. Nothing more is said on the subject of Levi that day, but I know they’ve all got questions they want me to answer, and the frustrating part is that I don’t have any answers to give them because Levi won’t give them to me.

And yea, okay. I know I’m starting to mope. The others have clearly noticed it too, but what can I say? Levi left things pretty broken between us, and now I’ve got more time on my hands to dwell on it, I am dwelling.

At first I was all Stubborn Optimism about him telling me what was actually wrong, and wanting to fix it, but now I’m starting to think that maybe he’s sticking to his guns on this. Maybe he really does want me gone.

And what am I supposed to do with that?

“Just let it go, Elsa,” had been Connie’s very helpful counsel. Thomas hadn’t said anything, and for that I’m grateful. (He must be fucking ecstatic that he was right all along about the vampire.) Sasha started giving me longer hugs, and I know it’s because I smell all butt hurt when anyone mentions it, and I kinda hate myself for that.

I should be happy that Mina’s doing well, not dwelling on my own personal problems. I should really just do as Connie says and let it go, Frozen style. But goddamn do I want Levi to just text me back already. Any response – any response – would be better than the silent treatment.

But I certainly don’t check my phone as I park up on campus, and I absolutely don’t scout around the parking lot for any sign of a red special edition Ford Focus RS as I’m making my way over to Queens College for my morning lectures, no sir. Definitely don’t feel disappointed that there’s no sign of the man I’m not looking for. Nope, not at all. I am tooootally letting it go.

It’s Thursday, and I’ve got a full day of lectures to attend (that Thomas refuses to let me ditch. Ugh.). I’m pretty drained, and if I’m being honest, I’d rather just go hang with Armin for the morning, but I can’t afford any more time off from my studies and we all know it.

So I sit through my lectures on feral children and what have you, and I flick through social media in the breaks between, and by lunch time I’m actually starting to feel like a normal student again. Hell, if I close my eyes and take in a deep lungful of the stress-coated-student-body-subsisting-on-a-bad-diet-and-lack-of-sleep smell hanging in the air, I can almost pretend I have nothing to worry about but my coursework deadlines that are coming up at the end of the year.

Oh to be a regular human. How simple life must be.

Thomas texts me and asks if it’s okay for him to meet me for lunch, and I say “Hey! Why not”. Lunch with quasi-relatives is something regular humans do, right?
Thus, Thomas meets me on campus for lunch, and we end up in Ruby’s – one of the eating establishments that serves food at all hours of the day to the hordes of ravenous students that live here. Up on the second floor of Queens, it offers us a good view out over the hillside and down into the city below. (Side note: The curly fries they serve here are to die for.)

It’s mid-day, and the place is half-empty. Gives us a free choice of table, and Thomas chooses one round the side of the bar. Out of the way. Out of earshot. Plenty of space to talk things over.

I have a feeling I know what this spontaneous lunch date is in aid of, but I don’t particularly want to get that ball rolling just yet.

Lemme grab some grub first.

I open up the menu as soon as we’re seated, despite already knowing what I’m gonna order. Thomas doesn’t look at his menu – no, instead he looks at me and folds his hands on the tabletop and leans forward a little, just ever so slightly.

So much for grabbing grub. Guess we’re diving right in.

“We need to discuss what our next steps are,” Thomas says, and man, I just want to order my curly fries.

He’s got those big, expectant eyes trained on me, and I don’t like it one bit. I’m tempted to be a little bitch and say; “What do you mean “next steps”? I need a break! I don’t want to be talking about “next steps”. Isn’t it enough that Mina is with us and she’s healing? Isn’t it enough that she’s got her humanity back, and we’re all there to support her through this tough time?”

But I don’t say that because I know it’s not enough; it wasn’t enough for me last time, and it won’t be enough for her this time. But that doesn’t take away from the fact that I’m tired and I don’t want to be having this conversation.

So, instead I say; “Sure. What do you think our next steps should be?”

Thomas frowns at me, that little disappointed mama look that used to make me feel so guilty. Right, right, I’m the Alpha, so I should be the one making the decisions.

“Eren,” he admonishes, and yep. There’s the Voice. Wonderful. “You claimed Mina. You saved her life, and you’ve brought her into your Pack. Whilst that’s fantastic for her and for you, we’ve got to remain focused on the bigger picture here.”

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“I know,” I say, and yea I sound like a petulant child now, but if he’s going to take that tone with me, I’m going to play up to it. Sue me.

Thomas’ frown isn’t going away.

“Our theory was that someone was chasing her. She wouldn’t have come this far north without a very strong motivator, and we really need to consider what’s going to happen now that she’s your beta,” he says. I’m picking at the edge of the laminated menu, avoiding his gaze. He sighs and sits back in his chair.

“Alright,” he says, and he sounds resigned. “Spit it out.”

I glance up at him. What’s he on about?
“What’re you on about?” I ask. He tilts his head to one side, gives that you’re really going to play dumb? look.

“Well, let’s see. You’re clearly not engaging here, and you haven’t been for a few days. You’re irritable, you’re defensive. You usually only act like that when you’re upset by something but too stubborn to actually confront the problem, so talk to me.” And ouch. Call me out much?

When I don’t give him anything to work with, he makes a guess, goads me into answering: “It’s not just Mina, is it?”

“No,” I say, and I want to have this conversation even less that the one we sat down at this table to have. “It’s not just Mina, but she’s the main reason I’ve been so tired lately.”

“Connie tells me you stay up with her for hours each night talking. That’s good, isn’t it?”

“That she’s warming up to me?” I ask. “Yea, sure is, but she only asks me about my life, wants me to tell her stories. She hasn’t talked to me about anything personal to her, and I don’t want to push her in case I ask the wrong thing, but I’m worried that she’s trying to distract herself form everything that’s happened to her; that she’s not accepted it.”

“And what if she hasn’t?” Thomas challenges. “What if she wants to distract herself because it’s too much for her to deal with right now. Don’t you think she’s allowed to want that?”

And great, now I feel guilty. Guilty and tired and just pretty darn bad. My wolf whines at me.

“Well, of course! But it’s not that that’s the problem.” I sigh, push the menu away from myself and turn to look out of the window. I watch the cars trail their way down the hillside and pull my thoughts together into something cohesive for once. Actually being made to talk about this is making me acknowledge how completely frayed I’ve been over the subject of Mina without realising it.

“I’m not trying to say that she shouldn’t want to distract herself from her reality, I’m just worried that if she tries to avoid facing it for much longer it’s going to hurt her in the long run. Full moon is coming up,” I point out. “We’ve got a week until she’s going to be forced to shift, and if she’s still in denial about the whole thing it’s just going mess her up.”

Thomas nods, and I can tell he’s mulling that over by the little crease between his eyebrows. I shake my head, and the words keep coming – all my stress falling out into the open for him to see.

“I don’t want to make her relive any bad memories, I don’t want to make her face her trauma, but I know she’s going to have to during the full moon, and I don’t want her to be unprepared for that. I don’t want her to feel her control slipping again.” God, I really don’t want her to endure that a second time. “It’s horrible to go through, and I don’t want to see that happen to her, but I don’t know how to deal with this.” Then, as an afterthought, I say; “I’m not Hannes.”

Thomas makes a little “ah” sound, and I glance back at him in time to catch his fond smile.

“You’re not, Hannes, no,” he agrees, and that makes me feel like a disappointment in some way I don’t want to analyse. “But you don’t have to be him – or even be like him – to handle this situation. Hannes had years of experience on his side, true. But Eren—” Thomas leans forward across the tabletop, holding my gaze with an earnestness I haven’t seen from him in a while, “—you’ve got personal experience on your side. You’ve experienced something very similar to Mina, and you came out the other side a survivor.

“So, you’re worried that Mina not facing her past will ultimately hurt her? Ask yourself – did how
you initially dealt with your trauma negatively impact you in the long run, and if so, how? Why? What could you have done differently?” He waits until I give him an indicator that I’ve understood him, and I nod. I do understand what he’s saying. These are all questions I’ve asked myself over the past fortnight, but so far I’ve been unable to come up with a good enough answer in relation to how I should be helping Mina cope because hey! I was a young teenager when I went through The Shit, and she’s a bona fide adult now with a life that’s just been turned upside down and a new baby to care for. Whilst the basics of what happened to us might be comparable, the overall impact differs.

But I’m distracting myself – Thomas is talking again.

“It might also be worth asking yourself: Do you think that maybe this is all something Mina’s already considered? I mean, isn’t there a possibility that she’s already realised that she’s going to have to come to terms with all this, but she just doesn’t want an audience?” Thomas asks, and damn. That’s something I hadn’t thought about. “She’s a smart woman, I’m sure she’s already figured out that she can’t avoid her past forever. She knows the full moon is coming up; she knows she’ll have to shift. So maybe she’s already considered that she’ll have to face her demons, and she’s decided she’ll do it alone, or maybe she’s decided she’ll do it when the time comes.”

“That’s possible,” I say. And it is. But. “But there’s a big difference from knows-she-can’t-avoid-it-forever and is-prepared-to-face-it-in-a-week’s-time, and I don’t want to sit here and assume she’s got it all figured out, when in actual fact she might just genuinely be struggling.” I heave a sigh. This is tough. “I want to talk to her so I can figure out where she is and how she’s feeling, but I don’t want to push her and end up hurting her or making her upset. I really don’t know what to do.”

“Well, from what I’ve seen and heard, she’s more comfortable around you than she is around the rest of us. I mean, she’ll make polite chit chat with us, but she doesn’t like to stay alone with any of us for very long. You’re the only one she’s asked to stay with her when she can’t sleep.” (I don’t bother telling him that she doesn’t actually ask me to stay anymore, it’s just an unspoken agreement that I will, regardless.) “And yes, that’s probably being fed by the connection you have as Alpha and beta, but I think it’s also probably got a lot to do with the fact that she knows you’ve been through something similar. You haven’t exactly been shy about telling her the facts.”

And boy howdy isn’t that the truth. Thomas is just hitting nail after nail on the head today.

“She knows that you’ve had a very similar experience, she knows that you’re here for her, and she’s already letting you into her space. She feels comfortable enough to fall asleep with you in the same room as her and her baby, Eren,” Thomas reminds me again. “I don’t think her instincts – or her common sense – would allow her do that if she didn’t trust you.”

“She said she wanted to be able to trust me,” I tell him, remembering the first night she asked me to stay with her. “But that’s why I can’t make myself just talk to her about everything that’s happened to her – because I don’t want to make her not trust me.”

“I can see your point,” Thomas sighs. He taps the tabletop with his fingers, drums out his thoughts onto the wood. “But either way, you need to prepare her for the full moon and what she’s likely going to go through, and I think that conversation is going to naturally lead to a discussion about her past. Either it’s something she’s already sussed out herself – in which case, yay, you don’t have to worry – or it’s something she’s in denial about and you’re going to have an uncomfortable time. But that’s something you’re better equipped than the rest of us (both in terms of experience, and your relationship with Mina) to deal with.”

I lower my head until it’s resting on the cool tabletop. It’s hurting and I want that to stop. “I don’t just—I don’t know if I can do this.” And yea, I’m whining. Get over it.
“We can all be there, if you think it will make it easier?” Thomas offers.

“She’ll feel cornered.” I know she will, and my wolf agrees. “It’ll have to just be me and her.”

“Okay, then.” Thomas lets the matter settle, and I wonder if he’ll let me order my curly fries now. But then his mood shifts, and he says: “Now, what else is bothering you?”

“Come again?” I ask, lifting my head to blink at him. I’m pulling a blank.

“You said that it wasn’t just Mina that was bothering you, so what else is on your mind?” Thomas asks, waits patiently with a look in his eyes that tells me he knows that I’m going to say.

Because truthfully, other than the impending doom that is Mina’s First Proper Shift, it’s also the distance between me and Levi that’s been getting to me lately. I saw his car parked in the lot behind the library yesterday and it literally took all of my will power to not stake it out for the rest of the day just so I could confront him. What would I even say if I did see him? “You’re avoiding me and it’s hurting my feelings”? He’d tell me to roll over and die, probably.

Connie’s “Let it go, Elsa,” flits through my thoughts and I pull myself together like a goddamn Man would.

I fix an obviously fake smile on my face and tell Thomas: “Nothing. I’ve just been worrying about how Mina’s really doing, and trying to figure out what our next steps should be.”

Thomas hums, scepticism hanging in the air between us. I fear, for one brief moment, that he will call bullshit on this very poorly delivered lie, but he doesn’t. He drops it.

And thank fuck for that, because after the last very heartfelt half hour of stressing about Mina, I don’t have the stamina to talk to him about anything Levi-related. (I also don’t want to prove Thomas right about him being a psychopathic minion of darkness or whatever).

“Right,” Thomas says, and his tone tells me he doesn’t believe me, but he’s not going to push it. He mercifully switches topic, and we’re back to discussing the matter he opened with: the Inbound Alpha.

“The Inbound Alpha,” I mutter when he says it. I shake my head. I don’t even need him to tell me that Sasha came up with that zinger.

“The Inbound Alpha,” Thomas repeats. “There’s a very high chance that we’ll have company headed our way, especially after the full moon is over and your connection to Mina is solidified. She’ll truly be a part of your Pack by then, and her original Alpha will feel it.”

“If he’s still out there,” I point out, ever hopeful that there’ll be an easy way out for us.

“There’s no reason to suspect he isn’t,” Thomas points out, and yea okay fine. Dash my hopes, why don’t you. “Mina ran across literal states. She wouldn’t have felt the need to keep going if she wasn’t being pursued.”

“But she stopped in Trost. She was here for a few months, so doesn’t that mean the Alpha… gave up?”

“Maybe,” Thomas concedes. “But when a beta severs their tie to the Alpha, they both feel it – you know that.” He’s talking about the time Hannes claimed me as his beta, brought me back to my sense. It was the beginning of everything for me, and yes, I know that both me and the Alpha that turned me felt that shift in power. No question. “It’s going to be pretty hard for the Alpha to
ignore.”

A sudden thought occurs to me, and I can’t help but voice it.

“Did Hannes feel it? When I left for uni, I mean?” I ask, and I know we’re going off on a tangent here, but it’s honestly the first time I’ve stopped to consider it. I hadn’t noticed a severing of sorts – not in the same way I did the first time around – but I’ve got a new Pack of my own, and I know I don’t consider Hannes to be my Alpha anymore, so there must have been a point of disconnect there. How had I not noticed it?

“Yes,” Thomas says, and he smiles sadly. “After that first full moon with your new Pack, he felt it. We all did.”

“Oh,” I say, because what else is there to say to that? I don’t feel guilty for not realising or anything (although I probably should in some way?), but I do kinda feel sad. Homesick, maybe. I didn’t want them to miss me like that. I don’t like that I made them miss me.

“It’s fine, kid,” Thomas tells me, and from the tone of his voice I know it is. “We were expecting it, and it felt like a natural end, like the last page of a book, you know? But when you claimed Mina it would have felt to her Alpha like three chapters were ripped out. See what I’m saying?”

“A noticeable difference.” I nod. Like history repeating itself. “You’re saying that the Alpha that turned her is most likely going to come and investigate what the fuck just happened.”

“Yes.”

“Wonderful.”

“And you need to have a plan in place for when he does.”

“Great.” I sigh. I really want those curly fries right about now. On cue, my stomach growls. “Can I order some food first?”

“Sure. Order some food, and then we’ll go over our options.”

Ooh. Options.

Fun.

So our options are as follows:

1. We keep going about each day as we have been – blissfully unprepared for the worst, hoping for the best – and then just sort of deal with the hand we’re dealt when we’re dealt it (note: we both agree this is the worst plan, but have to list it for clarity’s sake)
2. We start marking our territory so that any visiting Alpha would know we’ve got numbers on our side, whilst keeping Mina in the dark until she’s through her first full moon and her connection to her wolf and to mine is well and truly solidified (note: this plan would mean that we’re still just hoping for the best, and also deliberately lying to Mina which might end up putting her at greater risk, and so it is still a dumb plan)
3. We get Mina through her first voluntary shift before the full moon, tell her that we’re doing this so her connection to her wolf is solidified, and so that in case we run into said Alpha on
the full moon she’s at least a little more prepared, and we also start marking our territory
(note: this plan would rely entirely on Mina’s response to the news that “the guy who turned
you and murdered your family is probably going to try and come murder you at some point”
which could not be so great)
4. We literally keep Mina on house arrest until we know the coast is clear (note: we both
acknowledge that this could be literally be never, and so again is not a great plan)
5. We all sit down and have a group cry (note: yes, we’re probably going to do this, but as plans
go, it’s not the best we’ve got)

So, other than the above, we could just sit down and talk to the Pack at length and open the floor
up to any suggestions. Who knows – maybe one of them has dealt with this sort of situation before?
But again, that would mean cluing Mina in on what’s happening, which could in turn stress her out
to the point of catastrophe.

We both agree that we want to be as honest with her as we can, but with the control over her wolf
still a tender thing, we don’t want to push her over the edge if we can help it.

“Or,” Thomas says, supressing a burp caused by too much Pepsi Max. I raise my head off the
tabletop and look at him over the rim of my plate, try to express how unimpressed I am that he
actively tried to hold that in. He rubs his chest with one hand, says again; “Or.”

“Or what?” I ask, giving him the cue he so clearly desires. There’s a smile slowly spreading over
his face. I start to feel suspicious about where he’s going.

“Or we start to think outside the box,” he says. Still not really clear enough, though, is it.

“Do I honestly need to bribe you with fries to get you to talk, or..?” I prompt. He nabs a fry from
my plate, and I roll my eyes. Shouldn’t have said anything.

“We know that the Alpha will be coming to Trost, following that severed link between him and
Mina, tracing it back to the point of origin.” I nod, shove a few cold fries in my mouth to stop
Thomas from eating any more.

“Sure,” I agree. We’ve been over this like a hundred times.

“The Alpha that turned you ended up out in the middle of the fields behind the bowling alley,
which isn’t where you were at all.”

“Right. That’s where Hannes claimed me as part of his Pack, but when the Alpha showed up I was
at home and I had no idea anything was happening.” Thinking back on it, the only thing that made
any of us realise the crazy bitch of an Alpha was in town was his howl. It was a call, a challenge, to
the Hannes – the Alpha who claimed me – and every wolf in Hanne’s Pack responded to that call. I
was just the one who got there the quickest.

I shake myself out of the past and chew on my lip as Thomas theorises: “So that means that either
the Alpha couldn’t track you because he didn’t have a connection to you anymore, or he just didn’t
want to track you down.”

“He wanted to fight Hannes,” I murmur.

“True, but he could have gone anywhere else to do that. Why did he end up in the same spot that he
lost his connection to you at? Makes you think, doesn’t it.”

“I guess,” I agree. Truth be told I haven’t thought about that at all before today. I wonder what
he’s getting at here. We know it’s likely that the Alpha will come to Trost, but where he ends up
shouldn’t make much of a difference, should it? Well, let’s ask Tommy. “So what is it making you think?”

“It’s making me think outside the box,” he says, waving my last fry in my face. Aaaand we’re back to square one.


He grins at me, and Thomas isn’t a big grinner, so I know he’s got something he’s proud of here. I sit up straight and down the rest of my Pepsi.

“It means that if Mina’s here, she’s definitely in danger of being confronted by the Alpha – or, well, you both are but we’re not worrying about you because you know how to fight. Mina is the most vulnerable, here. That means that our time and energy over the week of the full moon is going to be spent making sure she’s guarded and safe, and then every day after that until the Alpha is dealt with.” He looks at me to make sure I’m following. I give him a nod.

“But what if—and this is where we’re stepping outside of the box, okay? Pay attention—what if Mina wasn’t actually here? What if Mina was far away from here when the Alpha shows up, and he’s just got the rest of you to deal with?”

And okay. That’s far enough outside the box that I’m paying attention.

“You’re assuming the Alpha will follow the severed connection to his beta to the point it was lost, which will bring him here?” I ask. Thomas nods.

“I’m assuming.”

“Regardless of whether or not Mina is actually still here.” Just checking.

“Correct again.”

I think about it, and hell. Without Mina here to worry about, we’d be able to deal with any threat made to us unimpeded. We’d be a stronger unit, and we’d be boosted by the knowledge that our newest Packmate was safe and sound. So yes, if Mina was away from Trost, that would be great for us. But what about Mina?

“Alright. I’ll bite. How far away are you thinking Mina should be?” I ask, and I have a feeling I know which direction Thomas is going to go with this, but I’d rather make sure he’s thinking what I think he’s thinking before I jump to any conclusions.

“About 600 miles,” he says, and yea. He’s thinking what I think he’s thinking. “My hotel room is paid up for the next three days, but then I’m heading back home. So, I’m thinking it might be an idea if Mina comes with me.” He can see I’m considering it as a possible bullet point on our list of options, so he pushes on; “Think about it, Eren. She’d be out of the danger zone, with someone she knows still, but she’d also have the support and protection of a much larger Pack if anything goes wrong.”

I nod slowly. This out-of-the-box thinking really puts a new spin on things, doesn’t it?

“It’s an interesting idea,” I admit. And it is! I know that Hannes would absolutely have no problem with helping someone in need, and if I was the one asking, he’d probably say yes before I’d even finished asking the question. But there’s still something at the back of my mind telling me not to be too hasty, and I’m pretty sure it’s that this plan doesn’t involve me spending the full moon with Mina. My wolf doesn’t like that one bit, and neither do I.
My internal conflict must have been written all over my face, because Thomas gives me a sympathetic smile and says, “It’s okay for you to not like the idea of sending your beta away. It’s just an option that I think should be worth at least considering.”

“Oh no,” I agree. “I think it’s absolutely worth considering, I’m just hesitating because—” because what? Because if she leaves in three days’ time, she leaves before her first full moon and my wolf hates the thought of that? Because I don’t want to have to rely on Hannes to help me with this problem like I do pretty much everything else? Because I see myself in Mina and the trauma she’s suffered and I want to be able to help her, to keep her safe, in the way that I wish someone had done for me before the shit hit the fan. Because all of the above. “—it’s pretty sudden.”

“It is,” Thomas agrees, and my internal monologue must have stayed internal for once, thank fuck. “But we can talk about this for hours and hours. At the end of the day, it’s got to be Mina’s decision that we go with.”

Well shit. Completely forgot about that.

“You’re right.” I breathe the words out on a *whoosh* of air, like a big ol’ sigh. And he is right. It’s Mina’s monster we’re facing the prospect of, after all. She’s got to be the one to decide how we handle it.

“So,” Thomas says in that tone of voice that means he’s winding the conversation down to a natural end. He starts piling up the plates, making it clear he’s going to make a move soon. Lunch time is waaaay over. “You should talk to her tonight. It would be better coming from—” he pauses, full-body. He looks at me, like a thought has just occurred to him. “And you’ll need to call your uncle first, actually. This will only happen if he’s okay with it, and it’s a lot to ask of someone at such short notice.”

“Yes, but Hannes won’t say no,” I point out. Hannes could never turn his back on someone in need of help or protection.

Thomas sighs at me, all Mother Hen. “It doesn’t matter if you know he will or won’t. What matters is that you still ask him first anyway. You can’t just assume—”

“Yes, yes,” I cut him off. I know what he’s going to say. “I know what you’re going to say. I’ll ask him, alright?”

Thomas pointedly raises an eyebrow at me, as if to say he isn’t impressed by my attitude, and it’s such a Levi Mannerism that it momentarily throws me through a loop. There’s a sudden emptiness in my chest, and my wolf shudders around it.

I blink, train of thought successfully lost. If Thomas notices my momentary brain malfunction, he doesn’t mention it.

“Well, do it before dinner,” he says instead, and stands, brushing non-existent crumbs off his pants.

“Oh—sure,” I agree, trying to figure out what I’m doing for the rest of the day. “I’ve got a lecture at three but then I can call afterwards, before I’m home.”

“Do that.”

“Sure,” I say again, and I realise I’m still sitting there, frowning over my own dumb reactions to dumb things. Great. This is just another reason to be angry at Levi. Now he’s making me *miss* him at dumb times.
I huff at myself and stand, grab my bag a little too roughly and following Thomas out of the restaurant and back into the cold November air.

There’s snow inbound – the whole town has been whispering about it for days – and as the breeze hits me I begin to think that maybe they’ve been right. I remember my mother telling me a superstition about the wind freezing your face in place if you frown too hard, and I try to ease out my expression.

“Let it go,” I say to myself. *Just let it go, already. Don’t get caught up over him. He’s an asshole, remember?*

“What was that?” Thomas asks. He’s a step or two ahead of me, and I shake my head at him and wave my hand – the universal gesture of “don’t worry about it”.

“Just thinking that if it’s going to snow soon, people are going to start going crazy over *Frozen* again,” I lie. No need for him to know that I’m coaching myself on how to ignore all of the nine feelings Levi hurt when he broke things off with me.

“I’ve never seen that film,” Thomas says, and it sounds like he’s not very sad about it. Oh, buddy.

“Well I know what we’re watching later,” I tell him, all thoughts of Levi banished in the face of sitting Thomas down for his first viewing of a modern-day Disney masterpiece. I can’t wait for him to regret being born once Sasha and Connie start duetting the songs.

“Do we have to?” Oh yea. He already sounds like he’s regretting it. We’re approaching a fork in the path, one route leading Thomas back to his car and the other leading me off to the Keynes lecture halls.

“Yep. Anyway, I’ve gotta run now. I’ll give Hannes a call and then see you later, yea?” I call as I half-jog away from him, partly because I’m going to be late, and partly because I don’t want him to talk his way out of this one.

“Eren!” he shouts, like he’s going to complain, but I shove my fingers in my ears and pretend I can’t hear him. So mature. (Shut up, you love it.)

I do actually manage to call my uncle before dinner, and he does actually end up agreeing before I’ve even finished asking the question. It’s remarkable, really. Almost like telepathy. (I’m fairly certain that Thomas text him to give him the heads up earlier, but I didn’t ask.)

“So, I’ll see Mina and the baby in three days, and you can stop worrying about her and start focusing on your schoolwork again,” Hannes says as I’m driving slowly through the traffic of Trost.

My last lecture overran slightly, and now I’m stuck at the ass-end of rush hour and I’m keenly aware that my dinner is getting cold. Much like everything else in this godforsaken city this evening. The temperature has dropped even further, that prediction of snow seeming more and more likely to come true by the hour.

I’ve got Hannes on loudspeaker, and I’m aware that I’ve been half-shouting so he can hear me over the noise of the heater as it pumps sweet, sweet heat into my truck, but I don’t care. It’s tits cold outside and I’m not gonna sit here and suffer, thank you very much.
“I’m focusing on my schoolwork just fine,” I tell him, and we’re both aware that it’s a total lie.

“Uh huh, sure.” He sounds so incredibly sarcastic, and I know he’s where I learnt it from. I pull a face at my phone, safe in the knowledge that he can’t see it, and turn into Connie and Sasha’s road.

“Well, I’m almost home,” I tell him, because that means I’m going to have to end this call so I can go and eat my dinner finally. (And then have a grown-up talk with Mina about werewolf stuff, but dinner comes first.)

“Alright, kid,” Hannes says, and his tone is light, fond. “You go and spend some time with your friends. Call me if anything changes, okay?”

“Okay,” I promise, bump my truck up on the curb out the front of number 42.

“And Eren,” he adds, before I can end the call. “I know this probably sounds silly, but you don’t have to worry. About sending Mina away, I mean. It’s to keep her safe, and I’m sure she won’t stop thinking of you as her Alpha just because there’s a bit of distance between you.”

“600 miles,” I remind him. “That’s a bit more than a bit.”

“A bit and a half, then,” he allows. I roll my eyes. “But you know what I mean. Just because she’ll be staying with me, that doesn’t change the facts.”

“No,” I agree. And it doesn’t. *Shouldn’t.* That is, unless Mina wants it to.

But that’s a conversation for later. For now, I say my goodbyes, hang up the call, and fast-pace it up the driveway and into the warmth of the house.

The others have all eaten and are curled up in the living room in front of the tv, watching *Spirited Away.* To my surprise, Jean and Marco are here too. Jean has his arm around his boyfriend, and they’re both watching the screen with the enraptured gaze of two guys that have never seen *Spirited Away* before. They don’t even acknowledge that I’ve made it home.

I notice that in addition to our two house guests, Thomas hasn’t joined us this evening. I suspect the reason for that was my threat of watching *Frozen* tonight, but you can never be too sure, so I text him to ask where he is as I wait for my food to heat up in the microwave.

[From Thomas]: figured i’d let you have some time with the guys. everything go alright with Hannes?

[To Thomas]: u know it did

[To Thomas]: he said yes right away

[From Thomas]: i guess i should start packing my bags then.

I guess. I’ve gotta ask Mina if she wants to start packing hers, first, and I’d rather not do that with Jean and Marco here. There’s no massive rush right this second.

[To Thomas]: still got 3 days mate

The microwave dings its completion and I hot-potato the plate onto a tray and then flop down on the armchair in the front room with the others.

“You’re back late,” Sasha remarks as I tuck in, only to be shushed by Connie. I smile at her
painfully around a mouthful of piping hot lasagne.

“Traffic,” I explain, only to be shushed by Mina. Great, she’s learning bad habits.

I catch her eye and very deliberately shovel another forkful of steaming lasagne into my mouth, as if to say don’t worry, I’m keeping quiet. She smiles at me, and then refocuses on watching the film, and I begin to relax too, surveying my little Pack.

Marco and Jean have claimed the couch directly in front of the tv (best seats for our guests, I’m not complaining) and look right at home with their feet propped up on the wooden coffee table. To their right, Mina and Sasha are sharing the smaller couch – the one by the sliding glass doors leading into the back yard. Although it’s at an angle to the screen, you can still get a good view sitting there. Sasha has her feet tucked up under her and her hand in a bag of dairy milk buttons. She isn’t eating them though; she just seems to have forgotten that’s where she left her hand.

The four of them look comfy enough, like old friends having an easy night in.

Connie, meanwhile, has given up on watching the film like a regular person, and is instead lying on his stomach in front of the tv with his legs wedged under the coffee table behind him. Either he’s being salty about having to give up the good couch, or he’s genuinely not in any pain right now. (Considering the impressive angle his neck is at, I’d be amazed if he’s not in any pain right now.)

I sink further into the cushions on the chair and let my head fall back against the backrest, close my eyes.

It’s warm in here, and my stomach is full. I’m content, and from what I’m scenting in the air, so is everyone else.

It would be a shame to ruin tonight with serious talk.

A mewling cry crackles into life from the baby monitor on the coffee table and I lift my head in time to catch the look that crosses Mina’s face as she realises she has to move. I don’t like seeing that at all, so through a moment of monumental strength and courage, I stand instead and snatch up the monitor before she can beat me to it. I wave it in the air and shake my head.

“I’ve got this,” I tell her.

“You sure? You’ve only just got in,” she points out, leaning forwards, dangerously close to standing.

“Don’t move,” I say, pointing at her. “Enjoy the movie.”

It isn’t stern, and it’s not an order really, but she’s still ready enough to obey. She sits back against the couch cushions. The smile she gives me as she does is all the thanks I need, and as I begin the long old trek down the hallway and up the stairs to our resident crybaby, there’s a smile on my face too.

It falters as I push open the door to Mina’s room and step directly into a storm of cries and frustrated emotions. For something so tiny, babies sure can express themselves in big ways, and oh boy, is Anabel kicking up a right fuss tonight.

(I would, too, if I was a baby who’s only skill in life is shitting her pants, but that’s beside the point.)
“Alright, young miss,” I say as I lift her from her crib, untangling her thrashing limbs from the blanket. “What can I do to make things better?”

Her only form of response is garbled crying.

“Absolutely fuck all, you say? Well we’ll see about that.” And I hold her and rock her as I take a slow walk around the room, shushing her as she continues to wail. I try to figure out what could be causing this – run through the list of possibilities one by one and cross them all off.

She doesn’t need changing, and she shouldn’t need feeding just yet. The temperature in here is fine, and the noise of the tv downstairs won’t have been enough to wake her. She’s not ill, not as far as I can tell.

Eventually those cries soften and subside, and she hiccups snot all over my shoulder.

Gross.

“Well, if you’re not in any great peril,” I say, matter-of-factly, “that must mean only one thing. You missed me, didn’t you.”

She babbles at me, and I take that as an agreement.

“You know, you don’t have to cry every time you want a cuddle with your favourite boy. All you’ve got to do is ask.”

She sighs, this time. I hope that means she’s worn herself out, but I doubt that’s the case. Something’s telling me that if I put her down right now she’ll just start the waterworks all over again, so instead I hold her close and go and sit myself down on the edge of the bed. Then, very gently, I swing my feet up and lean backwards until I’m lying back against the pillows.

Perfect.

Anabel mews softly and kicks with her feet.

“Yea, you get comfortable,” I tell her, and she settles. “I might have a nap here, too.”

But I don’t. I lie there with Anabel falling asleep on my chest, listening to her light breathing and her tiny heart beating, and wonder how on earth I’m supposed to say goodbye to this.

I’ve only had Mina and Anabel in my life for two weeks, but those two weeks have been intense as hell. As a result, I’m feeling all kinds of protective over both of them. Proud, too.

I hope that Mina realises that. I hope she knows that I would do anything in my power to help her, to provide for her.

I hope, too, that she knows this is why I’m going to ask her to leave with Thomas in three days’ time.

I want so badly to be able to handle this and give Mina everything she needs in order to build her life back up again, but I know deep down that I’m just not in the position right now to be able to. Talking to Thomas and Hannes today has shown me just gotten big the difference is between me and an experienced Alpha with a large Pack around him. It’s made certain things very clear.

Firstly, that I am a student and I cant keep forgetting that. I can’t provide for Mina and Anabel financially (I mean, just look at the money Thomas has spent already!) and I know that if they stay
it’s going to have a negative impact on my studies, too.

Secondly (and maybe selfishly) that after just two weeks, I’m exhausted. I’ve expended so much of my energy ensuring that the bond between Mina and me is strong enough to keep her stable, and even more energy running between here and my dorm every day whilst also still making time for classes and my other friends. Sure things might get easier after the full moon, when I won’t be putting as much of my energy in to the supernatural side of things, but then I’ll still have the worries of childcare to fret over.

Thirdly, whilst I know I’m not equipped for this, neither is my Pack. It isn’t fair to them to ask this much, regardless of how willing they might be.

As I lay Anabel gently back down in her crib, I know that letting them go to Hannes is the best for all of us. Mina will have the support she needs, both from a werewolf perspective and a human perspective, and although she’ll be far away from us, she’ll be with friends. Family.

She’ll be safe. They both will. And whilst they’re gone, the rest of us can work on making sure she stays safe. We can handle the Alpha, do this much for her.

I head back downstairs as the credits are rolling. Marco and Jean are gathering up their things and proclaiming that they need to make a move.

“Date night?” Connie guesses.

Jean rolls his eyes. “I wish,” he grumbles, heading for the hallway to grab his coat. Marco tuts and slaps him lightly on the arm as he passes, so Jean amends; “It’s Daz’s Pre-birthday Birthday Celebration.”

“Right,” Connie says, looking from Marco to Jean and back again, and sounding like someone who isn’t following. “Who’s Daz?”

Marco takes over. “One of the guys I live with. He’s turning 21 next weekend, so we’re celebrating as a house tonight, and then he’s doing a pub crawl with his course friends the weekend after next,” he explains and he picks his phone off the coffee table and slides it into this pocket.

“No one’s going to be here over Thanksgiving, so he’s spreading it out,” Jean adds from the hallway. He’s pulling on his sneakers, hopping on one foot.

“Right,” Connie says again, and this time I can tell he’s caught up, and then his expression changes. “Shit, is Thanksgiving next weekend?”

“Sure is,” I say, realising that because I’ve been so focused on the upcoming full moon, I’ve completely forgotten that Thanksgiving falls directly after. “This month has gone fast.”

“Fuck, it has,” Connie sighs.

We follow Marco out into the hall and all say our goodbyes (including Mina, who gives a wave instead of a hug) to the couple as they leave.

Once the door is closed and it’s just the four of us again, Sasha asks; “So are you staying over tonight?”

“I hadn’t planned to,” I admit. No, what I had planned to do tonight actually was talk to Mina about her future, but now that I’ve pussied out of that particular conversation, I don’t really have an excuse to stay. Maybe I should just get it over and done with?
“I’m going to bed,” Mina says, and aw shucks there goes my opportunity.

Sasha opens her mouth, probably to point out that it’s still early, and Mina doesn’t have to go up just yet (Sash has been desperate for the two of them to become friends, and I don’t blame her – we all are) but then she thinks better of it.

“Goodnight,” she says instead, kinda defeated but graceful, and Connie and I echo her. Mina smiles and climbs the stairs, and I stand there with Connie and Sasha in the hallway and they’re giving me looks that say they know something is up. They’re quiet until we hear the bedroom door upstairs close, and then they pounce.

“We know something is up,” Connie says, and yep. There it is.

“You’ve been kinda off this evening,” Sasha agrees.

“Have I?” I ask innocently. “Totally didn’t notice.”

“Alright, spill,” Connie demands, hands on hips. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” I say with a sigh, and the word sound like an apology. “Nothing’s wrong. I—I’ll tell you about it later.”

It’s a lame excuse, but I don’t really want to go through the whole thing with them here because Mina can easily overhear, and I want to talk to her about this first. So yea, I’ll tell them later – probably tomorrow.

Neither of them look convinced, but they let it go (although Connie’s a little more stubborn about it).

“If I have to kick someone’s ass….” he warns, and I laugh.

“So protective,” I tease, reaching out and ruffling his hair. He pushes my hand away, all fake-annoyance. “Seriously guys,” I tell them, then lie to them, try to convince them. “Everything’s fine.”

I don’t think they’re convinced, but I let them (and my wolf) talk me into staying over for the night, and that goes some lengths to making up for it. I’m aware that they both have lectures tomorrow morning and I don’t, which means I’ll have the house (and, more importantly, Mina) to myself for a few hours at least.

Which means I can talk to her.

Maybe mess things up completely, I don’t know.

Honestly, I’m kinda nervous about the whole thing, and that’s why I find myself waking up before all of my betas, and then heading downstairs to cook them breakfast, just as something to do.

Sasha is the first to emerge, drawn downstairs by the smell of food. She’s still in her pjs, barefoot, and I dish her up a plate of food whilst she waits with bated breath and wide eyes. Eggs (scrambled, just how she likes them), bacon, sausage, and fried tomatoes. I politely ignore the noises her stomach is making.
She almost trips over her feet to take the plate from me, and I drop some bread in the toaster as she digs in.

“This is so good,” she moans around a mouthful of what I think is bacon. “Thank you.”

“Not as good as Thomas’ cooking,” I point out (no one beats Thomas at cooking, period.) “but you’re welcome.”

Connie is the next to join us, and he’s wearing day-time clothes, looking more ready to tackle the day than his girlfriend who is currently drooling over scrambled eggs.

“Morning,” he greets us. I wave my spatula at him and start piling up a plate for him, too.

Now, I might not be the best cook in all of Minnesota, but I know how to get a cooked breakfast all hot on the plate at once. It’s one of the skills I know will only continue to serve me in life, and as I watch Connie and Sasha wolf down their breakfast, it makes me feel good to know they appreciate it.

I check the time.

“You’ve got ten minutes,” I tell them. Connie doesn’t look too bothered, but Sasha’s expression falls.

“But I want seconds,” she whines, gazing wistfully at the skillet on the hob, in which the rest of the food is keeping warm. Enough for me and Mina, but not enough for Sasha Take Two.

“Tough,” Connie and I say in unison. She frowns and huffs.

“Fine. I’ll go and get changed.” She pushes back from the table, still frowning. “You guys suck.”

It takes them longer than ten minutes to get their shit together and head out the door (mainly due to Sasha) which I know means they’ll be late for their lectures, but honestly there’s only so much I can do. As I’m waving them goodbye from the front step, my phone vibrates.

[From Thomas]: how’d it go?

I’m tempted to just put my phone back in my pocket and ignore it, but that wouldn’t really be fair.

[To Thomas]: havent said anything yet

[To Thomas]: gonna talk to her soon

[To Thomas]: ill keep you updated

Honestly, I abuse the “unlimited texts” part of my phone contract.

I hear the shower turn on upstairs and I close the front door.

Back in the kitchen, I help myself to the fruits (or, well, sausages) of my labour, and eat as I wait for Mina to come downstairs so I can get this show on the road.

I spend the time it takes Mina to eat her breakfast trying to come up with a better opener than
“Hey, do you ever wonder what happened to the Alpha that turned you?” I don’t come up with much, but in the end it turns out I didn’t even need to try.

“I’ve been thinking,” Mina tells me after she’s cleaned off her plate and dumped it in the sink. I sit up straighter, because her tone of voice betrays that she’s about to say something she thinks might be unwise. She turns and looks at me, and she’s got a little frown between her eyebrows. She chews her bottom lip, and then sighs.

“I’ve been thinking that I should probably go home,” she says, and yea. That’s not what I was expecting her to say, and really not what I wanted to hear at all. My wolf agrees – it kinda feels like she’s just trodden on his tail.

“Home?” I echo. She nods and sits down in the seat opposite mine. Folds her hands together on the table in front of her. She smells uneasy. Nervous.

“Yes,” she says, and then; “No?” Her shoulders drop and she lets out a sigh of frustration that is more of a growl really. “I don’t know. I don’t know what I should do, and it’s kind of starting to annoy me.”

“Talk me through it,” I tell her, as empathetically as I can. A good Alpha is always there for his Pack. A good friend is always there for others.

“It’s just—” she cuts herself off, and the frustration in her voice and in the air around her is mounting. My wolf twitches, reacting to the scent of it. He doesn’t like frustration.

Mina tries again. “I know I should go home,” she says, like she’s trying to convince herself. “I know that I have a family and friends and they probably all think I’m dead or missing. I should go home and let them know that I’m okay, right?” she looks at me for support and I tilt my head. I can’t agree or disagree here. I can’t advise her. She looks like she was expecting that response. She drops her gaze back down to her hands as she presses her fingertips together and releases them in a rhythm. Nervous tick.

“I know that’s what I should do, but the more I think about it, the less I actually want to do it. Is that crazy? I’m just kinda living here with a bunch of people that I don’t know, trying to get used to the idea that werewolves are real things and I am one, and I don’t want to go home and see the people who love me because I’ve got this voice at the back of my mind telling me that maybe it’s for the best if they keep on thinking I’m dead. How fucked up is that?”

It’s a rhetorical question, and I don’t answer it because she clearly isn’t expecting me to. Mina looks up and me and laughs like she’s got a joke she doesn’t want to share.

“I don’t know any of you people, and you’re all helping me and being kind to me and taking care of my baby. Why are you doing that? I mean, I’m clearly not a nice person if I don’t even want to go and tell my family that I’m still alive!” She’s getting louder, her emotions growing wilder, and I need to calm her down. My wolf’s standing alert in his cage.

“You’ve got it wrong,” I tell her, and she interrupts me.

“Have I?” she asks, pleads. There’s a hint of guilt in her eyes and a desperation that I recognise all too well.

“Yes. You’re not a bad person for needing time and space to heal from something,” I say, “and you’re not a bad person for not relying on your friends and family right now, either.”

I see the fight go out of her at that. She looks down again, this time in shame. I guess she hadn’t
thought about it like that, or maybe she just didn’t want to. I soften my voice as I talk to her, try to get her to reconsider her stance on things.

“Mina,” I say, “you’ve been through some shit. And yea, whilst your family is worried about you, and probably would do anything to help you if they knew what happened, they can’t really help you the way you need to be helped right now. You’re going through something they won’t understand, and you can’t possibly begin to explain to them. It’s okay to recognise that.

“I’m not saying that you should never go back home – not at all – but what I’m trying to say is that it’s fine for you to take your time about it, and seek help from where it’s available. Rely on us for a bit, if you like. But don’t force yourself to do anything you don’t want to, just because you think it’s what you should do.” Then, for good measure, I add; “Take it from me. That just tends to cause you more pain, which will inevitably effect the people around you.”

Silence falls between us and settles. I let it. Mina’s rubbing her knuckles together now, eyes down, thinking. I give her time to pull her thoughts together, try to get my wolf to stop pacing in the back of my mind and calm down.

“I know you’re right,” she says, and her voice is so small. “I just feel so powerless. I feel like a burden. You’ve all got your lives – your studies, your friends – to worry about. You shouldn’t have to be looking after me, too. You don’t even know me,” she repeats with a frustrated laugh, like she can’t understand why we’d help a stranger.

“We don’t need to know you,” I point out. “You needed help, so we’re helping you.”

She nods, but she still looks troubled.

“I don’t really want to go home,” she says, meets my gaze. “I’ve got no clue how I would even begin to explain any of this to them. I don’t want to try and pick up my old life, either. I—” she stops herself, presses her lips together.

It might be the wrong move, but I prompt her. “You..?”

She sighs, and that twist of guilt floods back into her eyes again. “You’re going to think I’m shitty, but sometimes I think that it might be better to just stay here and start over.”

There’s a moment of silence between us where I process that admission and how it might fit in with what I’m about to suggest to her, and she groans, drops her head into her hands.

“Now you think I’m a monster,” she moans, and shit. No. That’s not why I was hesitating.

“I don’t,” I rush to reassure her. “I don’t think you’re a monster at all. I think you’ve been through a lot.”

She lifts her head and looks at me, big grey eyes full of sorrow and regret and doubt. My wolf is pacing again. I’ll have a headache later.

“But how can I think something like that?” she whispers. “How can I want to leave my old life behind without saying a thing to the people I used to know? How—”

She doesn’t let herself finish that sentence, but boy do I hear it.

To her, it feels like she’s betraying those she lost by looking to her future. I know how moving on from your past can so easily feel like you’re treating that past as if it was meaningless.
It’s how I felt when I moved in with my uncle after my mother’s death. It was like, just by not living in the house I’d grown up in, I was betraying her memory. It took me a while to come to terms with the fact that actually, that was the house she died in, and if I had stayed there I would have been reminded of that every day.

Sometimes, you need to start fresh to move on. Sometimes, moving on is the best way to honour those you’ve lost.

I look at Mina, who seems so lost herself as she opens up to me, and I tell her what it took me so long to figure out.

“You think like that because you’re a survivor,” I tell her. State it like a fact, and leave no room for argument. She still tries, though.

“But—”

“No. You survived, and now you need to live. If keeping some distance between yourself and the place where it all happened is how you heal, then do it, and don’t feel guilty about it. The people that love you will understand. They won’t want you to suffer, not for any reason.”

Mina nods again, and again she seems sad. It makes me want to reach out across the table and take her hand in mine, but I don’t. Instead, I offer her what I can.

“I can’t tell you what to do,” I tell her, make my voice softer, like an apology. “But if you don’t think going back home is the right path for you, and if you want a fresh start then I can absolutely help you with that.”

She’s looking at me, interested, hooked even. If I’m going to suggest she leaves with Thomas, it’s now or never. I won’t find a better opportunity.

I take a breath and plunge right in.

“I’ve been talking to my old Alpha,” I begin to explain. “My uncle, back home in Michigan. It’s where Thomas is from, and where I’m from too. My uncle’s got a Pack of his own – he’s got a lot of experience too – and he wants to help you, Mina.”

“How?” she asks. Demands, really. She’s leaning forward ever so slightly as she drinks in everything I have to say.

“Well, Thomas is due to go back home in a few days, and we were thinking that it might work out pretty well for you to go with him.”

Mina makes a little huh noise, and I wonder what she’s thinking. Her emotions are all curiosity and nerves, which doesn’t help me much. She nods slowly.

“How would that help me?” she asks, and that’s all the encouragement I need to continue. I give her the full sales pitch.

“Well, for starters, you’ll be staying with a much larger Pack. There’ll be people who can help you get adjusted to life as a werewolf, and life as a mother. Hannes has plenty of experience with people who are new to Pack life, and he’s also helped people start from scratch after being turned in the past, so he’d be able to set you up with a new life if you’re serious about not going back home.”

“That doesn’t sound too bad,” Mina admits, but she’s hesitant, thoughts building in the silence between her words.
“They are people I know and trust,” I say. “My family.”

“But I don’t know and trust them; I trust you. Why can’t I stay here?” she asks, and then before I have a chance to answer, she huffs and says, “I guess it doesn’t matter though. If you don’t want me here anymore, then I get it.” There’s a hostility in her voice that sets alarm bells ringing. She’s defensive, and I need to tread carefully.

“No, that’s not it at all,” I assure her. “I want to help you, I do, but I know that Hannes would do a better job of it. It would just be a temporary move – I actually think it might be the best move for you, considering—”

I stop myself, milliseconds away from saying considering the Alpha that turned and chased you might show up any day now.

Mina notices. She’s observant like that.

“Considering what?” she asks. She’s frowning, and my wolf warns me that she’s on edge. I don’t need to be told twice.

“Considering everything you’ve been through,” I amend. Nice and broad and vague. “Hannes helped me after I was turned, so he knows what he’s doing.”

“What aren’t you telling me?” she asks, and it’s almost like I hadn’t spoken at all. She’s still frowning at me in suspicion. Verging on mistrust.

My wolf barks at me to tell her already, just let her know. Don’t let her think we’re sending her away because we want to be rid of her.

“Alright,” I sigh, both at him and at her. “But you might not like it.”

“I’m going to like it even less if you keep secrets from me,” she points out, and that’s fair.

“We think that the Alpha who turned you will try to track you down, and we’re certain that will lead him here.”

There’s a palpable shift in the atmosphere between us, like a drop in pressure. Mina sits back in her chair. The look in her eyes is unreadable.

I wonder if she hates me.

“I ran so far,” she says after a moment, and the words are quiet. Mumbled. She isn’t looking at me, but rather looking through me. Looking backwards in time with those big grey eyes. “I thought I was safe here.”

“I’m sorry,” I say, because I can’t think of anything else to say. She blinks, and she’s back in the room, holding my gaze. My wolf squirms, belly to the earth.

“So that’s why you’re sending me away. You know it’s coming for me and you don’t want to face it.” There’s anger now, and more than that; panic.

“No,” I start to say, but she cuts me off, accusing, jabbing her finger at me across the void of the kitchen table.

“Yes. That’s why you mentioned it. You’re hoping that if I leave, I’ll lure that monster away from you. I can’t believe—”
And that pointing finger curls into a fist and she slams it on the table top. This conversation is going sideways on me fast, and I need to set it straight. I can feel the shift in her emotions, and I know her wolf is waking up – that careful control I’ve helped her keep is slipping ever so slowly out of her grasp.

This is exactly what I feared would happen.

“Mina, listen,” I say, standing. I put my palms flat on the table and lean forwards, try to catch her gaze again but now she’s refusing to look at me.

“I can’t believe I trusted you to help me,” she growls, and okay. That hurts.

“You can,” I tell her, and her head jerks up. Her eyes are full of anger, teeth gritted. She’s ready to refute it, fight it, and I don’t want to turn this into an argument or something worse so I plough on. “The Alpha isn’t coming after you, it’s coming after me. I severed the link between you and him. I made myself responsible for you, so I’m the one he’s after. Sending you away is the only way I know to keep you safe, and right now that’s all I want to do.”

Her anger is failing, turning to disbelief, and something sweeter. There’s a flicker of hope there in her eyes, and I lunge for it.

“Mina,” I say, soft as I can. “I don’t want to send you away. I want to help you. I don’t want you to have to get to know a whole new set of people in another state, but until this Alpha is taken care of, I don’t know what else to do.” She drops her head, pulls her arms in around her stomach, hugs herself. My wolf whines, tells me to go over there and hug her too, but I can’t move.

“Please don’t think that I would abandon you,” I say. Beg.

She shakes her head. “I know you wouldn’t,” she chokes, and she’s crying, I realise. Or maybe it just started.

I find I can move, then. I round the table and I crouch down by her chair. I’m sideways-on to her and the wrong height, but I wrap my arms around her all the same. It’s the first time I’ve attempted any kind of physical contact with her, and the first time I think she’s considered allowing it.

She’s stiff for a moment, body shaking ever so slightly as she fights the tears that threaten to fall. Then, she relaxes, and she turns her head and I see the loss in her eyes as they start to close, and she slides off the edge of the seat and onto the floor, wrapping her arms around me as well.

For a good few minutes, we just hug it out as she cries quiet tears and I try my damned hardest not to squeeze her too hard, despite the eager encouragement from my wolf. He’s just thrilled that she’s seeking comfort from me in the way that Packmates should. I tell him to shut the hell up, now is not the time, she is obviously very stressed and doesn’t need another reason to be.

Eventually, her shoulders stop shaking, and the wet patch on my shirt starts to dry, and she leans a little bit heavier against me, clearly out of energy.

“When I said you wouldn’t like it, I didn’t think you’d take it this far,” I say because I feel like she’s calm enough to take the joke, and hey if she’s not at least she can’t get a punch in from this distance.

She half-laugh-half-coughs, which I’m pretty sure just makes a mess of my shirt where her face is pressed against it.

“I hate this,” she says, and I think oh shit bad joke and start to unwrap my arms. I don’t get very
She squeezes me, doesn’t let me back up, and says; “No, not this. I mean, my situation. I hate how fast I get angry and stressed, and how much I need you all around me to make me feel safe. It makes me feel like I can’t be myself without you here, like I’d break apart if I had to be on my own again.” The words are kinda mumbled because she’s saying them directly into my shoulder, but I can still understand her. I can feel her breath heating up my skin beneath the fabric of my shirt as she sighs.

“Wolves are pack animals,” I explain, and I’m talking about the animal here. “They need each other to survive. Their packs have hierarchies and every member of that hierarchy has a roll to play. Everyone knows that the alpha wolf is the toughest, but even an alpha couldn’t survive for long if they were alone, and if they were alone they would no longer be called “alpha”.

“Werewolves are the same. An Alpha leads the Pack because they’re the strongest, but by themselves they suffer. Omegas are alone, and not many survive like that. The only way to live this life is by relying on a Pack to support and care for you. The stronger the Pack, the stronger the individual.” I lean back a little so Mina has to lift her head from my shoulder. She looks up at me and I smile. “When I found you in the woods, I made you a part of my Pack because I knew it was the only way that you could survive. I didn’t want you to suffer anymore. I wanted to help you, and I know it’s not been the easiest few weeks, but I really do hope that we’ve managed to make things easier for you.”

Mina smiles and drops her head back down to my shoulder as she answer.

“You have,” she says. “You’ve all done so much for me, and I know I haven’t said it but I am grateful. Thank you.”

“No problem.”

“And I’m sorry for freaking out on you earlier. I know you’re trying to help me, it’s just all a bit —” she breaks off, searching for the right way to phrase it.

“A bit much?” I guess.


“Sounds about right,” I say. My knees are starting to hurt where I’m kneeling on the hard kitchen floor, but I don’t complain. Mina is still leaning heavily against me, and I have no intention to make her move just yet. Werewolves use touch as a way to connect. She hasn’t had this in god knows how long – probably never, actually – so her wolf must be howling up a storm at the back of her head right now. (Mine is on lockdown because he can’t be trusted to act naturally at times like this, and I don’t want him fucking this up for us.)

“Is it normal to—to smell peoples’ emotions?” Mina asks hesitantly, and I wonder what she’s picking up on from me to ask that. A lot of relief, if I had to guess.

“Yep. That’s standard.”

“And would it be normal if I said I didn’t want to let go of you right now?” she asks, and my stomach does this little flip because yes, this is exactly what my dumb old wolf wants to hear and now he’s pushing up against the bars of his cage, preening in the glow of Mina’s validation.

“We’re tactile creatures,” I say, as smoothly as I can. “No werewolf’s gonna turn down a hug.”

“I thought so. You’re all so easy and relaxed around each other. It’s like you’re siblings, but also old friends, but also all married. It’s kinda funny sometimes,” Mina says, and I can hear the smile
in her voice. She tilts her head up and her nose bumps the side of my neck. My knees are really starting to hurt, and there’s no nifty little supernatural trick to stop that.

I shrug, and it dislodges Mina enough that she has to rearrange her arms around me. I find myself automatically doing the same, and again my stomach does that little flip.

“Love is love,” I say by way of explaining my Pack’s behaviour around each other. “Pack is family, and even though we haven’t known each other for long, there’s a natural bond between us that has made it pretty easy for us to live with each other. Sure, not all Packs are the same, and we don’t all function in the same ways, but a big part of keeping the wolf under control is through keeping Pack bonds strong. The easiest way to do that is through contact, so I think we’ve naturally evolved to seek that out in whatever way it’s needed.”

“This is all so weird,” Mina says, and yea. It is. Not many people are comfortable enough after a month of knowing each other to share the same bed, no matter how innocent it may be. But werewolves aren’t really people in the traditional sense, they’re something more. Something extra. Therefore, most of us are pretty extra with our interactions. Sometimes it takes a little getting used to.

“My first few months as a werewolf were pretty fucking awkward,” I tell her, intending to recount the tale of emotionally stunted teenage Eren, and his adventures in forced affection, but then I think better of sharing this story right now because the discomfort in my knees is becoming too hard to ignore. “Can we please move? I think my kneecaps might pop off if I have to sit here much longer.”

“Oh,” Mina says, sounding surprised, as if she didn’t realise that she had been putting her full body weight on me for the last fifteen minutes. She drops her arms from around me and starts to get her feet under her. “Sorry.”

“Don’t worry about it,” I tell her, and then as she’s halfway to vertical, I stand and scoop her up and carry her into the living room, which is not a move I would have attempted before thirty minutes ago.

Mina shrieks at me, and smacks my shoulder, but she’s laughing as well as I unceremoniously dump her on the couch and drop down next to her, extending my legs out with a groan of pain as my knees pop.

“Why were your first months so awkward?” Mina asks, and she’s smiling, eager to hear the story in a way that says she’s not afraid of this connection we’re building. She links her arm through mine, and it’s not the weight of a whole body pressing against mine, but it’s a solid connection and it feels right.

Alpha and beta. Pack. It’s like this big weight has lifted right off my chest and I can breathe again.

I find myself smiling back (can’t help it) and telling her of how my anger issues, and refusal to let any member of Hannes’ Pack close to me in the months after being turned, led to a lot of emotional outbursts at unfortunate times. I was a messy teenager physically and emotionally, and most of my weekends were spent either grappling with my control over my temper, or over my wolf, as the Pack I was a part of tried to help me with little success.

When Mina asks me more about my old Pack, I realise that in a few days’ time, she might actually be meeting these people. Living with them. The realisation hits me in the chest like a fucking mortar, equal parts unhappy about sending her away, and missing my family. But I oblige all the same, and talk about summer campouts in the woods, barbeques and full moon runs. She drinks it
up, asks me for more.

I tell her everything I can think of to make her smile, and just talking about home makes me smile, too.

Later that evening, after a dinner cooked (and burnt) by Sasha and Connie, and just as I’m getting ready to head off back up to the campus whilst the two of them clean up the mess in the kitchen, Mina pulls me aside and quietly tells me the following:

“I don’t know if I’m ready to leave, yet.”

I don’t think it’s a lie, per say, but I also don’t think she’s being entirely honest. As I look at her, I think deep down she knows that her best option is to go with Thomas and stay with my old Pack until things have died down in Trost, but she also feels uneasy about leaving and having to start again with people she doesn’t know. I can’t fault her there.

“Think about it,” is all I say. I can’t force her to do anything, after all. “You’ve got a few more days.”

Mina shakes her head. “But that’s not long enough,” she insists, and whether that’s long-enough-to-decide or long-enough-to-say-goodbye I don’t know. Something about her expression tells me it’s a mix of both.

“It doesn’t have to be temporary,” I remind her. “And Thomas will take good care of you. Just think about it. Maybe talk to him tomorrow, if you’re worried.”

“Alright,” she agrees, and she lets me leave with that promise. Tomorrow evening I’ll be back. That gives her a whole night and day to go over her options. Maybe she’ll have a decision for me then.

Chapter End Notes

This was horrendous to write. Originally it was going to be much longer, but I’ve had to split it into two chapters or else this would just be too long and I would hate myself. Sorry guys!

Kudos and comments are always appreciated, thank you for reading <3 <3 <3
Chapter Summary

The trio enjoys the last day of sun, the Pack enjoys their last day with Mina, and Eren has a stressful night's sleep.

Chapter Notes

Big shout out to crypticnala for being amazing!! I hope you like this chapter hun, thank you for reading and supporting me!

If anyone wants to come chat, you can find me on tumblr here.

Last chapter, we managed to reach 20,000 hits and over 1,250 kudos! This is absolutely amazing and I am blown away by how many people have read and enjoyed this. It makes writing it worth it.

Saturday breaks over the city and with it comes the sun. It’s not the change in weather we were all expecting, but I’m not complaining, no sir.

As I open up the curtains in my dorm room and blink against the light, I wonder if this is the last properly sunny day we’ll get before winter sinks her teeth in for good. Over breakfast, Mikasa informs me that today we are absolutely without a doubt going to make the ultimate best of it. When I ask her what she means by that, she shrugs, enthusiasm diminished a bit, and says; “I dunno. Picnic?”

“A picnic?” I echo, totally unconvinced. It might be sunny but it’s still cold out there.

Armin yanks a carton of orange juice out of the refrigerator and breathes “A picnic,” as if he’s never heard of anything so wonderful.

Guess we’re picnicking today, then. No point arguing with the princess.

I leave them to work out the details and go shower.

Truth be told, a picnic isn’t exactly what I had in mind for my day. There’s a tonne (and I mean tonne) of reading I need to do for my lectures over the next week, and I also have chores to do as well. The more I think about it, I could probably do with topping up the gas in my truck today, and hey if I’m heading into the city I could really do with a haircut, too. My fringe is currently doing unnecessary things, and I don’t have the patience anymore to comb it out in the mornings, which isn’t helping.

But I know that between my studies and my Pack, I really haven’t been spending enough time with Armin and Mikasa recently, and I do feel bad about that. I also made a silent promise to myself
when I opened my eyes this morning that I wouldn’t spend the day with Mina – to give her some time to figure out if she wants to leave with Thomas or not without me being there to influence her decision in any way. A bold choice, I know. Look at me being all responsible.

So I agree that yes, Armin, Mikasa and I can go on a picnic, because hey I can use the distraction and I can keep putting off everything else on my list of stuff to do until my next free day.

I find myself offering to drive us out into the wilderness for this picnic (because, ya know, my truck can handle it) which means I get to top up the tank on the way anyway, so at least that’s something off the list.

We head out to Cedar Lakes midmorning, and I let Armin choose the songs and then try not to act too appalled when he chooses trashy ‘90s tunes and turns the volume up. He sings along and Mikasa head bangs like a pro in the backseat, going even harder on the songs that really don’t deserve to be head banged to. I must say, it’s kinda nice just spending time with the two of them. There’s no supernatural interference here, just friends and fun.

I’d almost forgotten what that feels like.

I park us up by the start of the main trail near the smaller lakes. The trail itself is a good few miles hike; enough of an exercise to build up our appetite and let us enjoy the last of this year’s sun. The walk will help keep us warm, even if the weather doesn’t.

“Did you seriously not think to bring a jacket?” Mikasa intones behind me as I lock up, and for a second I think she’s talking to me.

“No, I—” I begin to correct her, to tell her that I do in fact have a jacket but it’s in the truck because I doubt I’ll really need it on top of what I’m wearing. Superhuman self-heating and all that.

Armin cuts me off.

“I packed the food!” he protests, and as I glance over my shoulder I see - oh look at that! Armin isn’t wearing a jacket and he’s got a lovely covering of goose bumps breaking out on his arms already. I give it five minutes before he starts shivering and then complaining about it. I roll my eyes and unlock my truck again to retrieve my jacket for him.

“For a smart guy you sure can be forgetful,” I admonish, and throw my jacket at him over Mikasa's head. He pouts.

“But I packed the food,” he whines again, but quieter this time, trying to look innocent, to make us take pity on him.

I sigh and head towards the start of the trail. There’s a map painted onto a sign by the side of the path, and although we’ve all been here before and I can lead us out of these woods easily enough, I still snap a picture of it on my phone just in case. Running through the woods as a wolf is one thing, but my very human friends would prefer to follow a footpath, I’m sure. And actually, whilst we’re on the subject of my very human friends, I can’t help but notice that they have yet to catch up to me.

I turn around and walk backwards a step or two, shield my eyes against the sun. They’re still standing by my truck, faffing. I call out; “What’s taking so long?”

“Armin is!” Mikasa shouts back at me. I see her pop the gum she’s chewing at him, roll her eyes, and heft her bag onto her shoulder.
“We both packed the food, idiot,” I hear her say with a fond smile as he shoves his arms through the sleeves of my jacket. He must still be complaining, then. The jacket is big on him, like my hoodie was on Levi, and the memory sits heavy in my stomach, tasting like regret.

I pull my phone out of my pocket and scroll through my conversations until I get to his. Last message received over two weeks ago now and I haven’t had the courage to say anything since, no matter how badly I want to. At this point I’m more worried that if I do say anything and he ignores it, it’ll be worse than saying nothing and getting ignored anyway. At least if I maintain this radio silence, he can’t use my persistence against me.

I sigh and put my phone away again as Mikasa comes to stand beside me, and I tune back into the moment to see that Armin is still halfway across the parking lot and has managed to get the zipper of my jacket stuck on his t shirt. This development has in turn prevented him from walking any faster than a slow shuffle across the gravel towards us as he attempts to free it.

Mikasa and I patiently wait for him to sort himself out, exchanging an unimpressed glance.

“Not even out of the parking lot yet and he’s already struggling, bless,” I say, pity in my voice.

Mikasa deadpans, “What a man.”

I laugh.

The walk itself is great once we get going. Armin and Mikasa are both active people, so I don’t have to worry about slowing down for them, and my wolf enjoys the feeling of me stretching my legs and lungs in nature once again. Full moon is fast approaching, and I can tell by the ache in my chest as my wolf stirs and stretches that this month is going to be a tiring one. I haven’t been this worn down in a while. I doubt I’ll be able to remember much once it’s over.

Armin may not have been dressed appropriately, but at least he’s got decent footwear on, which means we can go off road, so to speak, to avoid the onslaught of joggers closer to the lakes, and Mikasa picks our course for the most part.

It’s refreshing, and soothing, and unsurprisingly just what I’ve been needing this week.

The sun is obstinate enough, shining through the thin layer of cloud in the sky, but the bite of the wind as we break through the treeline by the lakes’ edge is sharp. Cold. The sun won’t last longer than a day, that’s for sure.

We pitch up camp (i.e. dump our bags on the grass) a little ways off from the picnic area. There are families seated around the tables, stubbornly making the most of the last vaguely sunny day. It’s commendable, really.

Children run across the grass, down to the lake, shrieking at one another gleefully. The sight makes me kinda wish I wasn’t an only child – wish I had grown up with someone to play tag with, to share that childhood joy with – but then I don’t think my dad was ever fussed about kids much, and even if he was he never did anything about it. Probably for the best, all things considered.

Mikasa tugs me out of my thoughts and a blanket out of her rucksack and spreads it out. I help her pin down the corners, and then we crawl onto it. It’s not a picnic blanket – just a red woollen throw
she’s grabbed off her bed – so the grass stalks still poke through it, but it’s better than sitting on the damp earth.

“There,” she says to Armin as she hands him her bag so he can pull out the containers of food to pass around. “One picnic, as requested.”

“It was your idea,” I point out, and she flicks her bobbed hair regally over her shoulder. She’s cut it recently. It looks good.

“Yes, it was,” she declare. “Which I suppose only naturally means I get first dibs on food.” She takes her bag back from Armin (who looks like he’s just been spat at) and pulls out the box with our sandwiches in it. “Thanks for pointing that out, Eren. You can have second dibs.”


“Packed the food?” Mikasa guesses. She shrugs. “Eren drove us here and saved you from the cold.” She leans back on her hands and looks at me. “I’d give you first dibs, but, you know, it was my idea to have a picnic.”

“No, that’s fair,” I agree, if only to see the look on Armin's face bloom fully into one of betrayal. Mikasa scrunches her nose up at me, clearly enjoying this. I have to laugh.

“You guys are mean,” Armin complains as Mikasa selects her sandwich and hands the plastic container to me. I choose a chicken wrap for myself and pass it over to Armin, who looks very sullen for such a sunny day.

“Please have a sandwich, Armin,” I implore him, earnestly, totally teasing. “We’ve come all this way out here—”

“And if you don’t stuff a sandwich in your face right now, I’ll do it for you,” Mikasa threatens. “Bit extreme,” I mumble, breaking character. She levels me with a stare.

“We have to enjoy the last sunny day of the year, Eren,” she reminds me, and oh yes how could I forget. “We’ve only got five hours of sunlight left. That’s a narrow window, guys. Once the sun goes down, that’s it, game over. It’s winter and we’ll all be suffering and miserable. Eren, you’re from up north, back me up here.”

“It’s true, kid,” I tell Armin, lean back on one elbow as I take a bite out of my wrap and speak around the mouthful. “Once the snows come, you’ll be begging for the sun. Up to your knees in sleet and snow and ice, you’ll be. Dreadful, time of the year. Don’t end until May.”

Mikasa nods seriously as she chews. Armin looks between the two of us, searchingly. Suspiciously.

“I can’t tell if you’re being serious,” he says with narrowed eyes. Mikasa scoffs and I raise my eyebrows at her.

“He can’t tell if we’re being serious, Kasa,” I tell her, absolutely taking the piss now.

“Outrageous,” she tuts, playing along with zeal.

“Can you believe that?”

“No, I cannot, Eren.”
“Okay, you guys are taking the piss now,” Armin says, but he's smiling so he clearly isn’t bothered; not yet. Mikasa and I exchange another mischievous glance.

“Thinks we’re taking the piss he does, Eren,” she says, and it’s a struggle to keep a straight face but I manage it.

“Outrageous.”

“Can you believe that?”

“No, I—”

“Okay, enough!” Armin cries, clapping his hands over his ears. “Please just make it stop. I’ll eat the sandwich, okay? I’ll enjoy the picnic. Is that what you want?” and he’s playing up to it now too, preferring to be in on the joke rather than at the expense of it.

And I have to say, it feels great to be spending time with them. As much as I love Connie and Sasha, it’s good to take a break from being the “responsible” one and just sit by a lake and talk shit with my flat mates.

Eventually the teasing fades out into serious talk. We chat about how classes are going, about the projects and essays and coursework we’re all struggling with. We talk about Hannah and Franz who, after going three months strong, are now taking a short break from their relationship after Hannah decided she couldn’t deal with the rest of Franz’s boisterous friends.

This leads us onto the subject of Marco as said boisterous friends are currently living with the Italian, and I mention that I saw him just yesterday.


“He’s not too bad once you get to know him,” I defend. My wolf practically rolls his eyes at me. Christ knows we’ve had some teething problems with this one.

“You mean, despite the obvious lack of social grace?” Mikasa deadpans, and yea she’s got a point but I don’t want to let her have it, so I pluck a stalk of grass out of the ground and throw it at her. It falls limply to the blanket between us, and we all watch it in silence.

“I’m offended,” Mikasa snarks.

“You know what?” I threaten, pointing a finger at her. She throws a stalk of grass at me, grinning.


“Guys, please,” Armin groans, realising that we’re about to start back up again with our pantomime act.

“No, I’d like to know what Eren has to say,” Mikasa argues, and she’s still got that grin on her face. I stretch out my leg and lightly kick her thigh.

“That’s what I have to say,” I tell her, meaning the kick. She gasps melodramatically and clasps her leg, falling over backwards onto the blanket.

“Armin,” she groans. “Avenge me.”

“Guys, please,” Armin says again, but this time it’s with a sigh. He drops his head into his hands. “Don’t involve me in this.”
I laugh at Mikasa as she splutters in mock-outrage.

“I’ve been betrayed!” she exclaims, looking from Armin to me and back again with her mouth agape. “And after I helped pack the food—”

“Oh my god,” Armin groans, as Mikasa and I both burst out laughing. “You need to stop.”

“Why?” we ask in unison. He looks between us and sighs. Stands.

“I’m going for a walk,” he says, looking utterly exhausted by us already.

“Aw, don’t be like that,” I call after him as he walks off back up towards the circular trail ringing the lake. He flaps a hand at me and keeps walking.

“I give it ten minutes before he gets lonely and comes back,” Mikasa bets. I shrug. She’s probably right. We watch him go until he’s out of sight between the trees, and then I let myself flop back against the grass with my head pillowed on my arms and take a deep breath, drink in the scents around me. Despite the screaming children nearby, I’m thoroughly enjoying our last little day of sun.

And then Mikasa goes and spoils it.

“So real talk,” she says, nudging my outstretched leg with the toe of her boot. Her voice has that I’m-totally-about-to-start-prying-into-your-personal-life tone to it. I pull a face at her, give her a good look at my double chin.

“Ah, we’re talking real now?” I ask, in an I’m-about-to-start-closing-up-now tone. My personal life right now is way too complicated to start getting into. My wolf huffs because he knows he’s the reason for it.

“Eren,” she sighs, but it’s good natured. She moves aside the bag to make room next to me and lies down on her front. Props her chin up with one hand and flicks a few strands of my hair off my forehead with the other. It’s oddly intimate, familial almost. It makes me smile.

“What’s on your mind?” I ask, giving in just a little.

“Honestly? I feel like I haven’t seen you in ages, and you literally live next door to me.” Jumping right in, then. Bring on the guilt!

I heave a frustrated sigh and scrub a hand over my face.

“I know,” I say, trying to make it sound as apologetic as I can. “I’m sorry, Kasa. I’ve just been massively busy for the past few weeks.”

She frowns down at me, clearly concerned. “Anything we can help with?” she asks, and it pinches at my heart how much she cares. My wolf whines at me to reassure her that we’re okay, so I do.

“Nothing.” I shake my head. “I’m just sorry I haven’t been around much. But don’t worry,” I add, trying to lighten the mood, “it’s all pretty much sorted now, so I’ll be able to come to the gym with you and kick your ass any time.”

Her frown eases out into a grin at once, and she elbows me in the side.

“You fucking wish,” she says. “You’ve barely been able to keep up with me all semester and you’ve just had two weeks off. You’re gonna be face down on the mat in the first ten minutes.”
I pull an offended face at her and scoff. “Obviously you’ve been living in another reality because clearly I’ve just been going easy on you all semester so you don’t feel bad.”

“Oh really?” she asks. “Sure you’re not just making up excuses because you’ve been repeatedly beaten by a girl for the last three months and your tiny Man Ego can’t handle it?”

“Hey, my “Man Ego”—” (and yes, I do use air quotes because yes, I do know what she’s really referring to here) “—is not tiny, thank you very much, and I’d have no problem being beaten by a girl, but sadly no girl’s been able to beat me yet so….”

“Oh, shut up, Jaeger,” she laughs. “You so don’t want to start this fight.”

“We’re fighting?” I ask, looking ever so innocent. “Is that what you call this?”

Mikasa makes this *argh* noise in irritation, yanks a handful of grass out of the ground, and dumps it on my grinning face.

I have to sit up to brush it all off and cough the rest out of my mouth. Mikasa cackles at my misfortune, and she seems so goddamn happy that it’s such a shame to have to ruin it.

But ruin it I shall!

“Mikasa,” I warn, narrowing my eyes at her over my shoulder and pulling my own handful of grass out of the ground. She tilts her head, hums a question. I tell her; “I’m gonna give you a head start.”

She gets her feet under her and runs, shrieking as I follow and attempt to shove a handful of grass and dirt down the back of her shirt. My wolf eggs me on, exhilarated by the idea of giving chase to one of our Pack humans in the same way we would our betas. I tell him to calm the fuck down, the sap. This isn’t some game; my pride is at stake here.

“Eren, please,” Mikasa begs through her laughter as I gain on her, chasing her down to the sand by the lake’s edge, effectively cornering her with her back to the water. “Have mercy.”

“What, you think I’m a *nice person*?” I sneer, brandishing my handful of grass, but totally unable to keep a straight face as she holds her hands up in defence. I’m still a good few meters away from her, and there’s no way with the breeze against me that I’d be able to touch her with a single blade of grass right now, but we’re still playing this game.

“The nicest,” she assures me, takin a step backwards across the sand. “I think you’re the nicest person I know, and that’s why you’re going to put the weapon *down.*” Her referring to a clump of sad looking grass and dirt as a weapon makes me crack a smile, but it’s quickly gone as she finishes; “And also if you come any closer to me with that shit I’ll dump a can of spaghetti O’s in your pillowcase.”

The threat sort of catches me off guard, not going to lie.

“You wouldn’t.” I shudder at the thought of all those slimy little O’s and their tomato sauce soaking through my pillow. I imagine innocently climbing into bed at night and being met with that.

I think I’m physically going to throw up.

“I would,” Mikasa swears, growing bolder now she sees what affect this is having on me. “I’ve been saving a can just for you, my friend.” There’s no hint of a lie in her eyes. She really means it, the monster.
"You monster," I say, and lower my weapon, drop the clump of grass and dirt to the ground and wipe off my palm against my jeans with disgust evident on my face.

"Truce?" she asks, holding out a hand. I inspect it for a second, not sure that I trust her, mentally reminding myself to remove every can of spaghetti O’s, or likely substitute, from our kitchen when we get back later.

"Fine. We’re even. For now." I take her hand and shake it, and then link our fingers together and let her lead me back up to the picnic blanket and the rest of our belongings. I can taste how happy and contented she is with every breath, and I can’t keep the smile from my face.

Coming out for a picnic today was a damn good choice.

As Mikasa helps herself to another sandwich, I check the time on my phone and realise that it’s been a lot longer than ten minutes and Armin still isn’t back from his breather yet. I send him a quick text, asking if he’s okay, starting to wonder if somehow he’s managed to get himself lost in the trees. I scan around us for any sign of him by the lakeside, but all I see are strangers. My wolf flicks his ears, asking if I want to borrow his senses to go looking for our missing friend.

“What’s up?” Mikasa asks, pulling me out of my thoughts as she once again lies down across the blanket on her stomach, getting comfortable, munching away. I frown down at her, tap my phone against my palm as I wait for Armin’s response.

“It’s been a while,” I say, “and Armin’s not back.”

I can smell the drop in her mood when I say it, and know she’s just realised with a jolt that yes, our friend has been gone longer than expected now. She sits up and looks around at the families scattered across the grass around us.

“I’m sure he’s fine,” she tries to placate me, and lies back down again. “Probs just got distracted by some blown down tree and needed to take a picture of the roots for his project or something.” She waves her half-eaten sandwich at me in a gesture that says lie down, you’re blocking the sun where you’re standing. “You know what he’s like.”

“He doesn’t have his camera, though,” I mumble as I sit back down again. Mikasa makes a noise of assent.

“Eh, he’s a smart kid. He can’t have gotten far, and he’s got his phone on him. If he is lost, then he’ll call us and you can go and run off to his rescue whilst I look after the food.”

I roll my eyes. It’s clear that by “look after the food” she means “consume the food”. I would berate her for not taking this seriously, that these woods can be dangerous, and if Armin’s got no signal on his phone then we won’t know he’s lost until we eventually get worried enough to start looking for him. But I take a deep breath and tell myself not to worry just yet. If he’s following one of the paths around the lake, he’ll find his way back here soon enough, and the sound of all these people will easily lead him back to the picnic area from wherever he’s wandered to.

“You’re probably right,” I say. I reach for the backpack because the mention of food has me feeling peckish, and if I genuinely do need to run to Armin’s rescue later, I can’t do that too easy on an empty stomach now can I?

“Ooh, pass me a KitKat,” Mikasa says.
When Armin does eventually come traipsing back to us half an hour later, I can tell at once that he’s in a bad mood. If the expression on his face alone isn’t enough to go by, the swirl of sour emotions stinking up the air around him, carried on the wind, says it all. Mikasa, from where she’s lying with her back to the sky and her eyes closed, half-dosing after her lunch, doesn’t register anything’s wrong at first.

“That Armin?” she mumbles sleepily at the sound of his footsteps getting closer across the grass.

“Yes, heads up, he’s not looking too happy,” I say. She peers over her shoulder, sees the problem, and pulls a yikes face at me before rolling over and sitting up. Armin reaches the edge of the blanket and kneels down, grabs at the backpack and pulls out a bag of salt and vinegar chips without saying a word.

Mikasa and I exchange a look, silently urging each other to be the first to break the silence. Mikasa takes the plunge.

“Are you mad at us?” she asks, subtle as a brick.

Now, realistically I know that can’t be it – that whatever has killed Armin’s mood to this extent has to be something outside of the three of us, because for the best part of the last hour he’s not been with us – but I still feel relief as he shakes his head. He tears open the bag of chips and starts devouring them.

“Then what’s the problem?” she tries again, blunt as you like. No gentle hand with Mikasa. Maybe I should have left her to dose for another ten minutes.

Armin swallows his mouthful and looks at the two of us with a scowl across his face. “If I explain it, I’ll sound like a whiny brat,” he warns.

“Try us,” I say.

“Fine.” He sighs, shovels the last of his chips into his mouth and scrunches up the empty packet, Mikasa and I get comfortable on the blanket, and I pull the drinks we’ve brought out of the bag and hand them out. Pepsi Max for everyone. We’re nearing the end of our picnic.

“So you know my parents are split up, right?” he starts, and we both nod earnestly. We’re aware of the tense mess that has been Armin’s home life for the past year – he’s not exactly been shy about answering our nosey questions, either. “Well, it’s Thanksgiving this week, and both of them want me to come home and spend it with them.”

“Ew,” Mikasa says, as sympathetically as she can muster. “No thanks.”

“That’s what I said!” Armin exclaims, puling the tab on his Pepsi Max. A few bubbles spill over his fingers and he sucks the liquid off. “I’ve told them I’m not playing favourites for public holidays, but they keep acting like I’m being ungrateful by not spending time with them. But then if I make a choice and spend Thanksgiving with my mum, my dad will expect to have me like the full week of Christmas—”

“No fair,” I interject. A weekend for a week? So not equal. Armin nods, blonde hair bouncing.

“It’s not fair! But that’s just who he is. And then, if I spend Thanksgiving with him, my mum will do that whole “well your father has never been very supportive of your choice in degree, so why you’ve decided to spend your first visit home with him, I don’t know” and that’s just mad guilt-
tripping!”

“Wow, no chill,” Mikasa agrees, taking a dainty sip of her Pepsi.

“Ugh,” Armin huffs. “I know I sound super dumb, but every time I call home they start to complain about it, and it’s pissing me off. I told them when I came here that I would only be coming home for the breaks at the end of each semester, and I would spend time with each of them equally. I don’t like them using me against each other all the time. It’s fucking stupid, and exhausting, and they’re acting like children.”

My wolf is whining at me, nose scrunched up at the roiling mix of anger and frustration choking us both, and I’m totally on board with him here. Armin’s pissed. Must have been a tough phone call, especially considering how long he was gone for.

“That sounds pretty whack to me,” I tell him. He laughs without humour and shakes his head.

“It is whack. Even when they were together, they’d still act like this, like they were trying to be the “best parent” but it was just to show each other up, not actually to be a parent to me, you know? I hate it.”

Armin slumps sideways so he’s leaning against me, and I reach up and rub his back, hope it comes off as a comforting gesture. It’s quiet between, the only sound the ripple of water across the lake and the families socialising around us.

“Parents are stupid.” Mikasa breaks the moment of silence. Armin nods against my shoulder, like he totally agrees. “It’s why I decided to study abroad. This way I’ve got a good excuse to not go home for national holidays.”

Armin lifts his head to smile at her matter-of-fact reasoning. “I thought you liked your mum, though,” he says.

“Oh, I do now that she can’t critique me on every aspect of my life, or the things I wear, or how I want to be strong enough to bench press Eren someday—” at this Armin laughs for real, and I give her a good view of me rolling my eyes “—but I still think the whole concept of parents are stupid. They’re just people, like the rest of us. We shouldn’t have to bend over backwards to please them if they’re not willing to do the same for us.”

“That’s so wise,” Armin says, and for what it’s worth, I have to say I agree. It is wise. It’s reassuring and uplifting in a don’t-let-people-fuck-with-you Mikasa Ackerman sort of way.

Armin’s mood seems to be clearing as a result, so I decide to take this rolling ball of a thought from Mikasa and throw it through a proper loop. You know, just to shake things up a bit, see if I can’t get them to laugh for good.

“Yea, fuck parents. They’re so dumb,” I say as Armin takes a nice big mouthful of Pepsi. “You should just be an orphan like me so you don’t have to deal with them.” Armin spits his Pepsi out all over the blanket, narrowly missing the bag, and blinks at me in shock as Mikasa crows with laughter, applauding me for the show.

“Oh my god, Eren,” Armin says as he wipes off his chin on the back of my hoodie sleeve. He’s got a nervous smile growing across his face, though. I shrug.

“Hey, if I can’t joke about it, the grief will bury me alive,” I tell him with a nonchalant shrug. Mikasa has genuine tears shining in the corners of her eyes, and I’m glad she’s enjoying this – I’m glad she gets me.
“But….” Armin’s still hesitant, but he’s trying to stop his smile and failing. “God, that’s awful.”

“Is it?” I ask, looking between him and Mikasa. “I hadn’t realised that having a dead mom and a neglectful father was awful. Why didn’t you guys tell me?”

“Please,” Mikasa wheezes. “Please stop, you’re killing me.”

“My mum’s last words,” I deadpan without thinking, and then because that actually hits a bit too close to home, so much that my wolf digs his claws in a little, I try to backpedal. “Wait, no—”

But I can’t even get the words out, because they’re both howling with laughter.

“Are you being serious?” Mikasa wheezes. “Who the fuck are you right now? What the fuck.”

And yea, okay. No taking that one back.

Do I feel bad joking about my mother’s death – a very traumatic moment in my life, and something I spent a long time growing past? Yes. Absolutely. But let’s think about this; would my mom be encouraging this behaviour if she was here? Also yes, absolutely. She always had a quick wit and a sense of humour and would stop at nothing to make me laugh in the face of my fear or anger. I remember Hannes berating her for the things she said when she was alive, so I know deep down that she’d forgive me this once, because the hiccupping laughter of my friends is totally worth the mention of that moment five years ago.

Eventually Armin and Mikasa’s laughter subsides into something more neutral, and I manage to bring the conversation back around to something less morbid: Thanksgiving.

“Why don’t we just have our own party?” I suggest to them.

“And send our parents pictures of how much fun we’re having without them,” Mikasa adds, then turns to me with a serious look of sympathy, only belied by the gleam of mischief in her eye. “My condolences, Eren. We could potentially send your dad one, but that would require us knowing where the fuck he is.”

“Yea, okay, I get it,” I sigh. I brought this upon myself. “My dad sucks, there’s nothing I can do about it.”

“I think the idea of a party is nice,” Armin says, trying to break Mikasa away from the topic of my absent father. I smile at him.

“Pretty sure everyone else staying on campus will be doing the same, so why not?” I agree. We look at Mikasa, wait for her response to be serious this time.

“I mean, it’s going to be my first Thanksgiving, so I don’t really know what a Thanksgiving party looks like, but if that’s what you guys want to do, I’m in,” she says, and then; “What? It’s an American thing. I’m Eurasian.”

“True,” I say with a shrug. Don’t know why I didn’t think about that sooner. “We don’t celebrate it much back home, on account of its history, but it would be nice to get the gang together for an evening. Have a few drinks.”

“So, it’s decided,” Armin decides. “We can host it in our flat and see if floor three want to join us. We can invite Jean and Marco too, because I know they’re not going home.”

If what I know about Jean’s old Pack back home is enough to go by, I’d say there’s a good chance
they won’t be going back for the rest of their courses here, but I don’t bother mentioning that.

“Sasha and Connie are staying as well,” I say instead. (They come from Texas, it’s not like they can easily pop home for a visit.)

“Then they’re invited, too,” Armin says with a smile. I know he likes Sasha and her crazy youthful energy, and Connie’s been willing enough to play games with him whenever they’ve had some downtime. Even Mikasa can’t find a bad thing to say about the two of them. My wolf rumbles in pride that these two groups of mine have melded together so well over such a short period of time.

“And Levi, of course,” Armin asks, and my whole pleasant mood takes a fucking nosedive and smashes to bits on the ground. Fun stuff.

“Uh,” I say, eloquent as ever, “maybe not Levi.”

The look Mikasa and Armin exchange is telling as fuck. They know something’s up.

Great.

“Trouble in paradise?” Mikasa asks, and she’s using that sly voice that says I’m not going to hear the end of this.

“Don’t get ideas,” I warn, try to play it off like the No Big Deal it is, despite the sullen wolf at the back of my mind. “I just haven’t seen him in a while. Been busy.”

“He said you two weren’t talking much,” Armin comments, and wait. What? Armin’s seen him? Spoken to him, even? When did that happen?

“You’ve seen him?” I ask, oh so smoothly, like it doesn’t particularly interest me at all. My wolf, however, is all ears, pressing himself up against the bars of his cage, making my heart beat a little faster as I try to ignore his antics, the moron.

Armin is saying; “Yea, we sort of run into each other after our lectures a bit – his lecture theatre is next to mine over in Keynes, and they let out at the same time some days, so usually we just go and get coffee and chat before lunch.”

“Well that’s—” I blink and realise I don’t know how to finish that sentence. I kinda want to say, “well that feels like a kick in the gut”, and it does to be perfectly honest. It feels sort of like betrayal, hearing that Levi has all the time in the world to go and get coffee with Armin but can’t even be bothered to text me back and let me know what I’ve done to piss him off. Like he’s so effortlessly managed to cut me out of his life without even feeling bad about it.

That kinda hurts.

I realise that Armin is looking at me, and I didn’t finish my last sentence. “That’s great,” I tell him, quickly, and somehow it sounds like I mean it.

“You think?” Armin says, and he’s smiling bless him. He smells nervous, and that’s definitely my fault because I’m being weird as fuck right now, like a goddamn teenager having some personal crisis over a boy who won’t text me back. Jesus.

“I get the impression that he doesn’t really hang out with many people. He lives off campus, so it’s not like he’s got a group of friends constantly in his space, you know?” Armin says. (I try to picture Levi fitting into student halls life and fail. He’d hate it. Hell, he’d probably end up murdering someone within the first week.) “But he’s a nice guy really.”
“He is,” I say a bit softer this time, less strained. In spite of all the initial evidence to the contrary, if you catch him on a good day (and after a good drink) Levi can be nice so it’s not totally a lie.

“What else do you guys talk about?”

“Just…stuff,” Armin says lamely, with a shrug. “I don’t know.”

“Eren wants to know if you talk about him,” Mikasa very unhelpfully stage whispers to our friend, and I show her my middle finger because fuck her, that’s so not what I want to know. Liar whispers my wolf.

“Um,” Armin says, and then pauses, like he’s thought twice about answering that.

“Um what?” I press the question, and I can see Mikasa looking all smug out of the corner of my eye when I do. I ignore her as Armin rubs at the back of his neck, looking sheepish.

“I wasn’t trying to pry into your personal life or anything,” he says by way of apology. I shake my head because, to be honest, my personal life is such a high-strung mess at the moment, I can’t fault him for being curious. “I’ve just been wondering why we haven’t seen him much. I know you said you’ve been busy helping out a friend, but I don’t know, I though maybe something had happened?” From the look on his face as he says this, I can tell he already knows that somethings has, he just isn’t really sure what. “He said you guys were taking a break.”

“A break,” I echo, and silently curse the stupid fucking thousand-year-old vampire for wording it like that. Does he not know how that sounds? (On second thoughts, I bet he does know, and he totally worded it like that to fuck with me, the dick.) “It’s not really like that,” I say. “But sure, I guess we are taking a break of sorts.”

Armin pulls this fucking face, like he feels sorry for me, like he pities me, and now I wish I hadn’t asked, hadn’t said anything, hadn’t indulged my curiosity. If he starts questioning what happened then we might have a problem. Can’t exactly explain that Levi and I have been working together these past few months to root out a potentially volatile supernatural creature on campus, and now that the problem is sorted he suddenly no longer wants to have anything to do with me. No, that just won’t fly.

“He did look like he hadn’t been sleeping much,” Armin sighs, snapping me back down to earth. “What happened?”

“Yea,” Mikasa joins in, “how bad did you fuck up?”

“I don’t even fucking know!” I huff. I contemplate shutting the conversation down before I say something I’ll regret, but the words keep on coming. Two weeks worth of bottling it up will do that to you, I guess. “I thought things were fine between us, you know? Hell, things were going great, but now it feels like I’ve taken a massive misstep somewhere and he won’t talk to me about it. He’s just ghosting me and it’s kinda starting to piss me off.”

“What an asshole,” Mikasa asks, as Armin says; “Have you tried talking to him?”

I sigh. Nod. “I tried,” I say, realising how concerned they are over this. It’s sweet, really, and I wish I could actually talk to them about everything going on in my life right now, because there’s a million other things in that particular bottle, but I can’t. All I can give them is the bare bones and let them draw their own conclusions. “I’ve messaged him, tried to call. He’s giving me nothing back. All he’s said is that he needs some space, so I guess now I’m giving him it.”

“I’m sure he’ll get over it soon,” Armin tries for optimism.
Mikasa nods. “He will. You’re too good for him, you know that?”

“I’m wildly aware,” I deadpan, ignoring the little twist of hope that shoots through my chest at their encouragement. Mikasa snorts.

“But seriously, if he doesn’t get his shit together soon, I can kick his ass if you like?” she offers. “I mean, I can kick yours and he’s basically half your size, so it shouldn’t be too hard.”

I laugh and shake my head, try to picture Mikasa squaring off against Levi. The destruction those two could cause would be unreal.

“I don’t think it will come to that,” I tell her, “but thanks.”

She gives me a no problem kinda shrug and stretches her arms above her head.

“Right,” she says. “If we’re done talking about Eren’s boy trouble, can we head back to the car? There’s a livestream I wanna watch that starts in an hour.”

Guess we’re done talking about my boy trouble, then.

Back on campus I try to get some work done. There’s a draft of an essay sitting on my desktop that I’ve been trying to flesh out for days now but can’t seem to find the motivation for. Maybe it doesn’t help that I’ve got a whole plate full of other crap to be worrying about (Mina, Levi, Thomas leaving, another Alpha potentially honing in on us) or maybe it’s just that sitting in this room, even with my headphones in, I still can’t filter out the sounds of college life around me.

I can hear the tread of footsteps on the floor above me, Mikasa in her room listening to her livestream, Armin humming to himself as he sorts through his laundry ready to wash, Franz pottering around in the kitchen. It’s maddening at times, being in such a confined space with so many people.

I sigh and push myself away from my desk, acknowledge the fact that I’m not going to be getting any work done here today.

“Guess it’s library time,” I mutter to myself, and close my laptop screen.

The great things about living on campus is having the access to a nice, quiet library 24 hours a day. Sure, there are smaller computer suites set up in each of the colleges dotted around campus – there are lounges and lunch rooms that I can easily choose instead of the walk across the centre of campus to the library building – but it’s still sunny outside, and I like the view the library offers across the city. (Plus, the café will still be open at this time of day, and they make a good latte.)

I pack a bag with my laptop, charger, notepad and pen, and check in with Armin and Mikasa to let them know where I’m heading. Armin hands me a few books to take back with me, and Mikasa offers me a stick of gum for the journey. I accept both.

Campus is lively; students out enjoying the clear evening, moving between the buildings, sitting on the grassy hillside, relaxing. This time next week, it’s almost guaranteed to be snowing, so none of us can be faulted for making the most of the day. There’s the smell of hot food from the restaurant in the centre of campus, and the faint whiff of alcohol and cigarette smoke from the boisterous group of guys standing out the front. I recognise one of them as Marco’s housemate as I walk past.
and give them a wave. He tips his cigarette to me in acknowledgment. I wonder if he’s Daz.

The library is cool and quiet in comparison to the evening outside, and I drop Armin’s books off at the front desk before hoisting my bag onto my shoulder and taking the stairs two at a time until I’m on the third floor.

I make quick work of ordering myself a latte and pick my usual table by the window. I set myself up, plug my laptop charger into the socket by my feet, and try to focus.

Twelve whole minutes tick by. I’ve finished my latte and managed about three sentences.

Why the fuck is it so difficult to focus?

It’s almost like I’m feeling guilty about not spending time with Mina, but that’s ridiculous! I know why I decided to have the day apart from her – to give her space and time to make a decision about leaving with Thomas without me swaying her in either direction – and I know that feeling guilty about missing a whole day with her isn’t helping either of us, but it seems this evening I just can’t help it.

Mikasa and Armin did a wonderful job of distracting me today, but now I’m by myself again it’s hopeless. How in the hell am I going to say goodbye to her if one day apart is giving me separation anxiety?

How the fuck did Hannes do this?

I groan and slump forwards on the table, push my laptop back with my arms and close my eyes. My phone vibrates in my pocket and I figure it’s just Sasha asking if I’ll be home for dinner or not so I ignore it in favour of continuing to mope.

It vibrates again.

“Okay, I get it,” I mutter as I sit up straight and fish it out of my pocket. *Jeez, can’t a guy sulk in peace these days?*

I unlock my phone and tap on the messenger icon, prepared to type out a quick “I’m busy studying like a real student, I’ll see you guys tomorrow”, and pause. It isn’t a message from Sasha at all, but from an unknown number. It reads:

**[From Unknown]:** Hi, it’s Mina. I’ve just got this phone and you’re the first person I’m texting!

**[From Unknown]:** Can you come home? I want to talk to you all tonight. I’ve decided.

She’s decided. I have to sit back and let that sink in. Mina’s decided if she’ll be staying or going.

My wolf whines at the back of my mind and I have to agree with him there. The thought of her deciding to leave does hurt, even though I know it’s the best option for her right now.

I gaze out of the window to my left and take in the golden clouds of the sunset. The city looks so peaceful this evening, as if everything is softened by that syrupy glow. The last rays of summer disappearing over the horizon, heralding the true start of winter and the cold nights ahead.

I sigh and close my laptop.

Time to head home and face the music, I guess.
When I reach Connie and Sasha’s place, there’s a feeling of foreboding in the air, and I don’t know if it’s just me imagining it or if the others have all caught on by now that something’s about to change.

Connie greets me at the door with a bear hug, and he smells off. Concerned. Worried in a way that he shouldn’t be.

“I’ve missed you, too,” I joke as he buries his face in my neck, almost knocking my off balance as I try to kick off my shoes. He grunts but doesn’t let me go. I squeeze him back in return and hold him there for a second, offer him the comfort that he clearly needs right now.

“You okay?” I ask softly. He lets out a sigh and backs off.

“Sure,” he says with a quick smile, but it’s not enough to mask his emotions staining the air around us. “Everyone’s in the kitchen. Come on.”

He leads me to the back of the house, where true to his word Sasha is helping Thomas cook dinner as Mina sets cutlery on the table in the centre of the room. She glances up as I round the corner and smiles at me, and I mirror it with as much gusto as I can muster (which isn’t much), heart clenching in my chest as I realise how much I’m going to miss that smile.

Over the last three weeks, she’s grown so much. Now there’s no sight of that terrified young woman we found lost in the forest all those days ago. No, although I know the scars she bears across her heart will never truly fade away, she’s beginning to open herself up again, to connect and engage with us; to trust us to help her heal. For her, leaving will be the first step on that path to real recovery, and as much as I know she needs to take that step, it still stings a little to know that it’s a step away from me.

Oblivious to my internal turmoil, Mina finishes laying the cutlery and goes in search of some glasses in the cupboard, stepping around Sasha where she’s cutting vegetables on the side. She hands the glasses to Connie one by one so he can fill them up with Pepsi and then set them on the table. I take a moment to just stand there in the doorway and watch them work together in this crowded but comfortable space, and the sight of their easy companionship fills me with pride, chasing out the twang of sorrow from behind my rib cage.

Sure, tonight may very well be the last night the five of us are together like this, but at least I get to spend this time with them. At least we managed to help Mina, even if it’s only a little.

When Mina next catches my eye and offers me a smile, I find I’m able to return it with sincerity, and the contentedness I can scent coming off her as she turns and helps Connie with the plates makes the last of my reserve melt away.

I can’t be sad tonight. The others are nervous enough, that much I can tell, but I have to be happy for Mina – show them all that whatever her decision is, it’s the right one for her.

I step into the room and go wash my hands in the sink, prepared to help in whatever way I’m needed.

“Have a good day?” Thomas asks me over his shoulder, breaking the silence.

“Yea,” I say as I shut off the faucet and wipe my hands off on the towel. “Went up to Cedar Lakes
with Armin and Mikasa. Made the most of the sun.”

“I thought you were going to try and study,” he admonishes as he stirs in the vegetables that Sasha has been dutifully cutting. Whatever he’s making smells amazing and my stomach is starting to growl. I push my fringe out of my eyes and shrug.

“I’ve done a bit,” I totally don’t lie. “Do you need any help?”

“No,” he waves a hand at me. “You sit down. This’ll be ready in a minute.”

So, I take a seat at the head of the table and Connie and Mina come and join me; Connie to my right, and Mina at the other end opposite me. I can tell that my Second is still anxious, wondering what’s going on, knowing instinctively that something must be. I knock my knee against his beneath the table and he lets the contact stand. I turn my palm face up on the tabletop, and he frowns down at it for a second before accepting that too, lacing his fingers through mine. His palm is warm, skin slightly paler than mine. I give it a squeeze and see the tension in his shoulders ease out.

I’m struck by the thought that we might need to be drinking something a little stronger than Pepsi if this is how we’re all feeling and nothing’s even been said yet. I wonder if that bottle of vodka is still in the cupboard.

Sasha pulls out the chair next to Connie, sees our joined hands on the tabletop and loops her arm through her boyfriend’s, leaning into him with her head on his shoulder. He kisses her forehead, making her grin.

“Cute,” I tell them. They stick their tongues out at me in unison.

We manage to make it all the way through dinner without anyone addressing the elephant in the room, or Anabel waking up and wailing her head off. The meal itself is amazing, bursting with flavours that remind me of home. Thomas’s cooking is on point (as always), and Sasha’s appreciation of it almost makes him blush I swear.

Conversation flows freely around the table for the most part, Thomas entertaining us with stories of my old Pack, featuring me in my early years much to everyone else’s delight. (Thomas knows some wonderfully embarrassing stories about me, and he makes sure to remind me of that at any given opportunity. Ain’t he nice?)

Plates are cleared away and a bottle of cheap wine is unearthed from somewhere, and we relocate to the living room to stretch out on the couches and let the food settle in our stomachs. I wind up on the larger of the couches with one arm around Connie’s shoulders and the other around Mina. As Sasha flicks through the channels on the tv, trying to find something half decent to watch, I push my fingers aimlessly through Connie’s mop of grey hair, teasing out the knots.

He lets his head fall onto my shoulder with a light sigh and mumbles; “So is someone gonna tell me what’s actually going on, or are you all going to let me suffer for another twelve hours?”

I feel Mina go still to my right.

Way to fucking go, Connie.
“Well,” Mina begins, and then hesitates. I glance at her, and catch the look of panic in her eyes. I drop my arm from her shoulders and take her hand instead. It’s much smaller in mine compared to Connie’s, and I’m reminded of just how weak she was when we found her. It makes me want to pull her into a hug, but I don’t. Instead I rub my thumb over the backs of her knuckles and give her an encouraging smile.

“It’s okay,” I say to her. “You can tell them.”

She nods, takes a deep breath, and does just that.

“I’m leaving with Thomas tomorrow,” she says in a rush. “I’m sorry. You’ve all been so amazing and supportive and kind and wonderful and—I know I haven’t been the easiest house guest. You’re all saints. Honestly,” she chuckles, shakes her head. I glance at my betas out of the corner of my eye. They’re staring a Mina with twin expressions of distress on their faces, like they want to deny it all and say that really, no honestly, you can stay. But they don’t interrupt her now.

“I’m so grateful for everything you’ve done for me,” Mina continues, and her voice cracks a little. She swallows. “And I know I’m going to just be a burden if I stay. Thomas’s Alpha has offered me a place to stay with their Pack, and I’ve spoken to Eren and Thomas about this and—” she turns and looks at me, “—I’ve thought about it a lot and I think you’re right. There’s a lot of shit I need to work through, and I can’t stay here to do that. I need more help than I can ask of you, let’s be honest. You guys have got your own lives to worry about.”

“But you don’t have to go,” Sasha says in that little lost voice of hers that makes my heart break in two whenever I hear it. “You can stay here as long as you like. You’re not a burden.”

Mina smiles, bittersweet sadness rolling off her, making my wolf whine. I wrap my arm around her shoulders again and she leans into me, gratefully.

“I am though,” she insists. “You’ve got better things to be doing than looking after me or—or changing diapers or—”

“Yea, the changing diapers I can do without,” Connie agrees, and it’s enough of a joke to make us all smile.

“But you’re so good at it,” I point out. Connie looks appalled.

“I only look good at it because you guys are so useless when it comes to basic childcare,” he says. This time I have to laugh, and Mina does too, in spite of the sorrow that’s clouding around her still.

“You won’t have to change any more diapers,” she promises. “I’m sorry you had to at all. Sorry I couldn’t manage to take care of Anabel by myself.” I open my mouth to tell her how ridiculous she’s being, that of course we would have helped her take care of Anabel, regardless of what state she’s in; caring for a new-born is exhausting if you’re going it alone. She doesn’t let me get the words out, though.

“I know I’m not the same person I used to be, and I know I’ve got a lot more to learn about who I am now. You’ve all helped me so much already—I mean, I literally wouldn’t be here without you! You all saved me. Really saved me.” I can hear the tightness in her voice that hints at tears waiting to fall, and that’s the last thing I want. She takes a deep breath and sits up straight so I have to loosen my grip on her.

“I’m being selfish, now,” she tells us, determination in her voice. “I’m leaving and I’m going to go away and work on being the best version of myself that I can be.” She looks up at me again, and
the sadness in her eyes is melting into a swirl of hope and certainty. “I’m going to get stronger and better and braver and then I’m going to come back here and let you all meet the real me – the me I should be.”

Sasha sniffs, and that’s all the warning we have before she launches herself across the room and piles on top of us on the couch, arms around Mina’s neck, knee in my groin.

I gasp at the hot pain that shoots through me at the crippling pressure, and try to shove her off, but she’s clinging too tightly to Mina and they both topple to the floor with a thud.

“Fucking hell, Sash,” I groan, clasping a hand to my poor aching balls. Connie murmurs a very concerned “You alright, man?” to which all I can do is shake my head.

“Sorry,” Sasha says forlornly from where she’s sprawled on the floor, still clinging to Mina who is trying to extricate herself from Sasha’s grasp. “I didn’t mean to.”

“Yea, I know,” I wave her off. “I didn’t mean to either.”

“Didn’t mean to do what?” she asks, confused. I slip off the couch and flop down on her, put all my weight on her stomach and laugh in victory at the strangled sound of all the air leaving her lungs at once.

She splutters, whacking my back with her hand as she tries to wriggle out from under me.

“Whoops,” I say with a grin as Connie cackles.

I hear Thomas sigh.

That night, after Thomas has left for the safety of his hotel room, we manage to locate the vodka in the kitchen and drink many (many) toasts to Mina and Anabel’s good health and continued success in the future. Sasha puts on some jazz station on the kitchen radio, and we slow dance it out around the table as Mina tells us all how much she’s going to miss us, and we try not to cry like babies at the thought of losing her.

Connie clings to me as I pour myself a glass of water sometime before midnight and asks me for the fifth time in a row if I’m sure this is the right thing to do, and do I know that she’ll be better off without us. I remind him (for the fifth time in a row) that she’ll be staying with my family, with a Pack much better equipped to help her right now than we are, and that if she stays here she could potentially be in danger from the Alpha that turned her when he inevitably comes to track us down.

Connie thinks about that for a moment, a little crease appearing between his dark brows.

“But do you know if she’ll be better off without us?” he asks again, and I sigh.

“Buddy, come on,” I say. “Trust me. I wouldn’t have suggested it if I didn’t think it would be for the best.”

Connie frowns at that, too.

“I don’t understand what you just said,” he says. I hand him the glass of water and make a mental note that he’s had enough alcohol for one evening.
“Can we come and visit you?” Sasha asks Mina. They’re sitting at the kitchen table, side by side, eating a tub of Ben & Jerrys that had somehow been left unopened in the freezer from our last food shop.

“I guess?” Mina says, looking to me for confirmation. I drop into one of the wooden chairs opposite them at the table and shrug.

“Don’t see why not,” I say. “I’ll be going home for Christmas break anyway, so you guys can tag along too, if you want. ‘M sure Hannes won’t mind.”

“My mom might,” Connie points out. Right. Family Pack. A lot of them take issue with their betas being provided for by an outside Pack. I shrug again.

“We’ll figure something out,” I promise them all.

“Christmas is only a month away,” Sasha says, and holy shit so it is. Thanksgiving next week, then Christmas the month after. This semester’s nearly over and I feel like I’ve lived about five years of my life in the last three months. How has the time gone by so fast? Next thing you know it’ll be the New Year.

Scary shit.

“We’ll figure something out,” I repeat. “Might be nice for me to introduce you to my old Pack, show you around my hometown. If not, then Mina you can always come back here for a visit any time. We’re stuck here for the next three years, after all. Not like we’re going anywhere any time soon.”

“True,” she says with a smile, and licks the ice cream off her spoon. “I’ll make sure to come back and visit.”

I end up staying the night, much to my betas delight, too tired to bother driving back up the hill to campus, and too content in the company of my Pack to leave them for my empty dorm room. We climb the stairs a little after 1:00am, and then pile up as a Pack for the very first time, all four of us curled up in Connie and Sasha’s bed together.

The room is warm with all of us in it, and we have to open a window to let a breeze in as we all get comfortable on the mattress. After ten solid minutes of shuffling and rearranging, and at least one elbow ending up where it shouldn’t be, we manage it.

Usually, when I share this bed with my betas, I end up with Connie to my right and Sasha to my left, the three of us curled up in a bundle of limbs in whichever way feels most comfortable. I always end up with someone’s hair in my face, and throughout the night one of them will manage to squeeze all the feeling out of one of my arms, but it’s workable.

Tonight, however, is different. The revelation earlier that Mina will be leaving our little Pack tomorrow means that when she asks if she can sleep with us tonight, she takes pride of place – so to speak – and curls up on my righthand side, closest to the open window. Connie doesn’t complain, just flops down on the other side of the bed and leaves Sasha to find some space left to weasel herself into.

This proves to be slightly trickier than any of us at first anticipated, as four adults don’t very easily
fit a double mattress without some pins and needles involved.

In the end, Connie winds up at my back, forehead pressed into the nook of my neck, not quite spooning me because he’s got his knees tucked up to make room for Sasha where she’s lying horizontal at the foot of the bed, attempting to hug my shins despite how uncomfortable that must be. Mina’s managed to tuck herself against my chest, also with her knees up to avoid Sasha, her breath ghosting against the bare skin on my chest, making goose bumps rise. It’s not exactly comfort incarnate, but I’ve got all four of them in reaching distance, and my wolf is all puffed up with pride, and that’s all that matters.

As we’re settling down, breathing evening out, sleep creeping in at the corners of the room, Mina says; “Thank you for tonight.”

All three of us simultaneously reassure her that it’s no big deal, we’re just happy to spend this time with her. She huffs a gentle laugh into the dark of the room.

Sasha says, “I feel bad that we didn’t invite Jean, though.”

“Jean who?” Mina asks, oh so innocently, and for a split second I’m astounded that she has no idea who Jean is. Then Sasha bursts out laughing, making me and Connie both jump, and he reflexively kicks out and shoves her off the bed.

She lands with a solid thud on the floor, and a weak “Ow,” which is shortly drowned out by the sound of Anabel crying from the spare room next door.

All four of us groan, Connie utters “I’m going to kill you, babe,” and hurls a pillow blindly off the end of the bed managing to nail Sasha straight in the face.

Mina uncurls herself from beside me and goes to retrieve Anabel as Sasha picks herself and the pillow back up, pouting at Connie and rubbing her cheek until he sighs and reaches out to her, motions for her to come towards him. She happily complies and allows him to kiss her cheek where he smacked her with the pillow. I make gagging noises at the display until Connie takes the pillow back from Sasha and shoves it in my face, pushing me down flat on the mattress again.

“All right then,” Mina says, standing in the doorway with Anabel cradled in her arms.

“Sure,” I say, then round on Tweedledumb and Tweedledee. “You guys behave or you’re sleeping in the spare room,” I warn them. Sasha squeaks in protest.

“But it’s our house!” she exclaims in mock-outrage, but they settle back down again without any further complaints, and Mina lays back down beside me, holding Anabel in between the two of us like she’s something sacred. I guess she is, I think, looking down at her.

“She’s going to know who you all are,” Mina promises me in a whisper. “My Pack.”

Those words make me grin so goddamn wide it almost hurts. If I had a tail right now, it would be wagging.

“Sure you’re not going to replace us as soon as you’re in Michigan?” I ask. She shakes her head, smiling up at me with those big grey eyes of hers, full of trust in me, full of promise.

“Never,” she says.

I’m pretty sure that when I fall asleep that night, I’m still smiling, optimistic for once about the
I wake up Sunday morning with a lot of pressure on my stomach and the burning need to pee.

At some time around 4:00am Mina got up to feed Anabel, and then put her back down to sleep in the crib next door, so when she came back to bed herself she promptly curled up beside me which I thought was rather nice at the time. But now it’s 9:00am and I’ve got both Mina and Connie pressed up on either side of me, arms around me, both snoring, and I’m beginning to think it’s not so nice anymore.

I’m very hot. Also, need to pee. Not even my wolf can argue this is a good position to be in.

The pressure they’re both adding to my stomach with their heavy fucking arms probably isn’t helping with either of these aforementioned problems, but at least I haven’t woken up with a boner, so that’s something. (Let me tell you, although awkward morning boners are often a completely unavoidable happenstance for the young male werewolf, they absolutely will kill the mood of any early morning Pack pile, and each and every one of us has learnt that the – ha! – hard way.)

Connie has a leg draped over my thigh (again, thankfully no boner), and he’s drooling onto my shoulder. I pull a face and try to nudge him off me with said shoulder. He snuggles closer, arms tightening around my waist and causing a single tear to slide free of my eye as my bladder screams at me to relieve myself for the love of god.

I hear the shower turn on in the bathroom, the sound of water running through pipes and splashing against the inside of the bath telling me that Sasha’s up and getting ready for the day, and that’s probably what woke me moments ago. She hums to herself in the bathroom as she goes about her morning routine, and I lie there and silently pray that she wanders back in here and pulls me free of this prison of limbs.

But alas, she does not. I am on my own and I either have to wake up Connie – who sleeps like the fucking dead and will bitch about being woken – or Mina, who of all people deserves a lie in.

Needy Pack Second or new beta. Who do I favour this morning?

Thankfully, before I can decide, the doorbell rings, and Mina tenses beside me, awake instantly.

“Must be Thomas,” I tell her, and Christ is my voice rough this morning. “Let me up and I’ll go answer it.”

She moves, lets me climb past her off the bed, and then she lies back down again next to Connie (still asleep, I should point out) as I trudge down the stairs to the front door.

I don’t even need to open to door to know it’s Thomas, I can tell it’s him just from the sound of him tapping his car keys in his pocket – that nervous little tick so familiar to me it makes me smile.

I open the front door and let him see me in all my fresh-from-bed-and-only-wearing-boxers glory.

He looks me dead in the eye and sighs, like he’s disappointed in himself for expecting anything else from me.

“Morning,” I say as I step back to let him in, trying not to shiver in the chill of the November air.
“Must be, if you’re still not dressed,” he tuts.

“We’re all still in bed,” I explain. I go to the kitchen and switch the kettle on for him, knowing he’ll want a cup of coffee and feeling one myself. “Connie’s still asleep, Mina’s probably wishing she still is.”

“Let them rest, then,” he says, pulling out a chair at the kitchen table and gesturing for me to join him. I sit.

“Everything alright?” I ask. He nods.

“Signed out of the hotel, going to make sure you all eat a decent breakfast and then I’ll start loading Mina’s stuff into my car. I’m aiming to be on the road by 1:00pm,” he says, watching my reaction. I feel my wolf stir at the back of my mind, but it’s just a blip. Nothing major, not yet. (I’m fully expecting him to throw a bitch fit when it comes to saying our goodbyes, but for now he’s still mostly asleep.)

“Just let me know what needs doing and I’ll help,” I tell him. He hums, like he’s thinking about what horrible task to give me, and then leans back in the chair with an easy smile as the kettle comes to a boil.

“Well, you can start by making me a cup of coffee and then going to take a shower,” he says. I smile and stand.

“Can do, old man.”

I manage to get them all up by 9:45am, and by the time Sasha, Mina and I are showered and dressed, there’s no hot water left for Connie.

“Shouldn’t have stayed in bed for an extra ten minutes,” I scold him good humouredly when he remerges, dripping and shivering, from the bathroom. He scowls at me.

“Not my fault that you take longer than Sasha in the shower,” he grumbles.

“What was that?” I ask, refocusing on my task of making the bed, even though I heard him perfectly clearly.

“I said—” he enunciates, nice and loud in my ear as he reaches past me for his phone that’s sitting on the bedside table, “—that you take way too long in the shower and you’ve used up all the hot water.”

“It wasn’t intentional,” I assure him. He gives me a dirty look that says he’s pretty sure I’m lying, but goes and gets changed into fresh clothes without further complaint.

“Want help with the duvet?” he asks as he pulls a grey sweater over his head, making his hair stick out at angles. I smile at the image and shrug.

“Sure thing.”

He helps me wrestle the duvet into its sheet and pull it over the mattress, and we work together in comfortable silence. The smell of toast and the sounds of Sasha and Mina chattering away
downstairs filter into the space between us. I listen to them debate the importance of butter when cooking and have to smile. I glance at Connie out of the corner of my eye, but he doesn’t seem to have heard them. He’s got a small frown on his face as he buttons up the duvet cover.

I don’t outright ask what’s bothering him this morning, but I know something must be because Connie never offers to help me with chores unless he wants something, be that my Netflix password or a second opinion on something.

Sure enough, as we’re throwing the pillows into place against the headboard, he comes out with it.

“Do you think she’ll be okay?” he asks.

I straighten up, hands on hips. There’s the faintest scent of concern lifting the air around him, buried under a heavy layer of soap and toothpaste, but unmistakable once I’ve noticed it.

I sigh and take a seat on the edge of the bed, aware that whatever I say will be heard by the rest of my Pack and Thomas downstairs.

“I think that’s not something I can easily answer,” I tell him honestly. He comes and sits down beside me, close but not touching.

“As much as I know that Hannes can help her, what she’s been through – losing a loved one and a part of herself – it isn’t something you can ever really be “okay” with without a lot of work.” I look at him, give him a smile that almost reaches my eyes. He leans sideways and pushes his weight against me. I hold it easily.

“She’ll heal,” I tell him. “She’ll grow and become stronger in herself again, and yes, eventually she will be okay. It’ll just take time.”

“Are you okay?” he asks, and the question catches me off guard. I give him a questioning look, prompting him to elaborate. “I mean, you’re letting her go off and join someone else’s Pack. Isn’t that going to make you weaker?”

I blink at him.


He pushes his face into my shoulder, and I can scent the guilt rising from him and realise that he was being completely serious – that he really thought I would care about having my strength as an Alpha taken away. I have to laugh.

“I can’t believe you,” I mutter, pushing my fingers into his hair and ruffling it up. “I have never seen any of you as just something that’ll make me stronger. Being an Alpha isn’t about the power you hold, but about the people who trust you enough to give it to you.” He looks up at me and he’s still looking guilty as fuck, but he’s got a ring of hope and pride in his eyes that isn’t going away. “I couldn’t care less about how strong we are. What I care about is doing right by the lot of you. Letting Mina go stay with Hannes is absolutely in her best interests. Am I going to be sad when she’s gone? Of course! Am I going to stop her for selfish reasons? No. That’s not who I am.”

“Why do I keep forgetting that you’re a freak of nature?” he asks ruefully. I pull back from him so sharply that he almost falls forward off the bed.

“Take that back,” I gasp. He laughs, shoves me in my side and stands up.

“You’re a freak!” he calls over his shoulder as he walks out of the bedroom in search of breakfast
and leaves me there, wondering just what kind of lessons his mom was teaching him about other Alphas to make him think like this.

Christ, that’s a conversation for another time.

_Lead by example, Jaeger_, I tell myself.

I follow Connie downstairs and help myself to some toast.

Between the five of us, we manage to get Mina and Anabel’s belongings into two suitcases that Thomas kindly provides (a nice navy-blue matching set, no expense spared) in under an hour. We dismantle the crib and load that into the car, and then help Thomas put together the car seat he’s bought to transport baby Anabel the 600 miles between Trost and Michigan. That leaves us with a few hours to kill and none of us can think of a single thing to do. We’re all restless as fuck.

“We could watch a movie?” Connie suggests as we’re making our way back inside after loading up the car. That garners a less-than-enthusiastic grunt from Sasha, and a shrug from Thomas.

“Could do,” I say, uncommitted, kicking off my shoes and slipping into the kitchen to check up on Mina. She’s bottle feeding Anabel, walking lazy circles around the kitchen table as she does. I smile at her and my chest pinches with the realisation that the countdown is almost over. Only a few hours left and then we have to say goodbye.

“We could go for a run!” Sasha breathes as she pushes past me into the kitchen, looking between Mina and me with such excitement in her eyes that I hate to burst her bubble.

“Not enough time, pup,” I say with sympathy. She pouts.

“Just a little run?” she tries. I roll my eyes.

“By the time we drive out to the woods, shift, run, shift back, _drive_ back, then shower, it’ll be too late.” I hate to see the excitement in her eyes die, but we have to be realistic here. There’s a reason Mina’s leaving us, after all. “Besides, it’s too dangerous for Mina to be out there in the woods right now.”

“In Parkwood, maybe,” Connie buts in as he sticks his head around the door frame, “but Cedar Lakes is out of town in the other direction. It’s on the way for Thomas and Mina, so maybe if we leave now we can take a stop off there, have a run about, then send them on their way?”

“That’ll work!” Sasha agrees. I look between the two of them and sigh. I don’t wanna have to pull the Alpha card, but I can tell this isn’t something they’ll drop very easily.

“Do you mean “go for a run” as, like, werewolves?” Mina asks, and fuck now _her_ interest is piqued. I’m starting to feel cornered here.

“Yes, but I don’t think it’s a good idea.” I begin to explain that her control is nowhere near good enough to allow her to shift so easily and at such short notice. Chances are, if she runs with us she’ll end up stuck as a wolf for a while, and fuck knows what that whole experience will unearth inside her. No, I don’t want to put her under undue stress so close to leaving us.

They argue it (of course they do, the mouthy little shits) but in the end they accept that I’ve made
the decision and we’re not running today.

“Full moon’s in a few days,” I tell Connie and Sasha. “Just wait a bit, yea?”

“Yea,” they sigh in glum unison together. They look so dejected.

I pull them into a hug, an arm around their shoulders each, squishing their faces into my chest and making them squirm to get away from me, laughing.

“So, what do we do for the next…two hours?” Connie asks once he’s free of me.

I shrug, check the clock on the cooker across the kitchen. It’s 11:30am, almost lunchtime. I say, “Dunno. Wanna head into town and go get something to eat?”

The gang glance round at each other and nod, all making some sort of “yea I guess” noise. Running or eating – the two true drives for us lycanthropes – and offering up the second option to them worked like a fucking charm.

They file out of the kitchen to grab coats and wallets and shoes and prepare themselves for the trip into the city centre.

We take two cars; Thomas’s and mine, because Connie’s running low on fuel and Thomas has the baby seat already installed (yea, I know, he’s thought of everything and despite Mina’s complaining, has continued to provide her with enough gear to raise five children simultaneously). We park up in Westgate and wander down through the busy streets until we reach La Recoin. It’s always open on Sundays.

Mina carries a snoozing Anabel in a baby sling on her front, and my betas make sure to keep on either side of her as they follow me down the streets, keeping her in the safest position at the heart of our group. There’s no threat nearby, but it doesn’t matter. Mina’s nervous out in public, being somewhere so crowded with all these sounds and scents surrounding her, and we’ve all felt that stress before.

The courtyard that La Recoin backs onto is quieter, secluded from the main roads. As soon as we’re away from the noise of the main shopping markets, the tension starts to drain away from Mina, and the rest of us ease up as a result. By the time we’re all inside and seated around a table, everyone’s in high spirits again, like we’ve completed some small mission just by making it here without incident. I suppose, in a way, we have.

The fact that we’ve made it possible for Mina to come back to human society, that she’s here with her daughter safe and sound and relaxed in this foreign environment is testament to the amazing accomplishment we’ve all made over the past few weeks. Not only Mina being strong enough and brave enough to venture this far out of her comfort zone so soon, but the rest of my Pack helping and supporting her along the way.

As I watch them talk animatedly amongst themselves around the table (while Thomas tirelessly tries to get a straight drinks order out of them) I have to smile. They really are a good fit for one another, and I would not have this Pack built any other way.
We drive back to Sasha and Connie’s so that Mina can collect the rest of her things and say her last goodbyes in the privacy of their house, rather than out of the street in public. (I know, we’re so sweet.) The whole way, Sasha and Connie sit in the back of my truck and give me puppy dog eyes in the rear-view mirror. More than once I have to tell them yes, I know it’s a sad day, but look on the bright side – this is the best move that Mina can take right now, and we should be happy for her.

They aren’t convinced, and eventually I have to crack open a window because the choking smell of melancholia in the car is stifling. My wolf, attempting to crawl his way into my throat so he can whine out his frustration, isn’t helping either. By the time we get back to the house, I’m glad to step out of the car and breathe in the fresh air.

Jean and Marco drop by, having been given the heads up by both me and Connie separately yesterday that Mina was due to leave us. We all gather into the living room and try to act like saying goodbye isn’t breaking all of our hearts into teeny tiny little pieces. One by one, we all take turns hugging Mina and then holding Anabel and saying goodbye to both. One by one, we all end up a sobbing mess because damn this shit is hard. Sasha is the first of us to fall.

“Make sure you call and text me every day,” Sasha is mumbling into Mina’s shoulder, as Mina nods determinedly, squeezing her back.

“I will,” she croaks.

“And facetime us whenever you can, cos I want to see how Anabel’s doing.”

“I will.”

“And don’t forget to eat properly and sleep enough, and—”

“I will.” Mina cuts her off, pulling back out of the hug so she can see Sasha’s crumpled face, and then Sasha takes in a deep, shaky breath, and starts to cry for real. Big wet tears stream down her face as she forces herself to smile at her friend.

“I know you will,” she hiccups. “But I’m going to worry about you every day anyway.”

Mina laughs, but there are tears rolling down her cheeks too, and fuck my wolf is whining loud at the back of my head now. I want to go and wrap my arms around the both of them, give them a big ol’ hug, but the lot of us have come to some silent agreement that we’re not interrupting this moment for each other. We all get time and space to say our goodbyes, no exceptions.

Connie’s sniffling before he even steps up and takes Sasha’s place. Mina pulls him into a hug before he can say anything, and says; “Thank you so much, Connie. Thank you for letting me stay here, and taking good care of Anabel for me. You helped bring her into this world and I’m never going to forget that. Thank you for being amazing—thank you—”

She cuts off into a whine and buries her face in Connie’s neck, and that’s the first time I’ve heard her whine like that, like her wolf is shining through. It makes a knot form at the back of my throat, and if the subtle cough Thomas gives is anything to go off, I’d say it got to him too.

Connie’s mumbling words into the crook of Mina’s neck, telling her that she doesn’t have to thank him for anything, that he’s going to miss her so much and he hopes she’s happy in Michigan, and that she can always come and visit any time she wants.
I wonder, briefly, as I study the room around me, if this level of attachment is unhealthy. Hell, it probably is. We should probably all be worried about how, after three weeks of knowing someone, we’re crying over saying goodbye to her like we’ll never see each other again. But Mina isn’t just someone; she’s the catalyst that brought us all together without even knowing it.

She’s the reason I let Connie and Sasha stick with me – the worry that there was an omega out in the woods encouraged me to step up into that Alpha role to begin with, and then our natural connection took it from there. She’s the reason we found Jean and I was able to give him back control over his wolf – we wouldn’t have been looking for an omega if she wasn’t making bone yards to keep off her pursuer. She’s the reason that Levi and I started working together in the first place, and I know that even if he isn’t here, even if he hates me or wants nothing to do with me, even if it hurts me every time I remember the way he looked at me in disgust and anger out in those woods three weeks ago, I was close enough to him that I wanted him in my Pack, as my equal. Without Mina to focus us and motivate us, none of us would have met or clicked in the way that we did, and so for us, in a way, Mina’s been a part of this journey for a lot longer than three weeks.

Plus, finding a traumatised woman out in the woods and helping give her humanity back to her, saving her life and that of her child in the process, does kinda make you feel a certain way about a person.

After Connie, Jean steps up, and he hasn’t had as much time with Mina but he still sheds a soft tear as he hugs her goodbye and wishes her the best in the future.

For Marco, things are different. He doesn’t have the same bond as the rest of us; without a wolf of his own, his feelings towards her are less on the side of must-protect-and-nurture-her and more god-I-hope-this-poor-woman-finds-a-good-home, but the sentiment is there nonetheless. Marco even gives her a kiss on each cheek, which she accepts with a light blush.

Goddamn smooth Italian.

Thomas doesn’t need to say goodbye, as he’s going with her of course, so after Jean and Marco are done and have taken a step back to coddle Anabel, that means it’s my turn.

It’s my turn to say goodbye.

It takes me a second to realise that I sort of have to open my mouth and makes words come out of it.

I try, and find I can’t.

I stand there, floundering, trying to say something without knowing what, just knowing that it feels like something is slipping away from me that I shouldn’t let go of. Mina smiles, and just seeing that makes my chest feel tight with a loss that threatens to break me open. Then she steps forwards and her arms come up around my shoulders, and she’s in my space, right up against me so our hearts are beating together, and I can breathe in her scent – all heartache and grief, just like her first night with us, but bittersweet now – and I can feel the warmth coming from her and she feels so solid, so alive.

Fuck am I so glad that she’s alive. It makes my wolf tremble.

“I’m going to miss you the most,” she says, and the words are muffled because she says them into my shoulder, but we all hear her anyway. “Don’t tell the others.”
We all manage to laugh for her, and I find the strength and the coordination to lift my arms and circle them around her waist and hug her back. Hug her tight.

“I’m going to miss you too,” I say, and that admission is all it takes to pull a whine from the back of my throat and with it come the tears.

I’m crying like a fucking baby, holding onto a beta I’ve only had for three fucking weeks, and I don’t know how the hell Hannes was able to say goodbye to me because this shit is the fucking worst.

After a moment, I feel movement beside me, and then Connie and Sasha are wrapping themselves around us, breaking that silent acknowledgment of a moment before in the wake of the Alpha’s tears, and I’m so grateful that they’re here right now because I feel like I need supporting.

Jean sighs from somewhere behind me, and then he’s joining in the group hug as well, and I catch the faint whine of concern that he can’t quite hold back.

Mina’s still tucked up against my chest, arms around my neck and breath heating my skin, and I can feel her shoulders shaking as she cries, and I find myself talking, untangling all those words I couldn’t find past the lump in my throat a moment ago – words that I’ve been wanting to say for days, but that I haven’t been able to because I haven’t found the right moment or because I’ve been too pussy footed to say.

I tell her how much I’ll miss her; how much I’m already missing her and she’s right here with us. I tell her how proud I am of how far she’s already come, how I know she’s going to keep getting stronger, keep growing, and that nothing will stop her momentum. I tell her that although it’s going to be a hard road for her – and the hardest parts are yet to come – that she will never be alone again, and she will always have a home here with us. (There are tear-choked uh-huh’s from the rest of my Pack at that, and Mina hiccups a small laugh.) I tell her that in spite of everything, she’s still here and now she’s got her feet under her, no one will be able to knock her down again.

Beneath it all, without saying it, I tell her that I love her, and I know she understands.

We all hold each other for a minute, just breathing in each other’s scents, trying to get our emotions under control.

“I love you too,” Mina says eventually, voice raspy from the tears, and she could be saying it to any of us and all of us, but I think we all know it’s aimed at me. My wolf is shaking in my bones from the weight of those words, and I’m so close to crying again it’s unreal.

“You’ve all made me so grateful to be alive again, and I can’t repay you for that,” she says. She unhooks an arm from around my neck and snakes it down so she can rub the tears away from her eyes. It’s awkward because of how we’re all crowding around her in a messy, tight hug, and we all take that as a cue to break apart and give her some space.

“You don’t have to repay us,” I hold her gaze, stare deep into those big grey eyes of hers, and speak for my Pack when I say this. From the emotions I’m scenting in the room around me, I’m sure they’re all thinking the same thing. “Just look after yourself.”

“I will,” she promises, with a smile.
Jean and Marco stay a while once Mina and Thomas leave, and the five of us mope around in the house eating snacks and watching Netflix until dinner time, when we realise that in the stress of having to say goodbye to a friend, we had completely forgotten that we don’t have any food in the refrigerator and it’s Sunday. The shops are shut by now.

Connie, Sasha and I convene in the kitchen and try to come up with a meal from the few ingredients we have lying around in the cupboards. Jean and Marco (because they are guests) are still chilling in the living room, unconcerned for now by our foraging attempts.

“This isn’t going well,” I say as I toss an empty box of poptarts in the trash.

“I’ve found a bag of pasta, but it’s not enough for all of us, so I only count that as a half-win,” Connie says with his head inside one of the bottom cabinets by the refrigerator.

Sasha, standing upright beside him, gazes dejectedly into the open refrigerator and sighs. “I bet Thomas would know what to make with—” she pulls out a jar, pulls a face, and quickly puts it back again. “Pasta, pickles and ham.”

“No more Thomas cooking for us,” Connie moans as he gives up on his cupboard and takes a seat at the table instead, letting his head fall forward on the tabletop with a bang that has to have hurt. For a split second, I go to reprimand him for the noise, and then remember that we don’t have to be quiet because there’s no baby in the house anymore, and that just makes me feel bad. I, too, take a seat at the table.

Connie lets out a pained groan, and Sasha closes the refrigerator door with a sigh.

“Babe, please don’t start crying,” she says, and that might be real concern in her voice as she goes to rub her boyfriend’s shoulders. He mumbles something into the tabletop that sounds an awful lot like “Maybe I wanna.”

“You guys are bunch of babies,” Jean says from the living room. He’s lying on the couch with his head in Marco’s lap, feet up on the arm rest. I lean backwards in my chair and peer through the doorway into the living room, try to get a view of him, but all I can see is the back of couch, Marco’s head (he give me a smile, which I return) and Jean’s socked feet. I opt for glaring daggers at the feet.

“You know, you were a sobbing mess earlier too,” I remind him. “Pretty sure I heard you whining like a kicked puppy when you had to say goodbye.”

Jean’s feet disappear from view, and then his head pops up over the top of the couch.

“Maybe so,” he declares. “But that’s not the point.”

Marco rolls his eyes and shoves Jean so he’s lying back down again, and not picking a fight with me. “Play nice,” he chides, then turns back to me and says; “Armin tells me you’re planning a Thanksgiving party next weekend?”

And what a way to change the mood, thank you Marco.

Connie lifts his head from the table so fast he almost headbutts Sasha in the face.

“You’re throwing a party?” he asks, with a faint glimmer of hope in his eyes, like the promise of alcohol and food he doesn’t have to pay for might be the only thing that could possibly save him from his sorrow.
“Planning to,” I say with a shrug. “Haven’t worked out the details yet, but yea.”

“That you don’t celebrate Thanksgiving,” Sasha points out, and I blink. I do vaguely remember mentioning something of the sort to her when we were doing laundry together a few days ago, but I didn’t expect her to actually have paid attention to me.

“Uh, no,” I agree. “Back home we didn’t. It’s a bit shit, don’t you think? A tradition remembering the genocide of a nation?”

There’s silence around the table, and I hear Jean mutter a “Well, when you put it like that…” from the living room.

“So why the party?” Connie prods. I shrug.

“Armin’s idea. His folks are going mad at him for not spending time with them, so we’re throwing a party and all taking pictures of ourselves having fun and then sending those pictures to our families as a big ol’ Fuck You.”

“Sounds cute,” Connie says, and I can’t tell if he’s being sarcastic or not.

“You don’t have to do the photo bit, cos obvs you get on alright with your folks,” I tell him, “but you’re more than welcome to come take advantage of the food and drink.”

“Fuck yes,” Sasha breathes, and I shoulda known that would get her. Her stomach growls. “But can we actually order some food for tonight, because I. am. starving.”

We order pizza.

Falling asleep that night feels an awful lot like plunging off the side of a mountain and hitting every ledge on the way down. It’s not a smooth decent, by any means, and I wake frequently throughout the night, too hot or too cold or too uncomfortable to sleep deeply.

I do dream, though.

I dream of things I’d rather leave forgotten, things that today has brought back to the surface of my mind for my wolf to stalk in the dark.

They are flashes, like memories, like moments happening all over again and I’m stuck in them unable to change what happens in any way.

I dream of home, mostly. My childhood, for a while, and then my early years with my wolf; full moon runs that always feel like a dream to wake from anyhow, and Pack gatherings where “goodbye” meant “see you tomorrow”. My wolf stalks from one moment to the next as I drift in an out of sleep, but always, always circles round the memory of a pair of red eyes gleaming at me in the dark.

There was a time, growing up, when we had a basement beneath our house. My dad worked as a doctor in town and would do house calls during the winter when the roads were impassable, or
anytime when folks needed the assistance. He used that basement in our house as a storeroom for medical supplies, and he’d study there in the evenings, reading late into the night.

My mom used to tell me that that basement was the reason why my dad was as smart as he was, and whenever I was allowed down there (under careful supervision after all, medicine is expensive) I would make a beeline for whatever book was left open, and try desperately to make sense of the words I’d find there. Mostly, it was to try and act more like the dad I wasn’t all that close with, in the hopes that my clear passion for the medical field would encourage him to pay more attention to me and maybe even take the afternoon off every once in a while.

It never worked. I would be allowed to sate my curiosity now and again, but more often than not that basement was closed off to me, and so my dad.

Whenever I was injured, my mom would clean my scraped knees and stick band aids over cuts, tell me that if I’d come to her a moment later we might have had to amputate it. She’d root through the medicine cabinet in our kitchen and pull out cough syrup and decongestants for colds and sore throats, warning me that if I didn’t get a good night’s sleep then my throat might get so bad I’d lose my voice. For the really serious “poorly tummies” she’d sit beside me in my bed, stroke my hair back from my forehead and take my temperature, pull a face that said she was shocked I was still conscious and say “Well, Eren, it looks like we won’t be seeing you for much longer,” and then she’d yank the duvet up over my head and laugh as I shrieked.

She had what those in the medical field would call a Good Bedside Manner.

The closest I came to seeing my dad’s bedside manner in action was the time I got the flu and no amount of decongestants could fix it. My mom didn’t smile then, or pull faces, or make jokes.

No, for the flu I was allowed down in the basement where my dad kept the serious medicines, and my mom held my hand and rubbed my back and blinked back tears as my dad found a vein in my arm and shot me full of god knows what to try and bring my temperature down. He stayed with me that night, and I could see the fear in his eyes when he thought I wasn’t looking. Even as a boy, I knew he was afraid.

But in the end, it worked. I made a full recovery, went back to stubbed toes and skinned palms that my mom had plenty of imaginative cures for. All those books meant my dad was a smart man, after all. Smart enough to know how to deal with a sickness strong enough to kill.

Still, in the space between dreams I see the fear in my dad’s eyes, and the closing of that basement door echoes within me.

Hannes found me in the corn fields behind the old bowling alley, hunched over and burning as my body twisted it’s shape away from me.

I knew it was him as he approached, knew from the smell, so crisp, like family.

“Eren,” he called, and that name didn’t sound like mine anymore, not after all I’d been through.

(It’d been two months since my mom died, and I still had her blood beneath my fingernails.)

“Eren, you need to hold on,” he told me from a distance, his words whipping between the ears of corn in the wind.
"Hold on? I tried to say. I'm being torn apart. I don't know what to hold on with.

"Just hold on."

There was a time between the shift and the next moment, where my thoughts were a wolf’s and my body was too. There was a time between the shift and the next moment, where I bound across the corn field towards that call, following the scent of family with a reckless greed.

There was a time between the shift and the next moment, where for a split second I was not mine at all but someone else’s, and then the next moment arrived on the splitting howl of an Alpha, and I found the ground beneath me and clung to it with all I had.

Hannes made me submit to him in the corn fields behind the old bowling alley, and it’s imbedded in me now so deep, like a tether.

(Deeper still, those red eyes of my maker burn.)

So, my uncle stood in the place of my father after mom died, and we mourned her together, son and brother of the dearly departed. We struggled, for a while, to come to grips with what had happened.

I was selfish, as you'd expect a teenager with a dead mom to be. I wallowed in my grief and let the rest of the Pack deal with it. I acted out, let my grief fuel my anger and my anger cause problems. I wasn’t easy to deal with, especially not when you’re mourning a sister too.

Hannes never told me I was a burden.

My dad never told me I was either, but I felt it in the distance between us, and I wasn’t surprised when he told me to pack a bag.

He dropped me off at Hannes’ place, handed over the keys to my home and looked at me with remorse in his eyes.

“"I need to figure this out,” he said.

There was a finality to his words that still makes me feel like a child whenever I think back on it.

It made me feel angry, then.

When my dad walked away from me, and then got in his car without saying anything else, I wanted to run at him and slam my fists into the metal work, make him stop, make him speak. I wanted something other than distance, although I was never good at expressing it in any way that mattered.

Hannes put his hand on my shoulder (I was small enough back then that it made me feel grounded and safe) and the connection between us pulled the rage out of me like a vacuum.

My dad drove off, and I stayed behind. I worked through my grief with Hannes, and in time it was easier to live with.

The rage in me never went away.
The Alpha came back for me one night, as nightmares do.

It howled for me in the corn fields behind the old bowling alley, and for the second time in one summer I found myself in the body of a wolf, racing through the corn towards an Alpha.

Hannes was there – he’d heard the call too – but he wasn’t fast enough to stop me or the rage within, and he certainly wasn’t strong enough to keep the Alpha at bay when I bared my teeth.

We fought, that night; teeth and claws and fury, the righteous anger burning inside me keeping me present for the whole thing even as my wolf surged through me and moved our body and snapped our jaw around that Alpha’s throat.

The whole Pack bore witness and none of them stepped in when I delivered the finally blow. None of them stopped me from sinking my wolf’s teeth into the base of that Alpha’s neck and ripping the life out of it with everything I had left.

None of them stepped forward when I rose to my feet, red eyed and blinded by the power that flowed through me after my victory, an Alpha’s power that was now all mine, mixing in with that rage and adrenaline and making my blood sing.

None of them dared, but one.

Hannes stood before me, strong and powerful in his wolf’s form, golden eyes glowing. The stinking, lifeless body of the beast that killed my mother lay between us, and Hannes stood there proudly, patiently, and waited for me to decide what to do now it was dead and the nightmare was over.

I chose to bow my wolf’s head, to put my wolf’s muzzle to the ground, to sink down upon the bloodstained stalks of corn, broken underfoot, and submit once again to the only family I had left.

Hannes licked the blood off my wolf’s muzzle, and when I woke up in my own body again he told me what had happened and helped me deal with the weight of taking a life, even that of a monster.

He never told me I had been wrong to seek revenge.

Hannes taught me to run under the full moons as a wolf does, but as an Alpha, things were different.

I ran with a burning fire in me that wanted to hunt, to hurt, to destroy. A blood frenzy that swept me away from the Pack, far out into the reserve where I was alone to obey the instincts of the wolf and let that wolf consume me.

Hannes found me, red eyed and shaking with a power I couldn’t control, and after it was over and the sun lit up the sky, he told me it was okay to be afraid.

“It’s okay to be angry, too,” he said to me. “There’s plenty wrong in our lives to be angry about. But the worst of it is over now – the beast is dead. You’re in control of this power now. You can choose when to let it out, and when to cage it.”
I took what he said to heart, and locked that cage tight.

When the next full moon rose over the reserve, I ran with the golden eyes of my family gleaming in the dark, and the power of that Alpha coiled deep within, dormant, until I’d need its ferocity again.

(I hoped I wouldn’t need it again, but sometimes hope isn’t good enough. Sometimes, these things find a way of happening and all you can do is try your hardest not to fail, whatever the consequences.)

In the depths of the forest, Mina howls in the distance and my Pack runs ahead of me, Levi beside me. It’s cold, but I don’t feel it. We’re deep within the trees now, far from human life, but I know the way. I recognise this memory, this dream. I know what’s coming and what I have to do to keep Mina safe.

I close my eyes, try to focus, and let that cage inside me open for the first time in years. I pry off the hinges and smash the lock and try to pull the power of the Alpha that turned me up to the surface so that I’ll be strong enough to claim Mina when the time comes.

My wolf lays there at the heart of me, breathing like a living thing in the way that true power will. Beneath it should be the red-hot promise of a power I claimed years ago, but something is wrong.

I can’t find it.

I open my eyes and I’m in a clearing – the same clearing I claimed Mina in, but this time around I’m alone. No wolves circling us, a protective ring; no Levi standing by my side, grinning at me in the dark.

No, I’m alone, and the wolf inside me is silent.

I blink, and then Levi’s there with his back to me, frozen in place, like the dream is filling in the gaps piece by piece, trying to make it fit. He feels calm – something he certainly wasn’t the last time around – and has his head bowed, as if in defeat, like he knows something is over and he’s made peace with it. I try to step forward, try to walk to him, want to ask him what’s over, what’s wrong?

I can’t move.

There’s someone else here too now, and I know it’s Mina in the way that you recognise a person in a dream without having to see their face. She’s here with us, and I strain my eyes to try and make her out amongst the darkness of the trees.

Levi tilts his head to one side ever so slightly, like he’s listening to something I can’t hear. His back is still to me, but he knows I’m here. His calmness is ebbing outwards, but it doesn’t feel comforting to me. No, it feels like a warning, like an omen. Like the eye of the storm, passing.

He’s looking at something on the ground by his feet.
I blink and the image shifts, clears, like I’m closer, like its focused. By Levi’s feet is the body of Mina’s wolf, and with a sickening jolt I realise that there is no ounce of life left in her.

There’s steam rising from her, and from him, in that too-hot-in-the-cold-of-winter sort of way, and I know two things all at once: firstly, I know that Mina was waiting here for me in my dream, waiting for me to come and help her; and secondly, I know that Levi found her first and killed her, in the way that monsters kill their prey.

The feeling of betrayal rocks me, like a pressure bearing down on me from all sides. Levi, my friend who I ran side by side with, who I trusted, is standing there like a victor over the body of someone I had been trying to help.

The power mingling with his calmness terrifies me, and the only sound in the forest as we hang there in the wake of his betrayal is his quiet, measured breathing.

He turns his head as I watch and looks at me over his shoulder. His eyes are big, manic, and he grins with a childlike glee, his mouth too full of fangs, like an animal.

I see, in the moonlight, the blood and viscera around his jaw, dripping down his chin, the bottom half of his face a mess that makes me feel sick. I don’t need to look at Mina’s body to know that it’s been ripped open by those jaws, that that’s how she died.

Levi’s hands, hanging by his sides, are dripping with it too, like he’s plunged them deep into a pool of blood and brought up palmfuls of the stuff.

I want to look away, to run, to make him disappear, but I can’t move. I’m trapped in the wrongness of this dream, this nightmare, as my friend turns to me fully and I see the states he’s in, drenched in Mina’s blood.

He wipes the back of his sleeve across his mouth, like that will clean things up at all, and he laughs, low and raspy, the laugh of a man dying of thirst, desperate for a drink he’s just been offered. It floods me with fear and adrenaline, my instincts screaming at me to run.

He takes a slow step towards me, and I feel like prey. I feel cornered, despite the open forest at my back.

Levi’s eyes are blazing red, and the panic in my chest blooms as I recognise them as the eyes of the Alpha that turned me.

When Levi speaks, it is with the voice of my father, and the voice of Hannes. It’s Levi’s voice, and it’s the growl of a wolf and the stuttered cry of my mother as her neck snapped under that Alpha’s paw.

Levi says, “I’ve figured it out.”

He’s in front of me now, and I can see the Alpha’s red eyes gleaming in his face, and I want him to close them, to make it stop.

Levi says, “I don’t need you.”

The image shifts again, and I’m alone in the clearing with Mina’s broken body at my feet, and blood dripping from my fingers.

I don’t need you echoes through my head, and I know that now Levi’s gone, so too is everything else. Pack, power, family, friends, trust. It’s all gone as easy as that, and the loss feels like an ocean
I’m adrift in.

I look up at the sky overhead, the stars blurring in the night.

*I don’t need you,* I think, and close my eyes.

Chapter End Notes

Yooooo. So the last sections of this (the ~dream sequence~) just gives a little insight into Eren's past, his defining moments, his regrets, and his fears. I didn't really know how it would work, or even *if* it would work, so any feedback would be appreciated.

I'm literally uploading this at 1:00am and I've got work in six hours and I work in an accounts department and it's our month end, so I'm going to be dead on my feet as a result of this, but the chapter is finished!! So I have to upload it immediately!!

Haven't had much time to go through and check this, so some minor adjustments might be made to it hereafter. Please excuse any spelling/grammatical errors. I am very tired.

Hope you enjoyed, and as always kudos and comments are very appreciated! <3

End Notes

This is my first fic for SNK and I'm writing this without a clue as to where it's going. I doubt I'll keep to a regular updating schedule because I never manage to, but I have no intentions of abandoning this work at any point.

Kudos and comments are very much appreciated. Let me know what you think or if you have any questions.

A huge thank you to all who have drawn art/pulled together fanmixes for this. Links to these can be found at the end notes of the chapters they correspond with.

Much love <3

Please [drop by the archive and comment](https://archiveofourown.org) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!