

Chapter 2: Auntie Maria's Story Part 1

"Nobody has ever measured, not even poets, how much the heart can hold."

– Zelda Fitzgerald

By the time the school day had ended, Rose was tired of school and excited to get home. Her best friend Erica followed her out to the parking lot where Rose got into her car, offering Erica a ride.

"Why don't you come over today? Auntie Maria said something about a...a birthday party for me," Rose said excitedly.

Erica nodded enthusiastically, calling her mother to let her know she was going over to Rose's house after school. Erica's mom was barely home herself, always out partying with her latest ing. Rose often felt sorry for Erica but did her best to hide it. The last thing her friend needed was her pity. The two girls jammed out to their favorite songs the entire ride home.

Rose laughed as Erica pelleted out the chorus to Avril Lavigne's song 'Girlfriend'.

Once they were inside the house, Auntie Maria greeted both girls and maybe Rose was imagining it but her aunt's anxiety seemed to skyrocket when she was told that Erica would be joining the birthday celebrations tonight.

"Oh..." Auntie Maria's smile faltered a bit at this news.

"I can come over another time if tonight is family only," Erica said slowly, realizing that maybe she wasn't welcome.

"Don't be silly, we don't have any family," Rose said jauntily. "It's only ever just been Auntie M and I...isn't that right Auntie Maria? You and me together forever through thick and thin." Rose joked looking at her aunt.

What she saw made her face fall. Auntie Maria was gulping and looking guilty at her niece.

"Right?" Rose asked in a shaky voice, trying to make heads or tails of what was going on.

"Now Rose honey...I think we need to have a talk...and...and Erica, we love you...you're always welcome but tonight...tonight I need to speak with Rose. We have some people coming over to discuss some things regarding her a... parents." Auntie Maria nally landed upon the word after some deliberation.

Erica nodded in understanding casting a glance towards her best friend. "Don't worry about it Rose. I'll hang out and leave before your guests arrive. Save me a piece of cake Auntie Maria!" Erica said with a big smile.

"I'll send a piece with Rose for you tomorrow," Auntie Maria assured.

After the two girls had spent a great deal of time in Rose's room wondering what was going to happen tonight, it was time for Erica to leave.

"Maybe..." Erica said excitedly as Rose drove Erica home. "...maybe it's your parent's lawyers with a will telling you you're really a millionaire."

Rose glanced sideways at Erica as she turned into the dreary trailer park her best friend lived in.

"Maybe," Rose said skeptically as Erica got out and waved her friend away with a 'good luck.'

Erica was a wonderful friend and her mother was a recovering alcoholic. To compensate for the vacuum of loss the alcohol may have created, her mother seemed to ing from one man to the next. Sometimes, her mom would really try to turn her life around but just when things seemed to be looking up, the lady would fall back into her old habits. There were times when Erica would simply tell Rose she needed to stay over and Rose always understood that it meant Erica's mom was in one of her 'moods'.

No questions, no judgement. Erica knew she would always count on Rose and Auntie Maria to welcome her with open arms and an extra bed. Therefore, Erica didn't mind at all and knew that tonight must be something really important for Erica to be left out of the loop in such a way.

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As Rose drove back to her home, she preoccupied her mind with thoughts of who could the mystery guests be that were coming over for a birthday dinner tonight. Pulling into the driveway, Rose noted the SUV already parked behind her aunt's convertible.

If there was one luxury Auntie Maria allowed herself, it was expensive cars. She had always had an anity towards expensive things and Rose knew for a fact that as far as she could remember, Auntie Maria had never worked. When asked about how she provided for them, Auntie Maria always hedged around the question, saying she lived off of the return on various investments Rose's grandparents had made for their two daughters, namely Auntie Maria and Rose's mother, Estelle, who had died when Rose was a little baby.

The cool September's night air made Rose dig her hands into the pockets of her white leather jacket as her boots clapped against the wooden steps leading to the patio of the only home she had ever known. Little did Rose know that after tonight, her world would turn upside down.

The rst thing Rose noticed when she walked casually into the living room was that a young man with wavy black hair and a muscular build was sitting in her favorite recliner chair. His dark brown eyes gave her a cursory once-over before he looked away towards...towards...the keys fell from Rose's hands.

The man sitting on the sofa was an exact replica of the picture of her dad she had in her room.

"Wha...what's going on?" Rose asked confusedly.

The man, who looked exactly like her dad, stood up, coming over to give her a bear hug.

"My daughter...my dear Rose..." He squeezed her so hard Rose thought she might break in half.

"D...dad?" Rose choked out, unable to believe it. "You...you're dead..." she trailed off blankly, her mind still not registering the reality so clearly standing before her.

"No child. I'm alive and kicking," her dad said with a merry twinkle in his eyes.

His dark sapphire blue eyes were an exact replica of hers.

"But...but..." She stuttered, trying to gure out how such a colossal mix-up could have ever happened. Was Auntie Maria really that cruel to lie to her about her parents' deaths? Or was this all some big misunderstanding?

"Rose honey." Auntie Maria nally spoke up from her place next to Rose's dad on the couch. Her hands were clasped together tightly, she looked as pale as a ghost. "...I think we need to have a talk...rather...I need to tell you...tell you everything from the beginning."

Rose let out a strangled noise from the back of her throat, completely swamped by rage and confusion. Had she been lied to? However, right now the curiosity bubbling up inside of her won out against the rage rearing its ugly head in her heart.

And so, in response to Rose's silence, Auntie Maria started her story...

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Estelle screamed as she gave one nal push and the room was lled with the shrieks of an infant.

"A girl!" her husband, Thomas, proclaimed proudly, gripping his wife's hand as he was overcome with emotion. "She's.... she's perfect Estelle. Thank you.... thank you." He leaned in to kiss his exhausted wife on the forehead.

"Is she...is she ne?" Estelle asked weakly, holding out her arms for the crying babe.

"She's beautiful!" the nurse glowed, handing over the baby that still needed to be cleaned off.

"Rose.... Thomas. I want to name her Rose." Estelle spoke weakly, clutching her baby girl still crying and covered in blood.

"Rose it is!" Thomas exclaimed joyfully as his daughter was whisked away to be cleaned and brought back for her rst feeding.

"I...I don't feel so good Thomas," Estelle whispered, closing her eyes.

"You're amazing my love. You just gave birth. Give yourself time to rest and recuperate," Thomas assured, patting his wife's shoulder lovingly.

There was a small commotion as the nurse and doctor hurried back with the baby excitedly.

"She bears the mark of the Luna!" The nurse proclaimed, pulling the newborn's white blanket away to show her left arm.

A dark-red strawberry shaped birth mark resided on her upper arm just before her shoulder began.

"Our Luna has been born!" The doctor said with a happy smile. "What an honor," he said reverently, looking down at the infant.

Estelle smiled, her eyes still closed. "She's destined for great things, Thomas."

Thomas, unable to cope with this new piece of news, suddenly felt as if his child had been taken from him. This was his baby girl! How dare the pack lay claim to her. He hadn't even had time to hold her properly and now everyone was going to start fussing over her and ... his train of thought stilled when he realized his wife was no longer breathing.

"Estelle?" he said, shaking her shoulder where his hand was resting. "ESTELLE!" he yelled in anguish.

And that was how Rose's mother died, a smile on her lips and internal bleeding that the doctors had not foreseen. It was very rare for werewolves to die in childbirth due to their regenerative abilities but Estelle had been a human mate to the beta of the Crimson Phoenix pack. Human mates were very rare so it had never occurred to anyone that maybe she was better off delivering in a human hospital instead of the pack's clinic. Maybe...just maybe if her husband had had the forethought to think that a human delivery, a human doctor would have been more accustomed to all the things that could go wrong, Estelle might still be alive.