

Chapter 3: Aunty Maria's Story Part 3

"The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched—they must be felt with the heart."

– Helen Keller

Plagued by guilt over not being able to save his wife, Thomas fell into despair, throwing himself into his work. Rose would always be the light of his life but even her pudgy sts gripping his ngers or the toothless smile was not enough to lessen the depression in his heart. Estelle's sister, Maria took over the rearing of her niece whenever Thomas was out with his alpha for pack work. She moved to the pack lands, leaving her human life behind. Sometimes, Josie, the current Luna of the pack would stop by bringing her son Xavier, who was a mere toddler at that time, to check in on her future daughter-in-law.

It was uncanny how the infant would hush when Xavier was nearby. For his part, Xavier would look at the baby fascinated by her coos. Josie had given birth recently but Xavier's new brother did not fascinate him the way that little Rose did.

"Pwetty Mama!" he exclaimed, on a warm sunny day when Josie was visiting (she had left her younger son with a baby sitter) while Thomas had gone out with her husband to inspect the perimeter of the pack territory. Xavier was pointing to the wild unruly curls atop the 9-month old's head.

"Oh she's going to have a wild time trying to style her hair," laughed Josie fondly looking at the baby trying to crawl on her chubby legs.

"Her...her progress is a little slow...no?" Maria asked, biting her lower lip worriedly.

By now most werewolves were crawling and getting into everything.

"Don't worry about it," Josie assured loftily. "Every child is different. She is part human after all. The doctor did say her werewolf genes would lay dormant until her rst turn."

Maria nodded, still worried about her niece. If younger werewolves were anything like their teen human counter parts, her niece would have a tough time. "I worry sometimes; she might not t in..."

"Nonsense, she's the future Luna of the pack. No one would dare bully her," admonished Josie.

As the two females talked amongst themselves, there was a sudden crash from the front door. A canister rolled into the sitting room. Gas exploded as the two adults were sent into coughing ts. Rose began to cry as did the 2-year-old Xavier. Both females went to pick their respective charges and run out of the house.

"Take them," implored Josie, dumping her son into Maria's arms.

Josie was ready to her duty as Luna of the pack. She would gladly risk her life ten times over if it meant saving the pups. Placing a quick kiss atop her son's head, she turned to face the intruders as Maria ran out clutching both children to her.

Maria didn't get far however, as the moment she managed to run out of the house, a werewolf with an unknown scent grabbed her. Xavier fell from her hold on him but the werewolf paid the 2-year-old no heed. Instead, his eyes gleamed as he stared at Rose. A swift knife in the gut and Maria fell clutching her stomach, blood beginning to stain her hands and Rose was in the werewolves hold, he turned to make a run for it but, out of nowhere, Josie jumped on him, pummeling him to the ground.

The nine-month-old fell to the grass, crying over being jostled.

Josie, already injured and bleeding from her tussle with the werewolf inside who she had successfully managed to dispose of, kept punching the werewolf asking him again and again,

"Why do you want the future Luna of the Crimson Phoenix pack?"

The werewolf, laughing and spitting blood nally spoke. Josie's hand stilled mid-punch.

"We will weaken your pack eventually! We will take over this territory one day. To do that we need to weaken the future alpha who is heavily guarded. An Alpha is nothing without his Luna. We know that your Lunas are granted special abilities. Once we do away with the future Luna, your pack will no longer be as strong as it is today!" The man gave a crazy grin and spit more blood out and a few teeth.

Maria and Josie were both thankful this werewolf did not know that the future alpha sat a mere few feet away, crying over the commotion. As if from out of nowhere, Thomas and the current Alpha, Edmund, emerged out of the nearby woods running, running like their lives were at stake.

"The other one is dead inside," Josie spoke grimly, getting off the werewolf who was now laughing as if he had gone insane.

Thomas grabbed the crying Rose off the ground, running to aid Maria who was losing blood fast. He began to dial for an ambulance. Josie turned to clutch Xavier to her while Edmund grabbed the would-be kidnapper, hauling him up. The Alpha's subordinate wolves reached the clearing at a run and grabbed the enemy werewolf from Edmund.

"Well...it's the holding cell for you." Edmund muttered, his subordinates dragging him away. Then he turned his attention to Maria who was bleeding profusely. She needed to get to a human hospital. The injury looked fatal. If she had been a werewolf, she would have been healing by now.

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"The only way to keep her safe for now is to send her away," Edmund stated quietly a week later.

Their prisoner had killed himself, never disclosing who was behind this nefarious plot to harm an innocent baby in a bid to destroy Edmund's pack.

"She's part-human. She could assimilate well in the human world for now. When she's older and her werewolf genes fully emerge, she would better be able to take care of herself. For now...this is the best option. "

"If her mother were alive..." Thomas trailed off sadly before continuing." ...I've become a mess ever since her death. I don't trust myself to guard my own daughter properly. My bouts of depression sometimes become so severe, the only way I can cope is take the medication that's been prescribed. It knocks me out cold for a good few hours. I...I can't go with her," Thomas nally stated.

"I'm not asking you too Thomas. You're my Beta. Both of us need to nd out who is behind this plot to kidnap the future Luna and harm my son. We will eliminate this threat together...for both our children. Once we succeed, we'll call Rose back to join us in her rightful place," Edmund assured his friend and second-in-command.

Nodding as he gulped back tears, Thomas looked at Maria.

"I'll take her with me Thomas," Maria spoke before Thomas could even ask it of her.

"You can't go as you are Maria," Edmund stated with nality. "You almost died from the last attack. If you're going to guard her...I'm sorry to ask this of you, but you need to be stronger."

Maria looked at Edmund, paling suddenly. She would have to allow them to turn her.

"No," Thomas blurt out forcefully. "Estelle would never-"

At the merest mention of her sister, Maria's eyes lled with tears.

"Estelle would trust me to keep her baby girl safe."

Maria turned to Thomas with tears owing freely down her cheeks.

"I'll do it, for Estelle and for little Rose. I'd do it a thousand times over if it meant we kept this precious girl alive to fulll the great things she is destined for. Estelle always told me over the phone that she felt her baby was special. I won't disrespect her memory by not doing the best that I can to take care of Rose."

"The turning process for all humans is painful. That's why I never turned Estelle. Some don't even survive the change," Thomas spoke furiously. "You're risking your life. What would your sister say? She would never want you to sacrice yourself."

"I'm made of stronger stuff than Estelle was. She was always the more fragile one between the two of us. I'll survive." But the way Maria's voice shook made it clear even she had doubts. She took a deep breath and kept speaking. "Once...once you and our Alpha have gotten everything under control, we will return."