

## Chapter 6: The Alpha Leaves

"Sometimes the heart sees what is invisible to the eye." – H. Jackson Brown, Jr.

As the weeks passed, Rose began assimilating herself into the pack. Things were ne for the most part. She had made friends with one of the warrior-in-training werewolves named Lana. Lana took her around, showed her the ropes and pretty much explained the hierarchy. Xavier's younger brother, Anthony (or Tony as everyone liked to call him) took over as Beta and Rose's father had retired to join the Council of elders.

Secretly, her father had conded to Rose that he was happy to nally get a break and now he would be able to spend quality time with her. Which he did. Her father would take her around the pack territory, explaining the signicance of each part. Certain areas were more fertile than others and had potential for farming. There was a creek which was a prime habitat for unique aquatic life. Rose knew her father was teaching her the lay of the land , still in hopes she would become the future Luna.

However, he didn't see what Rose saw. Xavier was not interested in her. At least not ion any romantic sense. Now that she had been able to live with the pack and attend high school with the pack, the epic love story of Xavier and Alyssa was also revealed. Alyssa was the daughter of the Alpha from a neighboring pack. They attended high school together and fell in love. High school sweethearts, Rose had thought to herself bitterly. It had been exactly what she had always wanted for herself. She was a hopeless romantic. Sometimes, during classes, she would think on the what ifs of it all. What if no one had tried to abduct her as a baby? Maybe Xavier and her would have grown up together, falling in love organically because both already knew they were fated to be together.

However, that's not how things worked out. He loved someone else. And Alyssa wasn't a bad person once you got to know her. It was actually kind of hard to hate her, Rose had to admit. Xavier usually spent the night at her place or she stayed with him. They were almost inseparable. Whenever she came to stay with their pack, she brought goodies for the pups. She would even volunteer to help with the local town's orphanage. To add insult to injury, Alyssa was also gorgeous too with curves in all the right places. Rose sometimes watched her come and go, the Alpha's hands possessively around her waist or even lingering in the back pocket of her jeans. The wistful thoughts of 'what could have been' seemed to run through Rose's mind endlessly but she bore Alyssa no ill will. No one could control who they loved. Xavier didn't love Rose and in all honesty, Rose didn't love him. It was just the thought of the opportunity lost to love him that made her wistful.

Rose would be lying if she didn't admit that she was a little relieved that in a few more weeks, Xavier was going away to complete his studies abroad sent by his University. Apparently, Alyssa was going with him. He was enrolled fulltime for a bachelors degree and part of the accelerated program was to spend a year in Europe. He was excited and Rose was relieved. Anthony and her father would be in charge during his absence.

It was on the eve of his departure, when the whole pack was throwing him a farewell party that Xavier took Rose aside, onto the back lawn of the Alpha residence.

"How're you doing Rose? Do you like it here?" he inquired, meeting her eyes. He had been covertly keeping an eye on her. Like it or not, his mother was right. She was his responsibility because she was a member of the pack. Never mind the fact that when he would sneak glances at her, he couldn't help but think how cute her smile was or that the color of her dark blue eyes was unique.

Rose shrugged, walking over to the swing set and sitting on one of the metal swings that Xavier's father had probably set up in the backyard for his kids to play on. There was also a metal slide attached to the swing set that Rose pretended to be interested in looking at. She could think better when she didn't have to stare into those eyes which looked the deep brown of a forest after it had rained.

"My classes are going all right. I was in the advanced program at my previous high school. They have something similar to that here. I'll get college credits for the classes I complete during my senior year, which is starting soon. Everyone in the pack is really nice." Rose spoke carefully, keeping her eyes averted and wondering what Xavier wanted. He had spent a better part of these past months completely ignoring her. Why was he suddenly so interested in speaking to her tonight? Fear gripped her heart at a startling prospect and she suddenly looked up at him sharply. "Do you...do you want me to leave?" she asked warily.

"No Rose, I don't want you to leave." Xavier assured softly. "I just wanted to make sure you're OK. Listen Rose-" he expelled a breath before plowing forward. "- we still don't know whoever it is that's been planning to harm you ever since you were a pup...a baby... whatever half-werewolf infants are called." He ended lamely.

Rose continued to look up at him as he came to stand in front of her. Her blue eyes seemed to be pulling him closer. Out of some possessive instinct Xavier couldn't control, he bent down, clasping her hands in his but quickly let go as if her hands had burned him. He had felt a searing jolt rock his whole being at the merest touch. Rose had felt it too and she wasn't about to gloss it over.

"What was that?" She squeaked out confused.

"No....it....nothing. Rose it was nothing." Xavier stated more rmly than he felt.

"No, I know you felt it too Xavier." Rose stood up suddenly, stubbornly refusing to ignore the electric sparks that had erupted.

"That's Alpha Xavier to you!" he growled menacingly. For some reason , his name on her tongue seemed to send a thrill down his spine and a warm feeling erupted in the pit of his stomach. This was not good. This was the mate pull. This is why he had been avoiding her. Her proximity was making it stronger. He couldn't leave this place fast enough. Hopefully, by the time he came back and was ready to name his Luna, the bond would have weakened enough.

Rose didn't cower back at Xavier's inhumane growl. Instead, she stood her ground but meekly nodded. Who was she to call him by his rst name anyway? It's not like they were friends. But he didn't have to be so mean.

"Alpha Xavier." Rose clipped out stonily. "I'm sorry to have disturbed you and brought you out here only to end up yelling at you." She said pointedly, bringing home the point that it was he who had pulled her into the back lawn to talk.

If Xavier hadn't been so agitated by their touch, he would have laughed at how eciently she brought her point home. However, the way she was standing there, so close to him, was making the pull of the mate bond stronger and putting him in a sour mood.

"Look." He said running an agitated hand through his black hair. "I just want you to be careful while I'm not here. Your father has been given an additional charge of Alpha regent while I'm away. My brother will also make sure no one tries to target you. You're in good hands but keep your guard up."

Rose nodded, swallowing the lump in her throat. "Thank you Alpha." She spoke, not meeting his eyes.

"You're part of my pack, I have a responsibility to make sure you stay safe. Just keep your head down and keep that—" he pointed towards the mark on her upper arm. It was blatantly visible because she was wearing a tank top. "—covered up. Especially when you aren't on pack territory." He ended.

Rose just nodded again, kicking a small stone with her sneaker. She didn't want to reply. She didn't want to speak to him anymore. There was a dull ache in her chest at the nality of his words. He was leaving tomorrow. Why was it affecting her in such a way?

For his part, Xavier suddenly felt bad about lashing out at her. He hadn't come out here to upset her. He had come out here to speak with her and hopefully make sure she kept herself safe. Now that he was leaving, he found himself realizing he would miss her proximity. They couldn't be mates but maybe they could be friends eventually?

"I'll see you around." Xavier nally said with a small grin. "Come on Princess, the least you could do is give me one of your beautiful smiles before I leave for an entire year. One for the road?"

Rose looked up startled. He thought her smile was beautiful? Unbidden, a small smile broke on her face as per his request. It really wasn't that hard when she stared into those deep brown eyes and looked at his grinning face which made his dimples prominent.

Starting to walk backward, he gave her a mock salute before nally turning to walk back to the party. Rose watched him leave before turning to look up at the full moon. They said mates were a gift from the moon Goddess. What had she done wrong for everything to mess up so royally for her when it came to her own mate?