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# **WOLF'S BANE**

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**KELLEY ARMSTRONG**



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## CHAPTER ONE

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Kate

I'm crouched in a thicket, listening to the drawn-out howl of a wolf, blood calling to blood.

He's coming for me already? How is that even possible? I only dove into this hiding spot a few minutes ago. Maybe I misheard a dog from a neighboring farm.

I peer through the thick brush. The moon slides from behind a cloud and for a heartbeat, I see forest, acres of empty forest. Then darkness again. I stare into the night as I listen. The smell of spring-damp earth floats past on a sharp breeze. At a soft thump, I freeze, ears straining. Undergrowth crashes as a rabbit darts for cover. Then the forest falls silent again.

Okay, it really was just a neighbor's—

Another howl slices through the silence, raising every hair on my body. Even as it dies away, I feel it strumming through the air.

Unmistakably wolf.

Unmistakably him.

So stop listening and *do* something.

I swallow hard and concentrate, fingers digging into dirt. It's too late. He'll be here any second and—

*Focus. Just focus.*

I hunker down and slow my breathing. I might have time. I was careful choosing my spot, climbing through trees and dropping into my thicket so I didn't leave a trail for him to follow.

Paws thump over hard earth.

I squeeze my eyes shut, trying to focus and ignore the fact that those thumps grow louder with each slam of my heart.

He only knows the general direction of where to find me. He's coming from upwind. He won't smell me. I still have a chance. He'll run past, and then I'll have time.

I just need time.

I flatten onto my stomach, swathed in darkness and shadow. The footfalls slow to the soft pad of sure steps. I stop breathing. He's walking straight toward my hiding spot, as if I'm doing jumping jacks in the moonlight.

I hold my breath and hold my body too, as still as can be. He's still upwind and can't smell me. He doesn't actually know where—

A pale muzzle pushes into the thicket. Jaws open, sharp teeth behind inch-long fangs. Then eyes appear, a blue as bright as my own. My brother tilts his head, the question as clear as spoken words.

*What's taking you so long, Kate?*

I snarl. Logan withdraws with a snort and plunks down to wait. I growl, telling him to move farther away. He lifts his furry ass and transplants it exactly six inches.

Ever since we were kids, we've competed to see who can shift faster. The short answer is: Logan. Oh hell, the *only* answer is: Logan. I swear, he gets faster every year.

Tonight, I'd barely undressed before he was in wolf form.

I'd hoped to still Change quickly and then slip out and pretend I'd been just hanging around, waiting. That would work a lot better if he hadn't somehow known exactly where to find me, strolling over like there was a neon arrow flashing over my thicket.

Damn him.

I grumble for a few moment. Then I resume position, close my eyes and imagine sluicing through the long grass. Feeling the wind cut through my fur. Hearing every tiny creature shriek and scamper out of my path. Listening to the drum roll of my brother's paws as he races behind me, both of us drunk on exhilaration and adrenaline . . .

My skin ripples. Muscles shift, stretching and bunching as my skin prickles, fur sprouting.

I close my eyes, position my hands and feet and lower my head. When the first jolt of agony hits, it's as if this has never happened before, and I'm caught off guard, stifling a scream.

*This too shall pass.*

It's like getting a tooth drilled. Well, I presume it's like that because when I get a filling or a booster shot and the doctor says, "This is going to hurt," I almost laugh. A needle piercing my skin? Try having your entire body ripped apart and put back together twice a month.

What I mean is that the pain, however severe, is temporary. You grit your teeth, tell yourself this too shall pass.

It does. Waves of agony nearly knock me out, and then I'm standing on four legs, panting and shaking, my yellow fur gleaming in the moonlight.

Yes, I'm a yellow wolf. A werewolf's fur is the same

color as our hair, which for me means that if I'm spotted, I'll be mistaken for a dog. Don't ask me how I know that. All-caps rule number one: DO NOT BE SEEN. But, yeah, it happens, for some more than others, and it's probably a good thing I'm blessed with golden retriever fur.

When a distant owl shrieks, my ears swivel to follow the sound. Most werewolves have excellent hearing in human form, and even better hearing as wolves. Logan and I hear just as well in both forms. We're . . . a little different.

There are only a few dozen werewolves in North America and almost all inherited the genes from their dads—it passes through the male line. It can also be transmitted through bites, but the survival rate for that is so low that there are only a few bitten werewolves . . . including both our parents.

So what happens when two bitten werewolves have kids? No one knew. When it comes to werewolves, statistics are nearly nonexistent. The human world doesn't know about supernaturals, so they're not exactly conducting studies. We could do it ourselves, but for us, survival is a whole lot more important than note-taking.

Growing up, I only wished for one thing, with every birthday candle, every four-leaf clover, every wishing-well coin. Make me a werewolf. I got my wish at the age of nine, a decade earlier than normal hereditary werewolves. As far as anyone knows, I'm one of two female werewolves in the world—mom being the other. I'm the first female hereditary werewolf *ever*. That's cool, but really, all I care about is that I got my wish: I am a werewolf.

When I step out of my thicket, Logan greets me with a welcoming snuffle. Seeing him, I don't know how anyone can mistake us for dogs. We look like wolves. We retain

our human mass, which makes him a huge wolf, ghost white in the darkness, sleek furred and muscular.

As he snuffles me, I twist away and then surprise-pounce, which would work much better with any werewolf who *wasn't* my twin. Logan anticipates the pounce and feints out of the way, then twists and leaps at me. I duck and race around him so fast I swear I hear his vertebrae crackle as he spins to keep an eye on me.

Then I launch myself at him. I'm airborne, and he's diving, hitting the ground in a roll, expecting me to fumble when my target vanishes. But I wasn't jumping at him—I was jumping over him. With one massive bound, I clear his back, hit the ground and keep running.

It takes Logan a moment to recover from the fake-out. I bear down, my ears flat, muzzle slicing through the wind as the *thump-thump* of my brother's paws gallop behind me. Scents whip past. Damp earth and spring bluebells and the tantalizing musk of a distant deer. I don't slow. We can hunt later. Right now, I want to run, to feel the ground beneath my paws, the wind in my fur, my brother at my back.

The last is as important as the rest. Maybe more important now than ever. When I was little, Logan felt as integral to my life as a limb. Now, at sixteen, we've drifted, and I no longer feel whole. Yet whatever our problems, we shed them with our human forms. Out here, the rest of the world falls away, and feels as it always has, and I am happy.

Ahead, the forest thickens. That'll slow me down, but it also adds the challenge of an obstacle course. I leap over a dead tree and weave through thick brush while trying to gauge whether Logan is far enough back for me to hide and pounce.

I slit my eyes and swivel my ears to listen. Logan had to slow down in the forest, and I grin at that. I might have a slight advantage in speed, but I have an even greater one in agility, his recent growth spurt leaving him with a body he can't quite operate yet. Behind me, there's a thump and a yelp, as if he cut a corner too sharp and plowed into a tree.

I grin and nimbly swerve behind an outcropping of rock. Ahead, I see the perfect cover—the deadfall of a massive evergreen. I'll hunker behind it, and when Logan vaults over, I'll tackle him.

Getting up speed for my own leap, I'm running full out when a whistle sounds, cutting through the quiet evening and sending me skidding to a stop.

The whistle comes again. It's the Alpha—who also happens to be our mom. If she's calling us in, something's happened. Something important enough to interrupt our run.

I throw back my head and howl. There's a question in that, and Mom returns two quick whistle bursts. No, Stonehaven isn't on fire or under attack by rogue wolves—she just needs to talk to us.

A sigh ripples behind me, and I twist to toss Logan a sympathetic snort. We exchange a mournful look and separate to Change back.

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## CHAPTER TWO

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Kate

By the time I leave my thicket, Logan is already in human form, waiting for me. We were late getting back from our last day of school, and he's still wearing his uniform. Mom bought it new this term, and the pant legs already show a half inch of sock while the polo shirt strains over his shoulders and biceps. A year ago, Logan and I could share clothing. Now he could share Dad's. Not that he does, of course—my brother is decidedly more fashion conscious than our father.

As for me, I inherited Mom's build, which means I didn't wear a bra until I was fifteen, and I still need a belt to hold my jeans up because my hips sure as hell aren't doing the job. I also inherited her height. I've nearly caught up to her five-ten, and I'm hoping to pass it.

Strolling across the lawn, I smile when the house comes into view. As the name suggests, Stonehaven is made of stone, a mansion surrounded by acres of forest, the perfect home for werewolves. The Danvers have always lived here, and they've always been werewolves.



I'm a Danvers by name—Jeremy Danvers having raised Dad after he was bitten as a kid.

The back door clicks, and there's a canine yip as our dog, Atalanta, comes running. We usually take her on our runs, but she'd been sleeping after a jog with Mom. As she races toward me, I break into a run. Logan bears down, his footsteps thudding.

"Give it up," I call back. "You might be able to shift faster than me, Lo, but you can't run faster."

And, of course, as I say that, I stumble. I recover, but not before Logan yanks on the back of my T-shirt.

"Cheat!" I call.

"Cheating is party A starting a race without informing party B."

"Blah-blah-blah."

From the back door, Mom smiles as she leans against the doorframe to watch. She hasn't failed to notice the growing gulf between Logan and me. I tell myself this too shall pass, but it still hurts. Hurts me. Worries Mom. Yet the gulf isn't so wide that we can't still reach over it, racing across the yard like kids again.

Mom wears blue jeans, sneakers and an oversized plaid shirt with the sleeves rolled up. She's tugged her white-blond hair into a high ponytail. From across the yard, she could be mistaken for a teenager. Up close, you'd guess she was in her late thirties. She's actually fifty-one. Werewolves age slowly. Dad's six years older, and girls at my school still check him out, which is really gross. A moment later, he appears beside Mom, in his usual outfit: worn jeans, a plain white T-shirt, old sneakers, and a few days of beard scruff.

I skid to a stop, hand reaching to tag the doorframe. "Home!"

“Really, Kate?” Logan says. “How old are we? Five?”

“I wasn’t racing myself there.”

“I was humoring you.”

“Yeah, yeah. Good excuse.” I swat his shoulder as he walks past, and he tosses me a very Logan smile, his lips barely moving but his eyes twinkling.

“I’m glad to see you both in good moods,” Mom says as she and Dad back into the house, Atalanta tumbling after them.

I slow and eye her. “Because whatever you have to say is totally going to ruin it?”

“I hope not.”

I slide a look Dad’s way. His expression is studiously neutral.

“Shit,” I mutter.

“Language, Kate,” Dad says.

I flip him the finger. He only grins. Growing up, I heard those two words a lot from Mom. I wasn’t the only one relieved when she finally stopped bothering. If Mom doesn’t call me on my language, Dad no longer has to watch his. Let’s just say I come by my profanity-propensity honestly.

We head into the study, site of all family conferences. It’s my favorite room in the house. Pretty sure it’s everyone’s favorite—it’s certainly where we usually hang out, despite the number of options, and I think that’s why it *is* my favorite. It’s where my family will be, and where I want to be, even if I’m just studying on the floor while Mom or Dad or Jeremy reads, not a word exchanged. I’m a werewolf, and this is my Pack, and I like having them around, however seriously uncool that might be.

Speaking of reading, that’s what Jeremy’s doing.

Without looking up from his novel, he lifts a hand in greeting. I high-five it. Logan just says, “Hey, Jer.”

Technically, Jeremy is our grandfather since he foster-raised Dad. We never called him that or thought of him like that. He’s just Jeremy, as much a part of our family as Mom or Dad.

I sit on the other armchair. Logan and Dad take the sofa. Mom stands by the fireplace, which means this is a “serious family discussion.”

“Do you guys remember that youth conference I mentioned?” Mom says.

“You mean the bullet we dodged?” I say.

Mom came to us a couple months ago with this “cool new idea,” sponsored by the supernatural interracial council. A leadership conference for supernatural teens, where we were supposed to hold hands, sing *Kumbaya* around a campfire and come to a better understanding of one another. I’d rather start my summer facing down hell hounds.

I have total respect for the council. Mom’s the werewolf delegate, and I’m named after the witch leader—Paige Katherine Winterbourne. The part I like, though, is the idea of supernatural races banding together to kick ass as a unified front. I can totally get behind that. The touchy-feely togetherness side, though? Really not my thing. And this conference was clearly all about the touchy-feely.

Mom had wanted us to go as werewolf representatives. I’d been considering it, by which I mean awaiting divine intervention of the form of a thunderbolt that burned down the conference center. At the same time, those in charge of the conference—who were *not* on the actual

council— had debated whether they should allow werewolves.

Before they could make a decision, all the spots were miraculously taken. Yeah, among supernatural races, the only ones less welcome than werewolves are vampires. We're bloodthirsty monsters, don't you know, likely to slaughter you in your sleep if we get a case of midnight munchies.

Bullet dodged, like I said.

That's when I realize there's only one reason for Mom to be bringing this up now.

"Whoa," I say. "Wait, no. Don't tell me—"

"Two spots opened up."

"But they don't want us, remember?"

"They'd changed their mind about that, remember?"

"They changed it in the same breath as saying 'whoops, we're full,'" I say. "But now two kids canceled and the council found out, right? As sponsors, they're insisting we be allowed to take those spots, despite the fact the conference staff doesn't want us there."

"All the more reason for you to go. Prove them wrong."

Easy for Mom to say. She's not the one being asked to spend a week where she very clearly isn't wanted.

"I'm allergic to team-building exercises," I say. "Also crowds."

Dad snorts.

"Yeah," I say. "Wonder where I get that from. Maybe the guy who grumbled and stomped and snarled about going to New York last month to give a lecture . . . which he'd *agreed* to give."

"I agreed to a class of thirty," Dad says. "Not three hundred."

Logan's lips twitch in a smile. "Imagine if that got out. The most feared werewolf in the country can be laid low by the prospect of interacting with humans."

Dad twists fast, grabbing for Logan's arm. Logan dodges and swings to his feet. When Dad tries again, they end up locked together. Dad flexes, testing his hold, considering the possibility of still throwing Logan over his shoulder. He could do it, but not nearly as easily—or gracefully—as he once could.

"Shit," Dad murmurs.

"Yes," Jeremy says, gaze still on his book. "One day soon, Clay, you're going to try that and find *yourself* flying onto the sofa. Your son is growing up fast."

"Nah," I say. "Dad's just growing old fast."

Dad spins on me.

I stay on the chair, lounging back. "Try it, old man."

Dad takes one slow step toward me, his eyes glittering. I grin, ready for the attack.

"Do I need to kick you out of the room?" Mom says.

"Yes, Kate," Dad says as he stops short, "behave yourself."

"I'd *like* to be kicked out of the room," I say. "But I think she meant you."

"Never." Dad feints left, grabs Mom and drops back onto the sofa, plunking her on his lap. "Continue."

Mom only rolls her eyes before turning to me. "Yes, I suspect there will be team-building exercises, but I'm sure the camping part would compensate for that."

"They could provide an open bar," I mutter, "and it wouldn't compensate for team-building exercises."

"Good thing there's no open bar then. And the other kids are supernaturals your own age, which might be good."

A chance for new friends she means. I drifted from my friend group in the last couple of years, and I haven't replaced them. Mom might also be hinting about boys, since I broke up with my boyfriend recently. I definitely have no plans to replace *him*. First serious boyfriend, first serious romantic humiliation.

"I'm good," I say, sinking into my chair.

Logan looks at Mom. "Is there any reason we both need to go?"

I nearly bolt upright. Logan go without me? We don't do that. We're the Danvers twins.

Does Logan *want* to go without me?

Mom glances my way. "As your mother, Kate, I'd like you to attend the conference. As your Alpha, I will not insist on it. Sending one representative is enough. Remember, though, that if you choose to let Logan go alone, it tells the supernatural world which of my children aspires to a leadership role . . . and which does not."

I squirm at that. Logan and I aren't competing for Alpha-hood. We'd co-lead before we'd fight one another. Yet I *do* want to be Alpha someday. I just don't think it requires "youth leadership" conferences.

Mom's right, though. Logan going alone sent a message. The wrong message.

I glance at my brother.

"It's up to you," he says, his voice neutral.

I flinch. He's hoping I'll stay home. We aren't in middle school anymore, the inseparable Danvers twins. Back then, I'd been the popular one, kids trailing after me like I was the Pied Piper, even when I just wanted to hang out with my brother. I was the girl who said what she liked and did what she liked, fierce and fearless, confident in her cloak of rebel-cool.

Then we hit high school, and it felt like everyone changed except me. I was still that girl, and suddenly, it *wasn't* cool. It was just different. Weird.

Some kids embrace their uniqueness. I used to, but then . . . Stuff happened, and the last month at school has been hell, and I'm exhausted from pretending I don't give a shit.

Now I'm listening to that neutral tone of Logan's, and I know what it means. He's okay with me staying home. Perhaps more than okay. Maybe, just maybe, it'd be nice to go someplace where he doesn't need to deal with the baggage of being Kate Danvers's twin.

"Maybe it's better if Logan goes alone," I say carefully. "If they have a problem with werewolves, I might just make things worse."

He frowns at me. It's a genuine frown of genuine confusion, and I love him for that . . . and miss him a little extra.

"One werewolf might be easier to accept," I say.

"Are we supposed to make this easier for them?" Logan says. "Also, if there's only one, then they can say I'm the exception." He meets my eyes. "It would be better with us both there but if you really don't want to go with me . . ."

"I will."

The words come before I can stop myself. If Logan wants me along, then I'm there. Then I remember where "there" is. An interracial leadership camp. Where I will be an outsider, unwanted and unwelcome at a time in my life when I have never felt more of either.

I open my mouth to take it back, to pretend that I meant something else, but Mom's face lights up. Then Dad twists to glance at me, mouthing a private "thank

you,” with a wry smile that says he knows I don’t want to do this, and he appreciates me making the effort for Mom’s sake. It pleases her, and so it pleases him.

Shit.

I take a deep breath. “When do we leave?”

Mom and Dad exchange a look.

“First thing in the morning,” Mom says.

*“What?”*

“The actual conference started tonight. Your uncle Nick has business in Pittsburgh, so he’s offered to drive you. You’ll leave after breakfast.”



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## CHAPTER THREE

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### Logan

Kate and I are napping, curled up in the back of Nick's car. We drifted off leaning on our respective doors, but I wake to Kate against my shoulder, my arm around her, as if in sleep we find what we've lost.

I keep my eyes half-closed and pretend I'm a kid again, dozing in Mom's car, smelling leather seats and Kate's strawberry shampoo, listening to her soft snores underscored by the thump of Nick's classic rock. I linger there, watching the West Virginia state sign pass as Kate lifts her head, mumbling something that sounds like "Where are the pancakes?" She rubs her eyes, groans and flips over to her own side of the car.

I take out my cell phone to save myself from awkward silence.

Awkward silence with my sister. There'd been a time when I couldn't imagine such a thing.

"Your mom told you two about the conference cell phone rule?" Nick asks.

"Cell phone rule?" Kate growls.

"Thanks, Elena," Nick mutters. He glances at us through the mirror. "Your cell phones will be locked up at the conference. You get them back for twenty minutes each evening."

"What the hell?" Kate shoots upright, seatbelt snapping. "That's bullshit."

"Yep," Nick says. "Your mom may have used that exact word. But it's the rule, and she can't argue you two deserve an exception. So I'd suggest taking a few minutes to post your social media goodbyes."

Kate doesn't bother taking out her phone. After dumping her boyfriend, she wiped her social media accounts. My sister is known for her dramatic gestures, and if she's decided to play lone wolf for a while, I won't interfere. I just wish her social isolation didn't extend to me.

As I check my own messages, I see the advantages of my sister's choice. I have twenty Snapchat messages alone. Only half are from actual friends. Five are from girls I know by name alone. The first is a brunette I vaguely recognize, asking my opinion of her new bikini. At least she's wearing clothing. I get plenty of pics where they aren't.

I don't date. I don't have time. That's my excuse, and I know it's an excuse because it's not as if the girls who sext me are looking for a long-term relationship. Somehow, that's worse. They just want to be the one who lassos the class unicorn. Even those who seem interested in more than a hook-up don't chase me because they like me. They just like what they see.

I delete all those messages unseen. Then up pops one that's equally unwelcome.

Hey, Lo. Any chance of setting up that ‘accidental encounter’ with Kate? LMK.

Brandon. Kate’s ex.

He’s calling me Lo to be chummy, knowing only Kate uses that, but the bigger problem is him asking me to play mediator. I don’t know why Kate dumped Brandon. It’s none of my business, and I don’t appreciate him playing on our sorta-friendship to win her back. Every time he does, I get a little more annoyed with my sister.

I text Brandon a variation on the “family stuff, going offline” story. Nick takes an exit ramp and within minutes we’re rumbling along a dirt road into the forest. A few miles later Nick slows the car and squints at a sign with lettering worn and weathered to illegibility.

“Please don’t tell me *that’s* the camp,” Kate says.

We follow her finger to the forest. It’s *all* forest here, trees looming over the narrow dirt road. I shift and squint until I can make out a ramshackle cottage that looks as if a thunderstorm would flatten it.

“Yep, this is the place,” Nick says, putting the car in Park.

“What?” Kate squawks. “Hell, no. If you think for one second—” She catches Nick’s smile and scowls. “Ha-ha.”

“I was told to park here and call. The camp must be nearby but . . .” He scans the forest. “Maybe that’s not the right signpost.”

“Call anyway,” Kate says as she opens her door. “I need to stretch my legs, and I want to check out that cabin.”

“The one you just complained about?” Nick says.

“I’d complain if I had to sleep in it. Exploring it is a whole other thing.”

She climbs out, and I reach for my door handle,

waiting for the inevitable, “Come on, Lo.” Instead, she jogs into the forest without a backward glance.

I used to follow. She'd get in her moods, and I'd go after her, standing between Kate and the world—interpreter, mediator, buffer. But a moat stretches between us these days, and I can't seem to build a bridge. I'm not even sure I try.

That isn't like me at all. I'm the calm one, the logical one, the easygoing one. Or I used to be. These days, there's the me I used to be, the me I'm becoming, and the me that others see, and none of them are who I *want* to be, and I'm not even sure who *that* is.

As Nick places his call, I get out and inhale the sharp tang of pine. I roll my shoulders, working out the kinks. I sniff again, and my legs ache to run, even in human form. Just run into the forest and forget what I'm supposed to be doing here. Which also isn't like me at all. I'm nothing if not responsible. Boring, responsible Logan Danvers.

Maybe that's why Kate seems to prefer her own company these days.

A click as Nick pops open the trunk. As we walk to the back, he says, “The head counselor is meeting us here and walking you over.”

I reach in for my bag, but he stops me, glancing at where Kate disappeared.

“You guys okay?” he asks.

I shrug. “She's not happy about being here, which means I need to listen to her bitch about it for the next forty-eight hours. Situation normal these days.”

Nick frowns, and he shoots me this look that makes me feel like I'm five, caught doing something I shouldn't. Except when I *was* five, I never did anything I shouldn't, not unless Kate talked me into it.

“Your sister has been having a difficult time lately,” Nick says. “Maybe you could be a little more understanding?”

I replay my words and wince as I realize I sounded like an asshole.

Part of me wants to admit he’s right . . . and part of me wants to snap back that she’s not the only one having a “difficult time,” and maybe *she* could be more understanding. Which tips me right into asshole-hood again.

Before I can speak, my phone buzzes. It’s Brandon, asking if he can come over, my “going offline” message having sailed right over his head.

“That’s not Kate’s Brandon, is it?” Nick says, unable to miss the message on my screen.

“Yeah.” I thumb the text away.

“You two are still hanging out after what he did to your sister?”

“What?”

“Mr. Sorrentino?” a woman’s voice trills.

Nick turns, and the woman stops with a little “Oh.” The woman is maybe thirty, wearing shorts, a Team Half-Demon T-shirt and a goofy smile as she stares at Nick.

Nick shakes the young woman’s hand and says, “Nick, please,” and then waits. The woman just keeps ogling.

“Logan Danvers,” I say.

She turns then, finally noticing me, and her smile—thankfully—changes to one of regular greeting.

“Tricia MacNab,” she says.

“Team Half-Demon, I see.” Nick gives her an easy grin. There’s zero flirtation in it, but she still perks up.

“It’s for orientation. All the kids and counselors get one as a fun way to introduce ourselves and our types.

And then after that, the shirts go away as we work on forgetting our differences.”

“Forgetting them after you establish them?” I murmur, low enough that only Nick hears, and his lips quirk in a smile. Louder, I say, “I understand that you only found out we were coming this morning, so I know you won’t have Team Werewolf shirts.”

*Please tell me you don't have Team Werewolf shirts.*

Her smile quivers. Then she says with a nervous laugh, “No, we don’t. But that’s why I came to meet you here. We’d like . . . At least at first . . . I think it’s best if we don’t announce what you and your sister are.”

I frown. “But we’re here as the werewolf delegates.”

“To help prove we’re not all the big bad wolf,” Nick says.

Tricia giggles, a little too high-pitched. “Oh, I know you aren’t. But we’re concerned it’s a liability issue when we couldn’t warn—I mean, *tell*—parents that there would be werewolves. You two will be our mystery campers as an exercise to prove labels don’t matter. Once everyone’s comfortable with you, we’ll have the big reveal.”

This makes no sense. If it’s a liability issue—which is really insulting—then revealing it later might only make that worse. Hiding *everyone’s* type would be the true exercise in breaking down barriers.

“Isn’t someone going to figure it out?” I say. “This is a leadership conference. The other campers will know a thing or two about supernatural politics. Introduce them to twins named Kate and Logan, race unknown, and someone is bound to realize who we are.”

Tricia waves off my logic with, “These are teens. They won’t know werewolf politics. Hardly any *adult* supernaturals do.”

Nick and I exchange a look.

“Did Paige approve this?” Nick asks.

Tricia stammers a non-answer about Paige not being directly involved in the day-to-day running of the camp. The day that Paige Winterbourne isn’t directly involved in something is the day my sister voluntarily wears a Team Werewolf shirt.

According to Mom, Paige is coming tomorrow. Until then, I’ll fend off Kate’s outrage by pointing out the alternative—that we’d need to design our own Team Werewolf shirts, probably with glitter pens.

As Nick talks to Tricia, I offer to fetch Kate, giving me a chance to warn her. Nick nods, and I take off, jogging toward the dilapidated cabin. There’s no driveway leading from the road. No path either as I have to cut through thick bush.

After meeting Tricia, my hopes for this conference might be in free fall, but at least we get this forest—endless and empty wilderness, with the Appalachians rising in the distance. Kate and I will have a blast here, exploring new terrain, Changing and running and hunting. Maybe this is what we need, a chance for the two of us to hang out together doing something we both love.

I remember what Nick said about Brandon. Did Kate talk to Nick about the breakup?

No, he must be just taking her side, presuming Brandon did something wrong. If Brandon hurt Kate, she’d tell me. I’d notice, too, right? We’re twins. We can barely stub a toe without the other feeling it. If Kate was hurting . . .

If Kate was hurting, she’d withdraw. She’d go quiet and keep to herself, which is exactly what she’s been—

The crackle of brush stops me midthought. I glance

up, expecting to see Kate. Instead, I'm staring at a stranger, a guy who looks like a high-school senior. Roughly my height and my build, athletic and lean muscled. Dark skin. Hair styled in short locs.

He doesn't see me. He's poised in the forest, staring straight ahead, and his profile prods a ping of recognition, as if I know him. Except I don't.

I inhale deeply, but he's downwind, and the more I look at him, the more certain I am that I've never seen him before. It's just a weird sense of *déjà vu*.

That crackle I heard was the guy stepping from the forest's edge. Then he saw my sister and withdrew. Now he's watching her.

Kate doesn't notice him. She's crouched looking at something with her back to the newcomer.

He stands there, staring at Kate. That's nothing new. In the last few years, Kate has been approached by a half-dozen modeling scouts. She's tall and slender with blue eyes and long blond hair, the kind of girl who gets attention even as her old T-shirts, faded jeans and ratty sneakers insist she doesn't want it.

Except the look this guy's giving her is different. It's surprise and something like disbelief. I don't know what this look means, but my hackles rise and a growl tickles my throat. He should say something. Let her know he's there. You don't hide in the shadows, watching a girl who's alone in the forest.

I ease back and creep up behind him. I lose sight of the guy in the thick forest, but I know exactly where he is. I listen, in case he decides to retreat, but the forest stays silent.

As I draw near the spot, I pause and take a deep breath. Then I realize my fists are clenched and give my



hands a shake. None of that. I'm just here to show him what it's like to have a stranger sneak up on you.

I pause, preparing. Then I step through with, "What the hell do you think you're—?"

I stop.

The guy is gone.