

Chapter 7: Time Jump

"Absence is to love what wind is to re; it extinguishes the small, it enkindles the great." – Roger de Rabutin

Approximately one and a half year later...

Rose walked out of her academic counselor's office during her freshmen year of the local University close to pack territory. She would be starting her second semester soon and had just finalized her next set of classes. Thanks to the college level classes she had taken during senior year and now the accelerated program they offered, she would be graduating with a bachelor's within three years instead of 4. She was a pre-med student and for her, getting straight A's was her topmost priority.

Maybe it was because of what happened with her mother, or maybe it was because she felt like she wanted to do something good for the people of her pack who would lay down their lives to protect her, but Rose had decided to become a doctor and take over once her pack's doctor retired. Dr. Danvers was getting on in years and had mentioned more than once that he was ready to hang up his stethoscope. However, he also knew that their pack would not have anyone else to take his place. This is where Rose decided to rise to the occasion.

Still folding up her papers, preoccupied with thoughts of the scholarships her academic advisor had recommended her for, she bumped into someone. Startled, she opened her mouth to say sorry for not paying attention and looked up and saw a very familiar face with startling clear blue eyes and sandy blonde hair.

"Jake?" Rose asked with a gasp of surprise. What was he doing here? If possible, he'd gotten cuter than before.

"R...Rose?" Jake stuttered out disbelievingly. "Is that you?" He gave her a once over and his smile slowly broke out into a grin. "Rose!" he exclaimed enthusiastically, leaning in to give her a big hug. He unconsciously buried his nose into the crook of her neck, inhaling her scent. If Rose hadn't been giddy from the hug her longtime crush had just given her, she would have thought it highly personal of him. As it was, Rose did stiffen in his arms when she realized what he was doing. "Sorry." He replied sheepishly, pulling back. He scratched his head seemingly confused. "It's just that you...you smell different." He nally ended lamely.

"I smell different?" Rose teased. "Wow that's a first Jake. Why don't you just say it? You don't recognize me, do you? Erica didn't recognize me either when we met up just before she went off to college in London."

Rose beamed with pride. Her friend had been able to get herself out of the vicious circle of her family and got admitted into college. Rose had remained present through skype and WhatsApp to help Erica with her class work. After a lot of hard work on Erica's part and a lot of encouragement from Rose, Erica had gotten a full ride to a University in London to pursue her art degree in photography.

"Well ...you look different too." Jake said appreciatively giving her another once over.

Rose blushed, doing a little happy dance internally. She could tell he liked what he saw. An entire year of working out and training with the Crimson Phoenix pack plus the fact that her werewolf genes would be emerging soon, in another 8 months or so to be precise, meant that nature had nally given her the curves she'd always wanted. Rose had always been pretty but now the angles of her face were more prominent and her eyes had naturally elongated as a sign of her approaching turn.

Jake took a step back as if suddenly startled by something. Then leaning into her personal bubble so closely that Rose tamped down on the instinct to step back, he murmured ever so softly "You're a werewolf."

Rose's beautiful almond shaped eyes widened in surprise. How did he know? Jake let out a quiet triumphant huff of laughter. She looked around at the people walking by the academic bloc building, afraid someone had heard him. The campus was filled with werewolves from other packs as well but there were humans who also attended.

"How come I didn't sense it before?" Jake queried, confused. "Did you have some sort of spell on you or—"

"Shhh." Rose interrupted him sharply. She looked around, afraid again of being overheard. "Can we...can we talk about this someplace private?" she nally asked quietly.

Jake gave her a devilish grin with a mischievous glint in his eye. "You want to come to my apartment? It's right on the edge of campus."

Rose had a feeling she shouldn't agree but a quarter of an hour later, she found herself sitting in Jake's apartment. Nestled into his dark brown, comfy sofa, she leaned back into the cushion's clutching a glass bottle of peach malt in her hands.

"You're a werewolf?" Rose inquired as Joseph sat down on the matching sofa chair, opposite to her.

"My parents and I well...we're lone wolves. We don't belong to any pack." Jake explained. "I had my first turn at 16, like most do. Why couldn't I sense you back in high school?"

"I...I'm part wolf." Rose spoke after clearing her throat mid-sentence. Xavier's words from long ago entered her brain.

Be on your guard.

But telling him she was part wolf didn't really compromise the secret, did it? Could Jake be trusted? He was a friend from back home...well not a friend. They had never really been friends. More like Rose had had a huge crush on him while Jake would give her a kind 'what's up?' and ask her for help with assignments from the classes they had together.

"Ahhh." Jake said, leaning back to stare amusingly. "That explains it. So you don't turn until what...18?"

Rose nodded, tipping her head back and exposing her neck, she took a sip of the bottle of peach malt. Jake's hot gaze rested on Rose's exposed neck. Bringing the bottle down, she looked at him to see him staring a little hungrily at the crook of her neck where wolves usually marked their mates. He looked away quickly when she caught him staring.

"That means you'll be finding your mate soon too." Jake added airily. "The closer you get to your turn, the more you'll feel the mate pull. If your mate is complete wolf, then he'll be able to tell you're his mate. Do you know who your mate is?" he inquired a little interestedly.

Rose gave a nonchalant shrug. For now, it was better to keep things a secret. "Not yet. But I'm not too worried about it." She commented evasively. "So." Rose tried changing topics.

"What are you doing all the way here? I thought you'd be at an Ivy League School somewhere. You were always so smart."

Jake scoffed. "I was never the smart one between the two of us. Honestly, I thought you'd be the one attending Harvard or Yale." Jake leaned forward, resting his elbows on his muscular thighs. "I did community college for a semester before transferring here to attend the upcoming spring semester. I basically came down here early to get settled in and meet with my academic counselor. Sign up for classes and all that. It was one of the few colleges that actually accepted my application, I got in on the minority quota. Guess without you to help me, my grades took a turn for the worst." he teased.

"I didn't know they have a box you can tick for werewolf on their application." Rose joked.

"They do if you know the right people to ask. It's not the same application that's accessible online in .pdf format." Jake said with a smile playing across his face. "My mom used to be part of one of the nearby packs before breaking from it to join my dad. She knew this college catered to werewolves."

"Which pack?" Rose inquired curiously.

"The Crimson Phoenix pack." Jake replied. "She's the sister of the previous Alpha. He died awhile ago. Mom doesn't really like to talk about it much. It's like she's hiding some big secret from me. We attended the funeral and his son, Alpha Xavier visited us one time about a year and a half ago. He said he was in town on some social business. It was around the time you..." Jake faltered as realization dawned on him.

Rose gave Jake a guilty smile. "My father is...or rather was the beta of the Crimson Phoenix pack. They came to get me to bring me home. I had been living with my mother's sister."

Jake nodded in understanding. "They probably thought you'd assimilate better with humans since half-human werewolves don't usually develop until it's almost time for them to turn." He gave Rose an almost predatory look. "And you've developed all right." He ended wistfully.

Rose cleared her throat a little uncomfortably. She crossed her long lithe legs, toned from a year of running through the woods with the werewolves, striving to keep up. Day by day, her speed was getting better. Her eyesight was getting better too and her hair was starting to grow faster. Even her nails grew faster now. It was like everything inside of her was accelerating. Cuts that would usually take weeks to fully heal would completely disappear within a matter of days, leaving no scar behind.

"Well...it was nice to see you Jake." Rose stood to leave. "I need to get back home but I'll see you around."

"Yeah, once the new semester starts, I hope to see you around on campus. Maybe we could meet sooner though? I mean...If you're free this weekend, would you want to go into town with me and grab a bite to eat?" he asked casually.

It was on the tip of Rose's tongue to say no because that's what everyone expected of her. She was supposed to go straight to college and come straight back home. Each time she left pack territory, she was endangering herself. But this time, she checked the impulse. It was time to live a little.

"Sure." She said good naturedly.

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Xavier walked into his hometown, hand-in-hand with Alyssa. Her blonde hair tickled his neck as she rested her head against his shoulder, burrowing deeper into him to stay warm.

The cold January air caused their breath to be visibly seen as they walked around taking in how much had changed since they'd been gone. Xavier had spent his year studying abroad and then spent an extra six months taking classes online while acting as a representative of the four aligned packs within this district. They had made serious headway in forming alliances abroad and increasing the collective strength of the pack.

Finally, after spending Christmas in England with one of the newly aligned packs, the two lovers had made their way home. Excited to get back to his Alpha duties along with completing college, Xavier had wanted to stop in at his favorite diner for dinner before throwing himself back into his duties. He knew his mother would be happy to see him. She had missed him a lot. She was always alluding to Rose still being around which could get annoying. Xavier would always quickly change the subject not wanting to discuss her. Honestly, he could care less about Rose. But still...for some reason, sometimes he closed his eyes and saw those endearing stormy blue eyes of hers. He could still remember like it was yesterday her idealistic words..

I want to fall in love.

Xavier couldn't help but wonder if she had changed since the last time he saw her? Was she still so idyllic, caught up in her own dream world? Or had she grown up and become more practical, nally a woman? Maybe it was because she was now part of his pack, but Xavier did feel slightly protective of her. He wanted her to remain untouched, unharmed and hoped to find her as unwavering in her ideals today as he had found her back then.

Shaking the thought of Rose out of his mind, Xavier entered the downtown diner he'd been wanting to eat his favorite cheeseburger from. But instantly, all thoughts of cheeseburgers fled his mind as an entirely new scent overtook his senses. It assailed him, battling against his reason and overwhelming him completely.