

Claire

I bolt upright in my bed, noticing how sore and stiff I am. My hand flies to my throat, still feeling the cold steel of the knife as Ivy sliced my throat open. Thankfully, it's healed.

My body is so sore, more sore than it's been every other day. But every day I have less and less time to heal from the battle the day before, so every day I've been waking up more sore.

I move to the bathroom, realizing that my room is not in the right position. I turn, looking around. Did I drag myself back to my old room? Why would I do that?

My breath catches in my throat. Tereshan died on the battlefield yesterday and he wasn't the only one. So many died, including....including me, I thought.

I walk into the bathroom, ducking as I go in. I walk to the shower. I don't remember showering last night before I fell into bed.

How am I alive? Can Alpha genes heal a knife wound to the throat? I wouldn't have thought so, but honestly, Alpha genes are amazing. I'm constantly surprised at what I can do in this body.

I reach my hand into the shower, frowning when I realize the water is still cold.

"Come on." I say, knowing that my warriors are waiting for

me to replace them so they can get some rest.

Wait. Are we still fighting? I killed Roman, the other Alphas were retreating. Distractedly, I walk into the shower, jolting awake as the cold water hits me. I thought this fixed. I need to check with Feena to find out why she didn't tell me the hot water heater was broken again. Although, it's not like we've been able to get anyone here to fix it over the last couple of months. It's been impossible to get anything through the battle lines.

I'm so tired that it takes entirely too long for me to realize what should have been obvious to me from the beginning. My hands run over my breasts, breasts that I haven't had in a year. I look down, turning my hands in front of my face, my pale, small hands.

I look down at my body, my small body that is riddled with bruises.

Oh no. My heart rate spikes, and I begin to hyperventilate.

'Damara?'

"I'm here." Her voice, so strong yesterday, is so weak today.

'Oh Damara! We're back here again, aren't we? We're 18 again.'

'Yes.' Is all she says, and I know what I have to do.

Tereshan will be furious, he will hate me for everything that happened to him. He may have been willing to change, to be kind as an omega, but after everything that occurred, he will want to punish me. I know he will.

I get dressed quickly, grabbing my small sweater. It makes so much sense now why I'm sore, why my body is aching. It's not because of the war, it's because I'm back in my omega body. I'm weak all over again. I can't shift, I can't fight, the only thing I can do is run.

I carefully open my door, listening for the sounds in the kitchen. It's early, not yet 6am and the kitchen omegas will be waiting for me, since it's my birthday. Instead of heading toward the kitchens, I turn and head down the side stairwell, just like I did a year ago.

I open the door and listen, already realizing the difference in my senses. I hate feeling weak again. I was so strong. I did so much for this pack and for what? Nothing, it's all gone, none of it mattered. No one even knows what I did for them.

I sneak to the border, understanding the patrol lines much better than I used to, so I know the best place to go to get off the pack lands undetected, or at least, undetected for a while.

I have no idea where to go other than where Dane told me to go the last time I ran, so I head toward the river.

It's slow going, and I'm so weak that I struggle to breathe, having to stop frequently to catch my breath before moving forward again. I'm not sure how long I've been running when I hear the howl of the hunt go up.

Fear, like nothing I've ever felt before rushes through me. The spike in adrenaline gives me the energy I need to run. I've just gotten the scent of the river in my nose, when I hear the pounding of paws behind me.

I yelp, trying to run faster. If I can just get to the river....

I'm tackled from behind, sending me tumbling over myself. A large wolf grabs my arm, puncturing holes as I feel his teeth hit bone. I cry out in pain, as Dane shifts.

"Tucker, let her go! He said to catch her, not hurt her." Dane orders.

I already know who 'he' is.

"Dane, please, please, let me go. You won't ever see me again. Please."

I see real sorrow in his eyes when he looks at me, helping me to stand. "I'm sorry, Claire. Alpha gave an order to catch you. He knew you were gone. I can't go against..."

"I know." And I do. Probably more than I ever did, I understand the impact of an Alpha order. And Tereshan would know that Dane would want to help me, so of course he gave his Alpha order.

I hang my head, waiting for my judge, jury and executioner to arrive.

Sooner than I would have thought, I hear the heavy paws that I know are Magnor's. I ran on those legs, in that body, for a year. I know the rhythm of his paws hitting the ground, the sound of his breathing, every little sound his body makes.

I feel Damara stand up in my mind, wanting to see her mate back in his own body.

He comes rushing into the clearing where I'm standing beside Dane. As soon as he sees me, he shifts.

He looks at me for a long moment before walking up to me, kneeling down and pulling me to him, holding me against his body.

I stand there, not sure what to do. I feel him take a deep breath, burying his nose in my neck. He smells like sex and the she-wolves I remember from last year.

Suddenly, I feel him jerk. His hands coming to my arms in a tight grip, hurting the bite mark on my arm.

He looks at me and the fury coming off of him rolls over me. Here it is, the end of my short life.

"Tell me you weren't heading to the river. Tell me you weren't going back to the river, Claire! Not the river!" He says, shaking me.

I look up, seeing the anger in him. Now is my chance, maybe my only chance.

"I, Claire..."

His hand comes to my mouth, covering it and forcing me to stop talking.

"No. Not this time, Claire."

I feel tears pricking my eyes. I couldn't even get the rejection out fast enough.

"I, Alpha Tereshan Colton," I close my eyes, preparing myself for the pain that I know will come

"Accept you, Claire Roberts, as my mate and Luna."