

LONE WOLF

MY WOLF'S BANE 1.1 † THE BEGINNING



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Lone Wolf

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[Crush Publishing, Inc](#)
Sunland, CA 91040

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The Beginning



My limbs trembled with the urge to free myself from the suffocating walls of my bedroom. Just a few minutes outdoors. That's all I needed.

The window groaned as I lifted it. I paused to tune in to the next room, but my mom's steady breathing told me I hadn't disturbed her. I made the opening wider and slipped out, dropping two stories to the ground.

What would my mom say if she knew I'd developed superhuman hearing and strength over the last couple weeks? Would she think something was terribly wrong with me? Worrying could make her sicker. No, I wouldn't tell her. Not until she was better.

If she got better.

I had turned sixteen a few weeks ago, but California law didn't allow me to drive alone for another year. Even if I could, my mom would never give me her blessing to take the car out past curfew, much less

venture into a deserted park all by myself like I was about to do. My only choice was to go by foot after dark when I'd be harder to spot. The night air against my skin was half the reason I snuck out anyway.

At cheetah-like speed, I ran, leaping over backyard fences until I reached the grassy field near the trees. Though I practically flew by the jungle gym and the dog park, I easily caught the scents of lighter fluid and burnt coal from the nearby barbeque pits. In a blur, I zoomed into the wooded area. A moment later, I slowed to whiff the damp earth and crisp pine.

My lungs filled with it.

I was home.

I'd crept out of my room every night for the past two weeks, running and running until the need to stretch my muscles no longer pounded in my veins. I'd pushed myself as hard as I could, but the release never came. Maybe if I stayed out longer this time, moved faster and strained my muscles more, I could burn off the driving need to... to what? I had no clue.

Right now, all I knew was that I had to keep going, keep moving until I was too exhausted to think about my mom and how I'd be an orphan soon. I didn't

want to think about how she'd struggled to survive since the day I was born or how she'd lost my dad so young. How *I'd* lost him. And, soon, I'd lose her too.

I wanted to escape. Be someone else. Or *something* else...

Like a wolf... a big, badass wolf. Perhaps it was instinct, but somehow I knew the reason my runs never fully satiated the hunger had something to do with the vision of the wolf looming in my mind. The wolf was as real as the forest around me, the dark fur and green eyes becoming a part of me.

Whipping past trees, I melted into the forest as if it owned me. *I belonged* there with the animals, the trees and the night sky. Human trappings were long forgotten and my only worry was my next meal.

My legs quivered and the ground beneath me seemed to quake. But I couldn't stop running. I leapt to avoid slamming into a fallen tree and as I soared a weightlessness took over. In midair, black swirled around me. I landed with a light thud, my hands hitting the ground first.

Except they weren't hands anymore.

Paws? What the hell?

I screeched to a halt and whipped my neck around to see my side — which was covered in long, black fur, all wrapped up with a bushy tail.

My senses were on alert and I wasn't dreaming.

Finally, after weeks of trying to adjust to my changing body, I had an answer. Well, not totally since I still had no idea how this had happened. Whatever. I knew the whole morphing thing was crazy, but right then, I didn't care. In the morning, I'd think about why. For now, I'd revel in my new skin.

I was a freakin' werewolf. And I'd never felt more free.

Nestled between the bushes and trees, I tilted my head back and howled at the full moon illuminating the cobalt sky.

† † †

Hours later but well before dawn, I snuck back into my room the same way I'd left. Still shaky from my surprise morph, I fumbled and my legs barely cleared the sill. My head bumped the window and I froze when the wood floor creaked next door. Damn, I'd woken my mom. I quietly slid the window down and scrambled into bed.

My door opened.

“Mom?” I croaked. After spending the last two hours as a wolf, exhaustion clawed at my very being. “You okay?”

“Of course,” she said. “Just thought I heard something.”

Now that I’d woken her, she could be up for hours. As much as I wanted to liquefy into my mattress and sleep forever, I didn’t want her up all night by herself. “Want to have a snack with me?”

“I’d like that, *Tesoro*.” Even in the dark with the light behind her, I could see her smile.

I wanted to share this with her — how I’d morphed and what it felt like — the way we’d shared everything the past sixteen years.

Somehow, I knew my mom was human and my werewolfness didn’t come from her. I hadn’t been bitten and turned either. My dad, on the other hand... he’d left me all those old books — the ones filled with what I had always thought were silly stories and fairy tales. But now I knew the truth. Werewolves and shape-shifters were real. And my dad had known that one day I’d need the precious knowledge those books held.

My mom could never know my secret. My dad's secret. The knowledge would only make her worry and I couldn't add to her burden.

I was on my own.