

Chapter 112

Book two

In the heart of a sprawling forest, shadows clung to gnarled trees like ominous curtains. The air was thick with an eerie stillness, broken only by the terrified breath of a lone figure stumbling through the darkness. Her footsteps echoed, lost in the vast expanse of the trees that towered above.

Where was she? How did she get here? Just moments ago, she had been in the midst of a familiar crowd, finishing with a family dinner, after which she greeted a few pack members and decided to go for a little walk.

Nothing about the trees and shadows that loomed felt familiar. Everything felt menacing, the cold night breeze, thick with the promise of something to come, a danger that lurked. Another failed attempt to reach the pack link had anxiety bubbling within her. Her heart thumped so loud she could almost hear it over the ringing in her ears.

Her steps faltered in the darkness, fatigue creeping in and almost overtaking the urgency seered into her aching bones by the adrenaline. She spared a glance behind her, a mistake, as the inky blackness only seemed to follow behind her, close and unrelenting.

Fear claws its way up into every fibre of her being like icy fingers, squinting to take in her surroundings, the moonlight casting a shadowy light as it struggled to pierce through the thick canopy created by the entwined branches and broad leaves overhead.

Her breath quickened, coming out in shallow gasps and visible puffs, owing to the chilly night air.

Suddenly, a sharp crunch pierces through the air, echoing from somewhere on her right. She freezes at that exact second, her heart stilling in the confines of her chest as her breath remains lodged in her throat. The forest seemed to hold its breath in solidarity, something other than terror-filled anticipated hanging in the air.

Just as she sucks in a shaky breath, forcing her neck to make that move that would reveal what lurked in the darkness to her eyes, blown wide with fear, a soft growl disrupts the unsettling quiet and a shiver crawls up her spine.

Her heart rate spikes once again, the organ threatening to beat out of her chest that rises and falls without rhythm. Frozen in place once again, her entire body is wracked with tremors.

A smaller whimper follows immediately after, again after a few beats until her ears match it with a flow as it continues to sound at intervals. Against her better judgment, she found her body turning ever so slowly until she was looking straight into the darkness where the sound no doubt echoed from, drawn inexplicably to the unknown.

Strange and terrifying noises begin to surround her, whispers that seem to emerge from the trees, a cacophony of unseen terrors serenading her more and more into disorientation.

Through the twisted labyrinth of trees, she stumbled into a moonlit clearing. From the shadows illuminated by the dim light of the moon, a pair of eyes materializes right in front of her.

It squinted at the figure it seemed to be sizing up, eyes gleaming with a malignant glow, and despite being unable to make out its actual form still shielded by the darkness, she could feel the waves of sinister energy that it seemed to ripple with.

Her heart drops, and she immediately slaps a hand over her already parted lips, muffling the outburst of fear that threatened to erupt from her belly. She should have turned around and fled back into the night, taking whatever chances she had of escaping this beast, but she stood transfixed.

Something seemed to pull her closer, like a thread, or the consistent tug of a leash, it wanted her to stay, get sucked in, to get a better look at this creature that seemed to blend so perfectly into the night.

Was it a wolf? Everything about it seemed evil, ghastly, and deadly, and its whole aura screamed danger.

The beast's gaze remains locked onto her like a predator zeroing in on its prey, having sensed her about a few seconds ago. Or had it been longer - she had no idea.

Panic surged through her veins, and when it looked like the creature began garnering enough energy to pounce, she immediately ripped her eyes away and broke into a sprint for it. Thrown back into the thick darkness the forest offered, she cut through the narrow spaces between the trees, and her pounding footsteps resumed echoing through the daunting forest.

She looked back once, then twice, and after the third time, it seemed to become a habit as she continued to do so multiple times, nearly bashing her head against a particularly low branch once, only missing it by an inch but grazing her body roughly on the rough barks of the tree, her arm suffering more from the contact.

Pain surges through the no-doubt scratched skin as she continues to run after only a brief stutter in her step.

Suddenly, her foot caught on an unseen root, and time seemed to slow as her body was propelled forward by the impact, and she was sent to the wet, grassy floor of the forest with a cry of pain.

More pain seers right into her brain, but the adrenaline blocks it right out a millisecond later, and she was scrambling back to her feet, almost regaining her footing until she was sent colliding with the floor with a loud 'oof' sound this time.

All the air is knocked out of her lungs, and it takes a second for her eyes to recapture her surroundings, the pain shooting up the back of her skull, numbing and disorienting.

Before she could begin to comprehend how and why she was sent to the floor a second time, she was welcomed with a sight of why and how exactly. The beast. It was here and upon her, its hot breath fanning against her neck as its mouth seemed to remain in a permanent snarl.

A loud scream is torn right out of her throat at the realization and the forest seemed to echo with her scream, the sound of birds fleeing at the sound felt almost animated, wings flapping with urgency and the shuffling sounds created by whatever insects and critters skittering away deeper into the night. If she'd felt alone in the vast darkness before, now, without the company of all that had been, she felt so terrifyingly, alone.