

“Beware of the full moon. A werewolf wants to take you into his world. Forever.”

—Dr. Camille Meadows

ONE

haunted moon

The full moon glowed brightly above me and Brandon, the handsome werewolf I'd fallen in love with, as we stood cuddling, surrounded by a friendly pack of wolves, deep within the wooded area behind his grandparents' home in Legend's Run. I could taste Brandon's lips on mine and feel his powerful strength as he enveloped me in his embrace. His woody scent was intoxicating, and his wild, dark hair seduced me like a rock star's. I didn't want our evening together to end, but, unfortunately, I knew it had to. Brandon and I couldn't spend the rest of our lives in the woods away from our families and friends. Or could we?

I had more on my plate than I could handle. I was in love with a lycan, and my former boyfriend, Nash, was now one, too.

“What do you think will happen?” I asked Brandon as I looked up at him. “Now that Nash knows that he's a werewolf, what will he do? What will *we* do?”

Two months ago, Nash had been bitten by a wolf and subsequently, under the full moon, had become a lycan. And just like Brandon, he didn't remember his actions while he was transformed. But unlike Brandon, Nash was aggressive when he turned, and he'd become a threat to me, the town, and himself. I'd discovered that kissing Brandon when he was a werewolf caused him to become aware of his lycan state so that he remembered his actions in his daylight, human hours. And it was important for me and for the sake of others that Nash remember what

he was doing—as he was doing it. Also, he was tormented not knowing what was happening to him. I wanted to help him, for his sake as well as mine. The kiss under the full moon was the only remedy, so a few hours ago I'd kissed Nash when he had turned into a werewolf.

Nash was popular and very attractive, and he and I'd been going together on and off before I met Brandon—but something had always been missing between us. And now, of course, I was completely in love with Brandon—in his normal, human form *and* in his werewolf state.

Hair poked out from the top of Brandon's open shirt, and my fingers caressed the top of his normally smooth chest.

“We can't predict everything—nor can we control it,” he said, his voice strong. He brushed his hand against my cheek. “We can only control what we do. And that is continue to be together, even under these strange circumstances.” Brandon's hair, which hung savagely wild a few inches above his shoulders, flopped over his gray eyes. He drew me into him again with a powerful and reassuring hug. His chest was warm and rugged. I knew he could crush me with his strength, but he was as gentle as he was strong.

I loved Brandon's confidence; I was drawn to that as much as I was to his gorgeous human and now lycan features.

“Could we just stay here forever?” I asked, dreaming.

His wolf fangs poked out from his smile and caught the moonlight. It was as if he was really contemplating his life in werewolf form.

“Do you like being a werewolf?” I pressed.

Brandon didn't respond.

I thought about my feelings regarding his being a werewolf. My life had always been predictable: the same friends, the same school, the same house. But now that I was in love with a

werewolf, I didn't know what was happening day to day. On normal days, I had the positive things like my classes, friends, and this new love to juggle. But the addition of Nash and Brandon and their lycan condition made everything that was perfect turn into chaos. I had to admit there was some excitement in not knowing what to expect. It brought out a side of me that I didn't know existed; a spontaneous and adventurous girl was emerging as I experienced things I never had before—walking with wolves in the woods at nightfall, moonlight picnics, kissing werewolves.

I wanted everyone to be happy and to get along, but I wasn't sure how anything could be normal. Now that there were two werewolves in town, I didn't know how any of it would work out. And I wasn't sure that I wanted to. Brandon had this abnormal condition that he had to deal with every full moon. At those times, he was extraordinary, handsome, and powerful. I couldn't help but see positives of his being a werewolf—it made him stronger and even more heroic.

But for Brandon, it had to be difficult. I could see how awaiting his change, and then transforming, tormented him. It wasn't something that he could control, and it made him different, more so than just being a Westsider among the popular Eastsiders. If people knew about his condition and didn't think it was a joke like they had at the spring dance, it could be life threatening for him. It was unusual, to say the least, and no one would want a werewolf running around their town. But when he was a werewolf there were moments, like now, when he seemed at peace, even seemed to thrive. When we were deep in the woods experiencing nature, away from the hustle and bustle of the rest of the world, with untamed wolves nipping at his heels, he seemed very contented. Just as I found positives when he was in his superhuman form, I wondered if he did as well.

Brandon still didn't respond, and his bright mood seemed to change. "We'd better go," he said. "It is getting late."

After tonight the moon would wane and I'd have to wait another month until I saw Brandon in this lycan form again. Neither one of us wanted to let the evening end, me holding on to my werewolf for the moments I was able to see him in this form—and though he didn't say it, I sensed he enjoyed getting to explore a more powerful side of himself and to experience nature without the fear that a human might. But the clouds began to join together, covering our unobstructed view of the moon. It was as if the evening sky were telling us, too, that our night together was over, and we'd soon have to face the weeks ahead waiting for the next full moon.

The next day, I met my best friends, Ivy and Abby, at our local coffee shop. We liked to get together to discuss the latest gossip and upcoming events, and the friendly, cozy café offered our favorite drinks and an intimate space to chat. Our coffee hangout had local artists' pictures showcased on the walls, several bean-bag chairs to hang out in, and even stacks of board games and books for patrons to use while they enjoyed yummy caffeinated beverages. Even though I would have loved to get out a game and challenge Ivy and Abby, we always managed to drink and gab our time away and forget about the games. Cool, hip jazz music played as the barista took our orders. It was warm outside and I wasn't in the mood for something hot, so I chose an iced coffee, and we sat at our usual table.

"Isn't it great we all have found true love now?" Abby said.

"Yes, it is," Ivy agreed, "only I wish you would have told us about Brandon sooner." She looked at me with a little bit of hurt in her eyes.

It was going to be a little while before I would live down not telling them about my romantic relationship with Brandon.

“So we still have a happy sixsome—just a different one than we imagined,” Abby said to Ivy.

“Yes,” Ivy agreed. “Just as long as you are happy,” she said, turning her attention to me.

“And you are, aren’t you?”

I nodded enthusiastically.

“Then it’s settled,” Abby said. “We’ll have boyfriends for all events and dances for the rest of high school.”

“Then it’s off to college,” Ivy said, grinning.

I returned the smile, but inside I was uncertain that the world they imagined was as easy as the one I would be living in. My friends had their whole lives planned out. Since I’d met Brandon and he became a werewolf, I considered us lucky to get through each day. I fantasized about my future together with Brandon, but college? I hadn’t thought that far ahead. He and I had so much to figure out before then, which was mostly what to do about his lycan condition.

“Well, we still have time,” I said, thinking.

“Not much,” Ivy said, cupping her coffee mug with her hands. “We have to start planning these things well in advance. College is so hard to get into. We can’t wait until the last minute.”

“She’s right,” Abby chimed in.

“Have you even talked to Brandon about it?” Ivy asked.

“Uh . . . no,” I admitted.

“She’s too busy kissing him,” Abby said, laughing.

But Ivy turned serious. “It’s something you should be talking about,” she said in a voice that was similar to “mother-speak.” “We need to get all our ducks in a row,” she continued.

I had so much to worry about—like Brandon and Nash being werewolves—how could I take on our future plans for college now, too?

“Uh . . . do you think Brandon can afford college?” Ivy asked me gingerly.

I was taken aback by her question. “Why wouldn’t he?” I wondered.

“Uh . . . it’s just that he’s . . .”

“A Westsider?” I asked.

“I didn’t mean . . .” she said sheepishly.

Abby rolled her eyes at Ivy.

“I don’t see why he couldn’t go,” I said defensively. “Just because he lives on the other side of town means he doesn’t have money?”

“I didn’t mean to . . . I was just concerned,” Ivy said. “That’s all.”

“Dylan and I are hoping to get athletic scholarships,” Abby said, diverting the topic back to her as she added some sweetener to her drink. “But we have to promise that we all are going to the same university.”

“Duh,” Ivy said. She lifted her drink for a toast. Abby held up her latte, and I slowly raised mine.

I reluctantly clinked cups with them.

If only life were that easy, I thought.

I couldn’t even begin to contemplate going away to college right now. I was thinking about full moons, transformations, and distant howling in the night. How could Brandon go to college as a werewolf? It was hard enough going to high school and dealing with its assorted complications. And even with its issues, high school didn’t have night classes or dorm living to deal with. Those would be new challenges he’d have to deal with in a university setting.

My sister, Juliette, was away at college now. Her life was filled with late-night parties, studying and, for some of her classmates, part-time jobs. How was Brandon going to fit into all of that?

“I think Jake could get an athletic scholarship, too,” Ivy said. “But I’m not sure what kind I could get.”

“You don’t need one,” Abby said. “Your dad could pay for *all* of us.”

Ivy scowled at Abby. “So could yours.”

In fact, they both could easily afford college without any outside help. It was my family that would have to take out a loan.

“It’s okay, nothing wrong with being rich,” Abby said as if she weren’t rich, too.

“Well, you have a big, fancy house right next to mine,” Ivy argued back.

“Yes, but my dad’s still paying alimony for his first wife. We were hoping she’d remarry by now but she never did.”

We all pulled a face and laughed.

“What about you?” Ivy asked me. “You could get a scholarship for being a humanitarian. You are so sweet and kind and the only person we know who volunteers because you like to.”

“Uh . . . I haven’t thought much about it yet.”

“But it’s not far off. Only a few months until school ends, then it’s senior year!” Ivy exclaimed.

She and Abby clinked their coffee cups again.

They turned to me as I stared at my ice cubes.

“What are you so moody about?” Ivy asked. “Is it Brandon? Don’t you see a future with him?”

I paused. My heart said yes. But my mind was unsure. Anyway, it wasn't that I couldn't see a future with him—it was that I knew he was unsure about his own future. What was to become of him?

Last month, his scientist father had sent him a possible cure. It was to be taken under a full moon. And Brandon hadn't taken it because he'd shown up at the dance with me—and then, when we found out Nash had turned, too, he wanted to wait so he could protect me if Nash was violent in his werewolf form.

And what did we understand about this cure anyway? What was it made from? We didn't know if it had even been tested on anyone—or anything. If that wasn't bad enough, we only knew that it *might* work, and there was a possibility it could have the opposite of the intended effect and make Brandon a full-time werewolf. Or maybe there was a chance that the antidote wouldn't work at all.

“Maybe we should just think about ‘now’?” I suggested. “There is so much for us to enjoy today.”

“So true,” Abby said. “Like our field trip to the zoo this week . . . Oh, and the Legend's Run Werewolf Festival is only four weeks away!”

“The zoo?” I wondered aloud.

“Yes, don't you remember?” Ivy asked. “Our spring field trip. It's been on the school calendar for a while. Why are you so distracted, Celeste?”

“I didn't even look at the school calendar,” I said truthfully. Other than checking the calendar for the date of the next full moon, I'd been so preoccupied that I was lucky to even get my homework completed.

I loved animals and I hadn't been to the zoo in ages. Ivy, Abby, and I mostly hung out at the coffee shop, high school games, and the mall. So I was definitely excited about the trip, hoping it might be a great distraction for Brandon and me.

"And then, the Werewolf Fest," Abby said. "Won't that be fun?"

Every ten years, Legend's Run held a Werewolf Festival to celebrate the myth of the Legend's Run werewolf—which, from recent experience, I knew was more fact than fiction. It was a huge celebration in town with outdoor movies, all the shopkeepers setting up booths, and a werewolf look-alike contest.

I was seven when I attended the fest the last time. My parents took me and my older sister, Juliette, and I remember it like it was yesterday. There were prizes to win and fun things to buy—and a stalking or happy werewolf on every corner. The outdoor venue showed werewolf movies all night long, like the original *Wolf Man* and *The Howling*. But I was older now and I'd be going with my friends and my boyfriend. My parents would probably go together; Juliette would be away at school with her beau of the month.

"Yes," Ivy replied. "A blast."

"Are you guys going to dress up?" Abby asked, blowing on her latte. "The winner of the costume contest gets a hundred dollars."

"Me, dress up as a werewolf?" Ivy asked, cringing. "I don't know. I don't think Jake will think I'm so hot with fur on my face, will he?"

"I'm going to dress as a girl who was attacked by a werewolf," Abby said. "I've got a dress that I'm going to tatter in shreds. I think that's hot. You can use your imagination, too."

"I'm not so clever," Ivy said. "But maybe I could wear something prickly. Would serve Jake right. When he gets that five o'clock shadow, it really hurts. Could be time for payback."

We all laughed.

“I bet you can come up with something really awesome,” Abby said to me. “Your Halloween outfit was supercool. Little Red Riding Hood. You could wear that.”

“I guess I can,” I agreed.

And what is Brandon going to come as? I wondered.

It would be a full moon. I guessed he could come as himself.

Nash had been a prankster in our school for many years, so many believed that he and Brandon had pranked the school dance a few days ago—and that they weren’t *real* werewolves but fake ones. And no one wanted to admit that they weren’t in on the joke. Some even still gave Nash high fives as he made his way down the corridors.

I couldn’t help but feel uneasy about their lycan situation. We only had a little over weeks until the next full moon, and we’d all have to deal with their transformations again. Would we always be able to dismiss these occurrences as a prank? Or would everyone discover the truth?

Nash caught me in the hall on the way to class at school on Monday. “I need to talk to you,” he said urgently. My former boyfriend was always trying to get back together, and I figured this time was no exception. I was reticent to start another quarrel, but he seemed adamant that he speak with me immediately.

“Uh, can’t this wait until after school?” I tried as I hurried toward my friends, Ivy and Abby, who were already waiting outside our classroom.

“No,” he said, taking my arm and leading me into the alcove of the hallway.

I wasn’t thrilled to find myself alone with him in the narrow doorway that led to the theater.

Nash appeared harried. His normally neatly styled sandy-blond hair was tousled, and his mood was urgent. “I want to thank you,” he said intently. The last time I saw him, his eyes were gray, and he was in werewolf form. I was on the end of his lips, kissing him under the full moon in hopes that his memory would come back to him when he was a lycan.

Nash was dreamy and it was hard not to fall under the spell of his good looks, but I was in love with Brandon. I had to resist.

“For the other night,” he began. “I’m really grateful for what you did.” His words were as sincere as if he’d been waiting a lifetime to tell me.

“You remember?” I asked. He’d seemed to gain his consciousness that night but I wanted to make sure his memory lasted.

“Everything.” He drew in a breath as if he was breathing me in, too.

I nodded, relieved. This meant that the plan Brandon and I made had worked. Nash was now aware that he had been a werewolf. Having him remember was the only way to control how he acted when he transformed. If he knew what was happening, and what he was, it would give him reason to curtail any violent behavior before it was too late.

He gently placed his hand on my shoulder. “That kiss. It meant a lot to me.”

“It was the only way—” I said. I didn’t want him to think I wanted us to reconnect.

But then his demeanor changed. “I remember transforming,” he said in a worried whisper. “Running through the woods. Destroying the baseball shack.” Then he grew even more concerned. “Terrorizing you at the lake—and at the Moonlight Dance.” His voice began to waver.

Nash was referring to his first transformation, when he chased me through Willow Park, and another when he burst through the doors of our spring dance and almost attacked me.

I hated that he had to go through such an unearthly transformation. Even though we weren't together anymore, I certainly wouldn't wish for him to have to deal with such an unusual issue.

"It's okay." I tried to comfort him. "You were a . . ."

"I didn't mean to do those things," he continued. "Especially to you, of all people."

"Of course you didn't," I assured him.

"But at the time, I wasn't myself. Not like I am now."

"I understand." I tried to convince him. He was under a considerable amount of stress and turmoil—the effects of remembering his actions.

Nash looked again at me intently, this time his eyes full of sorrow. "I'm not sure you do. I'd never dream of hurting you. I hate the thought of making you afraid of me."

"I know."

"But those nights, I was different, Celeste. Everything changed. I changed, my whole world changed. I felt like an animal."

"Well, you kind of were," I said with a slight laugh.

He didn't smile. "But the kiss," he continued. "That was one thing that was the same. You and me, like old times. It meant everything to me that you did that. I'll never forget it."

"I wanted you to remember, to be aware while you were transformed, and that was the only way I knew how to help you. That's all it was. It was like breaking a spell."

"But I was a werewolf!" he whispered vehemently. Then he paused as a few students passed by, clearly out of earshot. He drew in closer. "And you stood there, shaking, and kissed me anyway. You were so brave—even though I've never seen you so frightened."

"I had to. It was the only way to help you," I said again. I couldn't seem to make him understand my motivations. Nash spent his nights in lycan form as if in a dream, without control

or awareness of his behavior. Two lives and memories separated by the full moon; now they all were one. Maybe it was harder for him to deal with it now than before he understood.

“And Brandon. I know it just about killed him to see us together,” he said, almost gloating.

This time I didn’t respond. Then the bell rang. “I should get to class now.”

“I don’t want you to fear me,” he said. “Not under a full moon. Not then—or ever.”

What is he going to do now? I wondered. But I didn’t have time to find out.

“Celeste? Hurry up!” Ivy called from down the hallway.

“I’ve got to go—” I started off, but Nash blocked my way.

“One last thing . . .”

“Yes?” I asked quickly.

“I have to fight this. There has to be some way to cure this horrible condition. This can’t keep happening to me every full moon. I have games, school. . . . I have a life.”

“What can I do?” I asked.

“You are the only one who knows, besides Brandon. But *you* are the only one I can confide in.”

I didn’t know what to say. I felt flattered that Nash still felt that I were his one true friend. But was I supposed to take on his issues as well as my own and Brandon’s? I thought I’d solved that with the moonlight kiss. Of course I wanted to help my friend, but at the moment, I didn’t know how to help him any more than I did Brandon.

“Do you think there is some way to fix this?”

“I’m sure there will be.” I tried to reassure him, even though I didn’t know if there was. I didn’t have time to go into Brandon’s possible cure. And how could I when there was only enough for one and I didn’t even know if it worked?

“You are the only one I can talk to about this. . . .” he lamented. “Am I supposed to tell my parents? Would they even believe me? I’ve been pranking people for so long, no one will take me seriously. I need to find a remedy. I only have a few weeks until this awful thing will happen again.”

“We can talk later,” I said.

“This can’t wait. I have to speak with Brandon,” he said urgently.

“About what? There’s enough tension between the two of you already.” Now that Nash remembered our kiss, I feared he’d want to confront Brandon about our relationship.

“It’s not about you and me,” he said. “This is about Brandon and me. I have to do something before anything bad happens, Celeste. I already demolished the shack and threatened you. But we have to find a cure.”

Just then the second bell rang.

Ivy and Abby called me again as they slipped into class. “I have to go,” I said. “I’ll be late.”

As I turned away, he stopped me once again. “You are my lifeline,” he said genuinely.

“Thanks to you, now I remember everything, Celeste. *Everything.*”

I gave him a quick nod, then broke away and hurried off to class to find solace in the company of my friends and a lecture that I was only hoping I could get lost in. I thought I’d remedied our problems with him with the moonlight kiss. But with him wanting me to ensure that he found a cure, it seemed like Brandon and I had to find a cure for all the werewolves in Legend’s Run. It was a lot to ask—but maybe I could help. Maybe on the next full moon Brandon and I really needed to test the antidote his father had sent to make sure it worked.