

Chosen

Book I of Chosen Series

By Jem Richards

Books by Jem Richards

Stand-alone Books

Poisoned Rose

Wild Heart Series

Wild Heart of the Seas: Birth of the Avenging Angel

Wild Heart of the Seas: Give No Quarter

Chosen Series

Chosen

Gathering

Magik

Tribal

Ghostly

Legendary

Huntress Series

Wicked Lovely Vampire

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Chapter One

I sighed in relief, it's the first day of summer vacation. I have only one more year of school left before graduating from Quileute Tribal School, which teaches all grades.

The weather is wonderfully warm for June and I'm ready to kick up my heels and do some exploring. I dressed in blue jeans and my favorite leather halter-top of tan, grabbed my jeep keys off the end table nearest to the door, and quickly headed out before Father could stop me. My long, straight raven black hair nearly reaches my waist and my mocha skin feels great as the sun shining began to warm me. My white sneakers padded down the path across the yard as I head to my jeep. It's a silver Cherokee Jeep Father had bought for my sweet sixteenth birthday. I loved going off road with my friends Jake and Lily.

For the most part, my Father, Jackson Whistler, allows me to do most of what I want, as long as I finish schoolwork and chores. Mother had died when I was only four from a car accident when she was on her way home from Port Angeles, where she'd gone to shop. Everyone in the tribe assisted in helping to watch after me as I grew up. Father was devastated, unsure of how to manage a small child on his own.

For a seventeen-year-old, I'm told I'm very mature for my age, and make it my responsibility to look out for the other members of our tribe. I make it a point to check in on those I know are going through tough times. They are my tribe, my friends, and my family. I'm fiercely protective and dedicated to them all.

I climbed into my jeep, turned the ignition and grinned as the engine roared to life. The radio came to life, tuned to my favorite station, so I cranked it up louder and quickly pulled out of the driveway, heading over to Jake's house. Jake White-cloud is my age; we've been friends for as long as I can remember. Out of all of my friends, Jake and I share the most in common. We both love our adventures as we explore the wide expanse of woods and swimming at the beach. It's a thrill to get out and enjoy nature. I guess we both grew bold and gutsy when out on our adventures. Often, we are scolded by our friend Lily, who is more reserved.

I turned the jeep into Jake's driveway and honked the horn. It only took a moment for him to come out the front door wearing dark blue jeans and a

hunter green t-shirt that fit like a glove over his broad chest, showing his muscular form. His short haircut has a spiky and windblown look. Jake smiled, showing the flash of white teeth as he made his way to the jeep and climbed into the passenger seat placing his dark green backpack in his lap.

“So, what are the plans for today? Hiking, swimming, off roading?” he asked with excited enthusiasm.

I grinned mischievously, “How about all of those!”

Jake’s smile widened, “I’m in! Sounds like a lot of fun.”

I winked and shifted gears to quickly pull away from his house and head out of La Push. I turned the jeep to head toward Rialto Beach and down some dirt roads as Jake rolled down his window and cranked the radio louder. He hooted with glee as I took the jeep over a bump and we slightly lifted up from our seats as I continued at a steady pace. I drove around the back roads, sometimes even going off the roads as we made our way toward Rialto Beach. There were many trails leading away from the beach and curving back around to take us to the cliffs that overlooked the northern end of the beach.

By the time I parked the jeep by the beach, we were both ready for some hiking, our bottoms aching from all the bumping around from driving off road. As I reached into the back seat for my hunter green backpack, Jake climbed out with his dark green backpack to wait.

Moving around the rear of the jeep, Jake fell into step by me as we headed towards the woods. My skin began to tingle as we entered the woods. I glanced over to Jake with a grin, “Go over there to change,” I pointed to some thick brush to the left. “I’ll go over there!” I explained pointing to more thick brush to our right. Jake didn’t need to be told twice, he quickly jogged off to change without a backwards glance.

I smiled in anticipation as I headed to my own hiding place. Entering the brush, I quickly removed my clothing and stuffed it all into the backpack. Once my clothes are secure, I put on my backpack and tightened the straps, latching the strap that went across my mid-section. As soon as the fastener clicked, I let the change flow through me. My skin tingled as thick black fur with silver streaks covers me and I lean forward, going down onto all fours as hands and feet become wolf paws.

My senses are heightened in wolf form and my muscles twitch in anticipation for a good run through the woods. I can hear Jake tearing through the brush ahead, heading for our favorite trail, so I take off after him. It didn't take long as I cut through the woods to come up beside his white and silver wolf form.

Thankfully we can communicate telepathically, I lean closer to nip playfully at his side.

"Hey, I thought we were going to enjoy a run!" Jake exclaimed, laughter in his voice.

"We are! I just had to get you for attempting to head out without me!" I replied jokingly.

I sped up, delighted with freedom as I lengthened my stride, padded paws barely made a sound on the ground. Jake sped up to match my pace. I veered left and leapt up onto a fallen tree sticking up into the air at an angle. Running up the tree trunk to the end, I jumped out from twenty feet up to land back onto the trail with a fluid landing, without breaking stride.

"Show off!" Jake snickered as he followed behind on the trail.

"What good is freedom if we can't enjoy all of it?" I replied, feeling exhilarated.

He remained quiet as we ran full speed down the trail heading to the cliffs. The trail was windy and would easily have taken about an hour and a half to two hours to hike the three miles. In wolf form, we can manage in only twenty minutes.

My wolf form is only slightly smaller than Jake's. In wolf form, we're larger than normal wolves. I led the way all the way up to the cliffs edge and howled in excitement out at the open sea.

Jake came up beside me giving a wolfish laugh as he watched me enjoy the moment. "So, ready for a swim?" he asked hopefully, sweat glistening off his white and silver fur.

"Sure am!" I exclaimed in excitement and turned back to the thick brush to change and dress in my swimsuit.

Jake followed suit and disappeared to my right behind some thick brush.

Regretfully, I changed back to human form and removed my backpack. Unzipping it, I dug out my turquoise two-piece swimsuit and quickly pulled it on. Before leaving my hiding spot, I hid the backpack in the thick brush and moved out of the brush to the cliffs edge.

Jake was already waiting in his black swimming trunks with his back to me. His broad back has defined rippling muscles from all the extra-curricular activities.

He apparently hadn't heard me approach, I grinned and took off at a run to pass him and dove off the cliff. The cliff is easily four stories high. I savored the wind cooling my heated body as I sailed through the air until entering the water and arched to swim away from the cliff.

Jake had waited until I resurfaced before he took his turn to dive off the cliff with a loud whoop of joy.

I grinned while swimming backwards and watched him travel down along the cliff to disappear into the water with a large splash. When he resurfaced, he was only a few feet away. He grinned widely as he moved to swim closer. "Why do you suppose you can shift into a variety of animals, where the rest of us can only change into wolves?" he asked with deep curiosity.

I looked at him and considered it with deep thought. Coming up empty, I shrugged my shoulders, "I am not sure! Only you and Lily know that I can though. I don't want everyone to know, and I appreciate you keeping my secret."

Jake smiled encouragingly, "Sure thing, it's kind of cool being in the loop of your secret!" With that, he dove underwater and swam away. I swam after him as I dove underwater. The water was a little murky, but I can see enough to follow after Jake.

We swam around for a while before Jake surfaced and waited for me to resurface close by. "Hey," Jake began hopefully, "Can you change into a dolphin?"

I smiled with anticipation, "That's one I haven't tried yet! This might be fun." I paused in confusion, "But I can't change while wearing my swimsuit or I'll ruin it."

Jake hesitated and said with uncertainty, "I can turn around while you take it off." When he saw my face turn horrified, he rushed on, "I won't look. I promise, and I can stuff your swimsuit in my pocket till you need it again."

I flushed as I considered him a moment. When I finally nodded in consent, he turned away to give me privacy. "No looking and no playing around when I need my swimsuit back, or this will never happen again!" I warned.

Jake seemed offended when he replied, "Of course, I get it! I'm the one who asked in the first place. I wouldn't want to ruin possible future adventures we might still have together."

I hesitated, still uncertain and a little embarrassed. "Ok then, I'll wait till after my transformation to hand it to you." I began removing the bikini bottom, pulling up my legs to pull it free. Then I quickly untied the string at my back and pulled the top over my head while keeping low in the water.

With both pieces in hand, I put them to my mouth and carefully bit down on the fabric before I dove underwater, swimming deep and held the image of a dolphin in my mind. I could feel the transformation swiftly taking place as my arms became flapper fins and my legs sewn together into a long tail. I felt disoriented for a moment and had to pause as my hearing intensified and adjusted to the underwater sounds, eyes focused better than before under the water.

I can shape shift faster than any of my friends. Many had to work hard at their transformation, but to me it feels fluid and natural. I become disoriented when trying a new animal form, but found I adjust quickly after a few minutes. Most people of my tribe have to practice for months before they were able to transform at will, which is only after reaching puberty. I managed my first transformation when I was only ten. It was the first sign that gave my unusual shape shifting abilities away. I've never even mentioned it to Father. He is always so wrapped up with the needs of the tribe, tribal meetings amongst the members, and telling of the time-honored traditions and legends at gatherings.

Giving my dolphin tail a flick, I arched up toward the surface and swam around Jake to come up in front of him. As I surfaced in front of him, his eyes widened.

"You did it! Wow that is so cool!" Jake stated enthusiastically. He carefully took the swimsuit from my mouth and stuffed the top in one pocket of his trunks, the bottom in the other.

I chattered warningly to remind him of his promise. "I know, I promise no joking around when the time comes!" he offered solemnly.

I bobbed my dolphin head in a nod of approval, then swam closer so he could drape an arm over my back. He carefully grabbed my upper fin instead. "Is this alright?" he asked concerned.

Feeling no discomfort, I chattered approvingly. Jake grinned and exclaimed, "Let's go for it!" He took in a breath and together, we dove down. I was surprised at how it didn't hurt to pull Jake's weight by my upper fin and tested my directional fins to adjust to the feel of them as I propelled us along with my powerful tail.

I almost forgot Jake needed to go up for air, but he gently squeezed my fin under his grip. I arched up toward the surface. When we surfaced, I turned my head to look at him apologetically.

Jake seemed to understand and quickly replied, "It's alright! I am sure it is going to take some getting used to. But that was so fun!" His face was lit up in joy as his breathing recovered. I chattered excitedly to share with him my own joy of the experience, he smiled widely.

He took another moment to regulate his breathing and tightened his hold as he drew in a new breath. Together, we dove back down into the water. Feeling more adjusted to dolphin form, I stayed within a comfortable distance of the surface as I pulled Jake along underwater. We swam for hours reveling in the new experience.

Jake urged to try diving up over the water and pulling him along. When the first attempt was wobbly, he moved to straddle my back and flattened himself for the second attempt. It proved to be much easier to pull him along and bring him with as I dove up out of the water.

When we finally had enough of swimming, we went to shore to turn into our wolf forms to retrieve our backpacks and hike back to the jeep.

Standing back up on the cliff in our hidden cover for changing, Jake asked as I uncovered my backpack to pull out clothing, "So, how was it to be a dolphin?"

I wasn't surprised by his obvious curiosity. "It was disorienting at first. It always is when I try a different animal for the first time. The more times I change into an animal, the easier it is for me to adjust." I informed him. "Being a dolphin was a new experience since I had no legs. It took a while to become adjusted to the fins and using them to steer in the direction I wanted to go in. For the most part, I tried staying out at sea away from the cliffs and rocks till I felt more confident in turning."

As I pulled on blue jeans over my legs, Jake asked in curiosity, "What other animals have you tried besides wolf and eagle?"

I giggled in mischief, "I changed into a squirrel once to listen in on one of the tribal meetings. They were only discussing some places they wanted to improve, so I didn't hear anything useful. I have also tried a deer, raccoon, and even a horse."

Jake whistled in amazement as I pulled the halter top over my head then stuffed the wet swimsuit into a plastic bag, then in the front compartment and pulled the backpack onto my back. When I stepped out of my hiding place, Jake came into view as he stood staring out over the cliff.

He turned and grinned, "That was some fun! We should try stuff like that more often. What did you think of your horse form?"

Giggling at where I saw his line of thinking taking him. "Not near as limber as the wolf, but fun all the same! I found that being in horse form, my senses were not as intense as the wolf form, and somehow easier at times to just enjoy running."

Jake moved to follow as I turned to head back down the trail. Neither of us were ready for our visit to end as quickly as it would if we ran back in wolf form. Hiking back gave the opportunity to walk leisurely and talk as we enjoyed the woods around us. We're both nature lovers and enjoy exploring during our hikes.

"Do you think Lily will be upset we didn't have her along today?" Jake asked, concerned she might feel offended and left out.

I grinned back at him, "Naw, she had to watch her little sister today, since her Mom had to work at the market. We can make it up to her and go to the movies in Port Angeles, if you'd like!"

Jake nodded approvingly as he moved to walk beside me, "That sounds great! We've been cooped up near La Push and Forks most of the winter. It's been a while since we had a movie night!"

I grinned in appreciation as I contemplated some of our other friends. "Perhaps we should plan on a large group. You know, invite Seth, Matt, and Summer."

Jake smiled widely as he envisioned the whole group going. "Yeah, maybe Seth will bring his crappy green Dodge Ram van to load a bunch of the group into and we can take two vehicles to fit some of the others like Willie, Viola, Trix, Quincy, Sasha, Tanya, and Max."

Warming up to the idea, I replied, "Of course, we haven't been out as a group since Christmas break. Maybe we should plan for Saturday night. It's only Wednesday, today, so that gives us a few days to check in with everyone to see if they're up to a day out."

Jake nodded in agreement, "You know Lily's Mom. She needs notice before we can plan anything. And Willie and Sasha are always so into each other as a couple. Giving them few days of notice is the only way we can get them to go."

I grinned widely at Jake, "Now that we have vehicles and a little more freedom, we can cut loose and hang out more often. Father is relaxed because all the parents have taken up looking out for me! Many of them see me as a good influence." I giggled in mischief, "if they realized some of the stuff we did on our own, they probably wouldn't see me that way anymore!"

Jake looked at me bewildered, "Come on Raven, everyone knows you are the most responsible one in our entire group! Sure, you have a wilder streak, but in all, you keep everyone out of trouble for some good clean fun!"

Shrugging my shoulders, I replied, "Yeah, I guess so! I just see a lot of the parents and grandparents who need help and step forward to assist. Like when that deer jumped in front of Old Man Mitch's truck and had him laid up for a month with a broken leg. He had no one to help, so I helped him with

groceries, cleaned house, and made him dinner. His wife died a long time ago and his kids have long since moved away."

Jake gave a sideways knowing look, "You don't give yourself enough credit. I have seen you go out of your way to babysit the younger kids when parents needed a babysitter, and give assistance to others when a need called for it."

Feeling self-conscious discussing myself, I allowed silence to fall between us as we walked companionably down the trail. The tall pine trees climbed high above our heads, with some bare dead trees still among them from the floods long ago. I savored the fresh pine scent that mingled in the air with the scent of the salty sea. It never ceased to amaze me of the natural beauty of the area. I grew up here and couldn't imagine living anywhere else. It's my home, where I belong.

Sure, I've enjoyed going to Forks and Port Angeles to escape and visit the more civilized areas, but I was born and raised on the Quileute Indian reservation. I've never had a boyfriend, probably because I know everyone and considered them all friends and family. I have never really liked a boy in that way. All my friends had either tried dating, or were currently in a relationship. Like the couples of Willie and Sasha, Lily and Quincy, and Summer and Matt.

Chapter Two

I pulled the silver Cherokee jeep in front of my two-story house. It's a small two-bedroom house painted a warm pale yellow. Since Mom had died, Father took out all the flowers beds that had once been planted along the front of the house and replaced them with a rock garden with a birdbath and wolf statues in different poses. One wolf statue sat by the stairs of the porch near the front door, sitting on his haunches as if he's watching over the house. Another sat by the far-right corner, in a pose of howling at the sky. A third sat at the far-left corner, standing still with its head turned toward the street.

I always found comfort in the statues, as if they were guardians that kept me safe. I climbed out of the jeep and started down the path leading to the front door.

As I opened the door and entered into the main entryway, I knew from the missing vehicle and quiet house that Father wasn't home. He's most likely off handling business. I turned right to enter the kitchen and went to search the fridge for something to eat. Locating cold cut meat and sliced cheese, I decided on a quick sandwich.

When I finished off the sandwich, I headed upstairs to my bedroom. Since there were only two rooms upstairs, I share a bathroom with Father, but I don't mind. He usually felt uncomfortable trying to talk to a teen girl, now a young lady, and gives me my space.

My room isn't large, but it's spacious enough. The bed lay centered on the left wall with a closet to the left inside the door. My dresser and vanity lay on the right wall and large bay windows on the far wall. I love to sit with my laptop or a book at the bay windows and feel secure with the nature around while in the comfort of my bedroom.

Deciding to go on-line to my Facebook site, I collected my laptop from the nightstand and went to sit at the bay windows. Opening the laptop as I sat crossed legged and gazed out at the tree line outside my window, I waited for the laptop to load.

Sighing in relief when it finished loading, I clicked to open the internet and selected Facebook off my bookmarks. It wasn't surprising to see no one had been on Facebook all day, with it being the first day of summer break.

Thinking it was a good idea to make a post for suggesting a movie in Port Angeles was a good start to get the group together. I posted; *"Hey guys, who's up for a movie Saturday in Port Angeles? Jake and I thought it would be great to get the whole gang together since we haven't done anything since Christmas break. Get back to me and let me know!"*

I was just finishing the post when the phone rang. Putting aside the laptop, I went to the nightstand to pick up the cordless phone, "Hello!"

Lily was on the other end of the line. "Please tell me you'll be home for a while!" she said sounding upset.

I felt alarm seep in by her tone. "Yeah, I just got home from a hike with Jake! Are you alright?" I asked in concern.

"Can you come get me? I need to get out of here!" Lily stated anxiously.

"Of course," I replied, feeling uneasy about my friend's tone. "I'll be right there!"

"Thanks Rave! See you soon!" Lily replied and hung up.

Hanging up the phone, I shut the laptop, and headed out the door with decisive movements, concern growing quickly. I've never known Lily to act so upset unless something was deeply bothering her. Closing the front door to the house, I quickly jogged to my jeep.

When I pulled up in front of Lily's mobile home on the other side of the reservation, Lily immediately came out and quickly moved to the vehicle. She's tall and slender with a rounded face of an angel. Her long black hair in two braids coming down in front of her shoulders, reaching down to her bosom. Her dark brown eyes looked haunted as she hurried to the jeep.

As soon as she closed the door behind her, she looked to me appreciatively and asked anxiously, "Can we hurry up and get out of here, please?"

I didn't wait and turned the jeep around to head back to my place, deeper in the wooded section of the Indian reservation. "Are you alright?" I asked in concern.

Lily shook her head despairingly, "My Mom's boyfriend came home drunk and started yelling at me. I called Mom; she came home to take over with Britney. But some of the things he said were just plain vicious and cruel."

Anger burned in me as I considered all the things the man had put Lily, and her mother and sister, through. "Why don't you stay the night at my house tonight? We can have a girl's night!" I suggested.

Lily smiled appreciatively, "Thanks! I'd really like that."

I smiled encouragingly over to her as I drove down the main road, traveling through the heart of the Indian Reservation. "Jake and I thought it'd be great to get the whole gang together to go to Port Angeles for a movie on Saturday. We can make it a whole day event with shopping and a bon-fire on the beach in the evening if you'd like."

Lily grinned, obviously liking the idea. "Sounds great! I could really use having my friends all close and together at this point," she confided.

I beamed a bright smile Lily's way, "Great, then let's call the others. I was posting it on Facebook when you called. Perhaps times like this require that we make the calls and urge them to join!"

"Do you mind if we go for a walk on the beach?" Lily asked a little breathlessly. When I glanced at her in concern, she filled in quickly, "I don't feel like being cooped up all evening. I feel caged in already, as it is!"

"Then let's save the calls for tonight. We can go for a walk on the beach as soon as we get to my place. I'm always up for a walk on the beach!" I suggested.

Lily nodded gratefully before letting a comfortable silence settle between us.

When I pulled the jeep in front of my pale-yellow house, Father's black Chevy Silverado is in the driveway. He opened the front door and came out to greet us. His black hair is thickly covered with gray and his aging face showed his worry. "Lily's mother called. She was concerned about Lily," he offered as he glanced over at Lily and noted her haunted expression on her rounded face.

I stepped forward and gave him a gentle hug. When I stepped back, I looked up into his golden hazel eyes, matching my own. "I offered to have Lily stay the night. Chetley was out of line today and said some awful things. She needed to get away and had been watching Britney all day while her mother was at work."

Jackson Whistler considered his daughter's thoughtfulness and knew her to be wise for her young age. He nodded in consent as he smiled encouragingly over to Lily. "I'll call your Mother to let her know. Anything you'd like me to say when I talk to her?"

Lily sighed in relief as she smiled weakly and stated, "Raven and Jake wanted to get the others together for a movie and full day in Port Angeles on Saturday. We were hoping for a day with our friends and perhaps a bon-fire on the beach in the evening. I know she has Saturday off, so it shouldn't be a problem."

He considered the idea and glanced over to me and asked, "Will it be a large group? You know how I feel about you going to Port Angeles."

I smiled reassuringly, "We are trying to get the whole gang together for the event. Jake and I just thought of it today, but it should be enough time to make the proper arrangements with everyone by then."

He solemnly nodded in understanding and turned back to Lily. "I'll mention it to your Mother. I will recommend she give you this time with your friends. She usually listens to me when we discuss these matters." He consoled her.

I gave him an appreciative smile as Lily seemed to relax, "We were just going to walk on the beach for a while. Lily has been cooped up and needs some fresh air."

Jackson's face turned serious as he considered the evenings meeting around the bon-fire. "Perhaps you two would join us this evening with the elders and some of the other kids as we share some of the legends of our people tonight after dinner," he suggested somewhat urgently.

Our faces lit up in excitement. We loved hearing our ancestor's stories and legend's. "We'll be there!" I exclaimed excitedly.

Lily replied, "I wouldn't want to miss it!"

Jackson smiled warmly and nodded in approval. Lily and I waved and turned to walk around the house and down the path that led to the beach.

Lily and I took turns calling our friends to make arrangements for the trip to Port Angeles. So far, everyone was up to making the trip. We finished the calls in time to head to the meeting by the bon-fire on the beach early.

The sun was beginning to set when we headed toward the path leading to the beach. Lily was acting more like herself and had relaxed. As we walked toward the beach, we talked about the last legend we had heard about Q'wati and the wolves he had turned into the first Quileute people.

Lily exclaimed, "I am still amazed at how much truth the legend holds. It wasn't until I was reaching adolescence when my Mother told me it was all

real. By then, I was suffering from the fever that takes us over in the transition. I thought I was just sick, since the fever was the only symptom."

Contemplating her response for a moment, "I remember having a fever so bad, I thought I was going to die from being over-heated."

Lily glanced over at me questioningly, "It is odd how you developed your ability at the age ten. No one else has ever come into it so young. Have you told your Father yet about your other shifting abilities?"

Hastily shaking my head, "No, and I don't plan on it either! Only you and Jake know, and that is the way it is going to stay!"

Lily solemnly nodded, a little confused on my reasoning for keeping it a secret. She could respect my decision no matter what because we're best friends. I smiled widely, "I tried a new animal today!" Lily turned to look at me questioningly in anticipation. "Jake and I went swimming out by the cliff past the main part of Rialto Beach," I supplied. "He talked me into trying a dolphin." Lily's eyes widened in surprise, "It was actually different than anything else I had tried and found I liked it very much once I had adjusted to its form."

Lily gushed excitedly, "Oh, I wish I could have seen you! That would have been so neat!"

I gently reassured her, "Don't worry, you'll get the chance."

Once we stepped onto the beach, we turned to walk up the beach. I could see the bon-fire already burning brightly as the sun set. The sky took on early shades of orange and pink as we walked companionably toward the bon-fire over three hundred feet away.

"I wonder what legend they'll tell us tonight," I said thoughtfully. "So far, several we have heard have truth in them. Our shape-shifting abilities are proof of that."

Lily shrugged her shoulders, "I like listening to them whether they hold truth or not. It is our link to our ancestors that has been passed down through the generations. Our heritage comes from these meetings and I am fascinated by the whole of it all."

I readily agreed, "I like that part too, of course. But I also find it interesting to hear of the legends and how they still apply to our way of life today!"

By the time we reached the bon-fire, my father; Jackson, Old Man Mitch, and several of the other elders were already present along with many of the kids who have already reached adolescence. Jake was with his Father, Casey White-cloud. Others I knew included Max, Tanya, Quincy, and Seth. There were several kids in younger ages such as fifteen-year-old Bobby Whittaker, thirteen-year-old Evangeline Hashford, and many others.

Seth noticed us first and stood up with a wide smile. His black hair is straight, going down to his shoulders, and his youthful face with strong square jaw lit up in excitement as he turned to nudge Quincy to point us out. Seth wore a navy button up shirt he left open wearing a plain white t-shirt underneath and blue jeans.

Quincy straightened up to turn to look at Lily and smiled affectionately as he and Seth worked around the circle of people to greet us. His black hair cut short of only about an inch in length and always had a wild windblown look. His face is lean and strong with high chiseled cheekbones and square jaw. As He and Seth walked toward us, I noticed he wore blue jeans and a gray t-shirt.

"It's good to see you two made it!" Quincy stated brightly.

Lily nodded as Quincy pulled her close into a hug. She sighed contentedly and he pulled back to look at her more closely. Lily softly told him, "I'm alright; it's just been a long day!"

Jake joined us as I greeted Seth, "Hey, good to see you made it tonight!"

Seth smiled widely, "What, and miss out on the killer stories and legends! Not a chance."

I giggled. "My thoughts exactly," I confessed as he watched me closely. I turned to Jake, "Hey, I see your Father brought you. Did you know about the meeting ahead of time?"

Jake shook his head, "Nope! He told me when I got home from our adventure. Guess he thought I could use a wise legend to keep me in line."

He grinned in mischief as Seth looked at him questioningly. Jake just shook his head at him and turned to walk with Lily, Quincy, and me, back to the bon-fire.

We chatted and visited until my father, Jackson, cleared his throat and raised his right hand to signal the meeting was beginning. "It is good to see many have made it here tonight. This meeting was set on short notice. I had a dream that told me it was important to bring certain events from our people's history into the light."

Several murmurs ensued around the now larger group of people. I glanced around the bon-fire and noticed several other kids that I knew, who had come into their shape-shifting abilities, that joined us tonight.

Considering Father's dreams, he had always been right in the past events, something told me we're going to hear something vitally important. For no apparent reason, uneasiness settled over me as we listened to him continue.

"Long ago, many of our warriors had traveled in wolf form in a hunting party to bring home meat for our people. During their hunt, they were deep in the woods of what is now known as Olympic National Park. In their wolf forms, they smelled elk blood and went to investigate." Jackson Whistler paused as murmurs started again in excitement through the group of the younger teens. "When the hunting party neared the area, they were spread out. The first man to enter the area was most surprised on this sunny day to find pale men with shimmering skin standing over the elk. When the men turned to see the wolf, the sunshine sparkled off their skin so brightly that it was nearly blinding. But they ignored the hunter in wolf form and returned to the elk to tear at the flesh and drink its blood. The other wolves joined and together and they fought and killed the vampires as a group."

Whispers of vampires sounded out around the bon-fire and fear entered many of the younger teen's eyes as we considered the possibility that vampires could actually exist.

I felt blindsided, my uneasiness increased, "But we have never heard of vampires actually existing before. Haven't they always been considered as made up and folklore?"

Jackson looked directly at me, "Even stories of folklore can hold certain truths, my daughter. My dream was of their return. If it does happen, I would

like our people to be ready. By our gifts of shifting into wolves, the great Q'wati had ensured our people the necessary strength and bravery we would need to overcome these cold ones. They are former humans, but no longer of the living. They drink blood of not only animals, but of unsuspecting humans as well. The legend says that when all the wolf hunters united in confronting the vampires, their strength together helped them in the battle. Make no mistake that this conflict still ensues today as I have seen of their return to these lands. It is a continuing battle that has carried on over the ages, passed on by our people through generations."

The other Elders had remained unusually quiet during the telling of the legend and waited patiently as many of the others seemed fearful and panic seemed to settle over the group.

Casey White-cloud, an Elder and Jake's Father, spoke up, "It has been a long time since any news of these vampires has reached us out here. My grandfather was young when the last vampires entered our lands. Back then, it was just one and the hunters had to tear him apart and burn his remains. Our wolf strength gives us that ability and they can only be killed by taking off their heads or removing their hearts. We have been told to burn their remains to ensure they cannot rise again."

Old Man Mitch agreed. He was the oldest living Quileute still alive, "That is very true. The first such encounter between our people and the vampires was the *Fighting Ground of the Monsters*. The legend is that two monsters met occasionally in a massive battle located near the boundary of the Elwha and the Quileute territory. Both inflicted many wounds on the other and neither could kill the other. These two monsters are the wolves that have fought the vampires over the ages. Since we are not everlasting as the vampires, we rely on our children and our children's children to pass on these legends to prepare the future generations."

Silence surrounded the bon-fire as everyone contemplated the legends and their meaning that they could very possibly be facing a very real danger in the near future.

I was the first to speak as I turned to Father to ask, "Do we have any idea of when, where, or how these vampires will come?" My voice wavered and I grew tense while the uneasiness failed to subside.

Jackson spoke loud enough for all to hear when he replied, "They will come from the Olympic National Forest. They are known to avoid heavily

populated areas, except when searching for something to feed from. According to our legends, they can walk among the sunlight during the day. They choose not to because sunlight touching their skin gives them away. Their eyes are red from consuming human blood and their strength and speed is immeasurable. It is time to train our shape-shifters to prepare for the confrontation. Two hours a day to work on speed, agility, and learning the best attack techniques. I do not know when it will occur, but I suggest we have patrols set up around the reservation of no less than six volunteers at a time. We must all work together for the safety of the people. I will start keeping an eye out for any tale-tell signs in the newspapers and on the news that may alert to their passing."

Everyone seemed a little more at ease with a formed plan of action. Of all the things we were expecting during the meeting, this had never crossed anyone's mind.

Seth spoke up, "I'll volunteer for the first watch!"

Jake grinned in anticipation, "I'll join too!"

I gave them a horrified look as they acted all excited and enthusiastic over it all. "Are you flipping' nuts? This is not some game or joke! This could pose as a real danger for us all!"

Jake smiled sheepishly, "You know me, always up for some action!"

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. "Arg!" I grumbled and shook my head in frustration.

Kyle Hashford, Evangeline's older brother at the age of twenty-two, volunteered, "I'll keep Seth and Jake out of trouble by joining them in the first shift." He is tall and slender with a lean handsome face and short cut black hair.

He glanced at me, as if offering encouragement to make me feel better. I managed to give him a weak and tense smile, appreciating his gesture of kindness.

When Quincy volunteered, I watched as Lily flinched and her face grew pale. "Do you want to join so we can keep an eye on them?" I asked, not really wanting to do it, but feeling I should at least offer.

Lilly turned in amazement, "You'd do that for me?"

Nodding solemnly, "I am not really excited about the idea, mind you, but it would give us the opportunity to keep them out of trouble."

Lily nodded vigorously in agreement.

Jackson had already heard our conversation and hesitated in allowing girls to join.

I stood to confront him as he prepared to tell me no. "You know above all others that I will look out for our people with the same dedication as you have! Do not deny me of this! I may shock you at how capable I really am," I told him with determination and a stubborn set of my head and shoulders. "Ever since I sat among this circle tonight, I have had an uneasy feeling that something isn't right. Do not expect me to hide away in my room while our people are keeping watch over the reservation."

Jackson's eyes widened in surprise at the confession. He knew something he wasn't telling me and figured now was not the time to bring it up. He sighed in frustration and lowered his head as he stated, "You can go. But do not expect me to let you join too regularly. We will have to have many in various shifts. It is a responsibility of all our people capable of shifting and strong enough to join in."

A couple others in their twenties volunteered to join in the first shift and within minutes, we were moving into the brush to shape-shift into our wolf forms.

Lily stayed close to me as we ducked behind a bush together. Lily gasped as I shifted automatically with ease and waited patiently for Lily to do the same. Lily closed her dark brown eyes and stood still for a minute before white fur slowly rippled over her skin and she moved to all fours as her wolf form completed. Lily is a mostly white wolf with gray shading along her back and on top of her head.

When she opened her dark brown eyes, she gave a wolfy grin as she telepathically exclaimed, "I did it! Did you see how much quicker I was that time?"

I lowered my dark black head with silver streaks in an intent and sincere gaze, "That was very good, Lily! You are getting better every time now!"

Turning, I led the way back to the bon-fire to meet the others as they rejoined the group still in their human form. Jackson approached me and

kneeled to bring himself to eye level. "Be careful out there. I'm putting you in charge of the others because I know you to be level headed and quick thinking. Keep them out of trouble and notify me immediately if anything happens."

Deeply touched he had such faith in me, especially since there were some several years older than me. I gave a nod of my black and silver streaked wolf head to indicate I understood the responsibility he was placing on my shoulders.

He nodded in satisfaction, stood back up, and turned to address the other wolves, there were seven wolves standing behind me. "Raven will be in charge. Split up around the reservations borders and check in with each other regularly. I will have a second group assigned to take over in four hours to relieve you so you may go home and rest. Your families will be notified so they will let you sleep in!"

His voice held tension and sadness. His aged face shown worry for them all. I jumped up to encouragingly rest my head against his chest to give him comfort. "Thank you!" I heard him whisper softly into my ear. I nudged him with my nose before returning to all fours and turned to the others in wolf form.

Chapter Three

I looked to Lily, "We stay in areas by two's, Lily, you're with me." Turning to Kyle, a great silver wolf, I told him, "Kyle, team up with Quincy!" Turning to the next, a twenty-one-year-old named Jeff, a tan and gray wolf, "Jeff, you're with Jake." Finally, I turned to a twenty-five-year-old named Gabriel, a solid dark brown wolf, "Gabriel will team up with Seth. Spread out, but try to keep reasonable distance among you and the next group. Since we can all talk telepathically, we should keep each other in the loop of anything that can be suspicious or out of the ordinary."

Whining noises came from them as they telepathically replied in various ways from "Yes Ma'am" to "You got it".

"Good, then let's go!" I decisively turned to bound up the beach and toward the main street. Lily stayed close as the other pairs spread out.