

FULL CIRCLE

He knew me too well.

Read the writing on my heart.

He knew exactly what it would take—

For me to embrace this savagery.

*“However will you choose?” he asks. “You let me go,
and I will kill him.”*

*I lift the gun. Train it at his heart. “I’ve made my
decision.”*

*He does not falter. Doesn’t even blink. “All you have
to do is want to kill me, and you’ll lose yourself.”*

“I know,” I say.

*I squeeze back on the trigger. A silver bullet explodes
from the chamber.*

I have no regrets. . . .

Chapter One

HOWL

FRIDAY NIGHT

You need to do something, Gracie.

My eyes squinted involuntarily at my phone's screen, illuminated too bright in the dark of my bedroom. I'd been staring at the black void between my bed and my ceiling for so long it was hard to focus my vision—and my mind—on the incoming text.

I blinked several times and read the message again: *You need to do something, Gracie. He's going to get himself in real trouble if he doesn't stop.*

I wish I could say that I'd been asleep when the howling started. I knew it was the white wolf without being able to see him. The high, mournful wolf's cry that filled my bedroom now sounded like he was just outside my window—but I knew it came from deep in the forest. He was venturing farther away.

Away from me.

Away from who he used to be.

I'd rolled over and sat up in my bed when the howls started only a few minutes before. I knew it was just after two a.m. without even needing to glance at the dim red numbers of my alarm clock. I'd been willing myself not to check the time every few minutes, not to count down how many hours of rest I could still get before morning—if I could just fall asleep in the first place.

The problem is, it's hard to fall asleep when deep down there's a part of you that desperately doesn't want to ever again.

Because sleep brought on dreams of Daniel. The Daniel I remembered. Dreams so wonderful and tangible that the second I woke up and realized they were just that—dreams—the terribleness of reality came crashing in on me all over again. I didn't know if my sanity could handle it one more time.

Dad and Gabriel had sent me home around eleven o'clock, claiming I needed to get a handle on my sleep debt during the weekend before I was expected to go back to school on Monday. But I think they really sent me away because neither of them could bear to look me in the eye as the hours—days—of searching through book after book on werewolf folklore, shape-shifters mythology, and even scripture, went by and we'd still found nothing.

Nothing at all that could help us change Daniel back.

It had been six nights since the terrible one Daniel

and I had spent imprisoned in the Shadow Kings' warehouse, knowing our deaths would most likely play out in the morning. It had been five days since Daniel had somehow miraculously turned into the great white wolf in order to save me from Caleb's rabid wolf pack. I'd escaped a horrific fate that day—but Daniel hadn't. He'd been trapped in a prison of bone and fur and claws ever since. Stuck in the body of the white wolf.

I could tell with each useless page that was turned that Dad and Gabriel believed more and more that Daniel was going to be stuck forever. And it didn't bode well that he seemed to be more the white wolf than he was *Daniel* with each passing moment.

The first few days after Daniel transformed, he'd followed me everywhere—which meant I pretty much couldn't go *anywhere*, but at least he'd been with me, and I could see him in the white wolf's deep brown eyes.

But two days ago, he'd gotten skittish, and then he'd started to wander away. Into the woods mostly. For a few hours at a time, returning to my backyard when I called for him. But then today my calls had gone unbidden, and he hadn't come back at all.

The forest is claiming him, a harsh voice whispered in my head.

I shook it off, not letting the demon wolf inside of me feed off my doubt. I didn't have the patience for mind games tonight.

Daniel's howling grew louder from the woods, and

my heart ached for him. For us, I'd wondered if his howls were as loud to anyone else, or if my superhearing was just acting up again—that was until the cell phone on my nightstand buzzed with the text from Dad.

Huh. Dad. Texting. I'll never get used to that.

I rubbed my eyes. My sight shifted from my superhuman night vision back to normal a couple of times before I was able to focus on the screen of my phone again. I pecked out a response to Dad's text about my needing to do something.

Me: I know. Are you still at the parish? How loud is it there?

Dad had taken to staying at the parish most nights this past week. Besides doing research, he and Gabriel alternated watching over my brother Jude in his small cell-like den in the parish's basement.

The question as to what to do with Jude had been our first item of business when we'd brought him back from the warehouse with us. I think everyone was surprised when I suggested that we lock him up in the storage cage in the parish basement for observation until we could figure out what exactly was going on inside his head. My brother had been on the run for the last ten months, and he'd eventually joined Caleb's gang of paranormal teens—the same pack that had tried to kill Daniel and me. Jude had been the one who had led the Shadow Kings right to us.

In the end, he'd surrendered. Begged to come back

with us. But relieved as I was to know finally that Jude was safe—I wasn't ready to let him come home. Not until we were sure of his motivations. Not until I knew whether my *brother* was the one who had returned with us, and not just one of Caleb's death dogs.

As surprised as the others had been when I suggested keeping Jude under lock and key for the time being, I was shocked that Dad and Gabriel actually agreed. Only April had protested, but her vote hadn't counted for much.

She hadn't seen the way Jude had stood by and let Caleb try to destroy me. . . .

A new text from Dad interrupted my thoughts: *Yes, still at the parish. The howling is quite loud here.*

That wasn't the answer I was hoping for. The parish was several blocks away. If Daniel's howling was still loud there, that meant the whole town could hear it, too.

Dad: *He's going to get himself killed.*

I know, I typed, my fingers shaking a bit. Rose Crest had a history of "wild dog" attacks—and unearthly howling from the woods surrounding the town would be enough to get people talking. And what they'd talk about were all those rumors about the Markham Street Monster. Rumors that weren't really rumors at all. And then talking would lead to action. . . .

Dad: *You MUST do something to stop him.*

Me: *I'm on it.*

Except, I didn't know if there was anything I *could* do—not if Daniel wasn't responding to me anymore—but I had to at least try. I couldn't let something bad happen to him. Especially after all he'd sacrificed to save me.

I pulled on my jacket over my red flannel pajamas and tucked my phone into my pocket. My tender ankle throbbed as I sank my feet into my tall faux-fur-lined boots. I hoped they were sturdy enough to keep the newly healed fracture from shifting out of place. I slinked quietly down the stairs, even though I was the only one home. Dad had sent Charity and James to spend the week at Aunt Carol's because Mom was . . . somewhere I didn't want to think about now.

I went out the door off the kitchen into our backyard. A light blazed in the house next door—the house that Daniel used to live in all those years ago—and I saw the silhouette of Mr. Dutton standing in the window. He looked in the direction of the forest—no doubt wondering about the source of the wolf's cry that had probably awoken him—but I doubted he could see much with his own light on.

I stood on our back deck until Mr. Dutton moved away from the window. Before he had a chance to turn off the light for a better look outside, I mustered up a few extra ounces of power and took off in a sprint toward the back fence that separated our yard from the encroaching woods. Just before the rosebushes could snag at my

pajama pants, I leaped over the fence. I winced at the shock of pain that ricocheted up from my ankle when my feet hit the ground on the opposite side. But other than that, I'd managed a perfect, almost soundless, landing.

For half a second I thought about how proud Nathan Talbot, my former mentor, would be if I told him about my quiet landing—something that we'd worked on in training. “For such a tiny girl, you land like a pile of rocks,” he'd teased me once, his cheeks dimpling with that warm smile of his.

And then, as if he knew I'd allowed myself even to think about him, my phone buzzed with a new text.

Talbot: *Do you need any help?*

I dropped my phone back in my pocket without responding. If I could manage it, I was never going to talk—or even text—with him again.

Talbot was the last person I'd ask for help now. The last person I'd trust. *And all that crap that he'd said about loving me . . .*

I took in a deep breath and told myself not to give Talbot another thought. Daniel needed me, and I had to find him before anyone else in town—like Deputy Marsh with his rifle—decided to go looking for the source of those terrible howls.

A patch of bushes rustled off to my right. I whirled at the sound—realizing I wouldn't have noticed it without my superhearing—and crouched defensively. Panic pounded in my ears.

A large brown wolf stepped out from between the bushes onto the path in front of me, followed closely by a slightly smaller gray wolf. Their eyes glinted as they looked up at me. I nodded to them, trying to hide my disappointment that neither of them was the wolf I was looking for—but at least they weren't a couple of local hunters.

The two wolves separated and sat at attention on either side of the rocky path. Like sentinels, awaiting my passage. Only five days ago, these two wolves had been part of the pack that had been intent on killing me at Caleb's beckoning; now they bowed their furry heads in reverence as I passed between them.

While I questioned my brother's intentions, these wolves were another quandary altogether. I mean, I still didn't quite understand why they treated me this way—like I was practically their queen.

I'd asked Gabriel about it a couple of days ago. "As I told you in the warehouse, Daniel is their alpha now," he'd explained as we stood in Dad's office together, watching as the white wolf lay next to an untouched bowl of canned stew I'd set out for him by my dad's desk. "And apparently, Daniel has done something to choose you as his . . . mate. The wolves recognize this somehow and have accepted you as their alpha female."

And of course it turned out that my dad, the pastor, was standing behind us, and even though he was usually

a pretty even-keeled guy, he went totally nuts over the word *mate*.

Until that moment, I'd completely pushed aside the worry of explaining to my father what had happened during that dark night Daniel and I had spent together in the dungeon of the warehouse. But the look on his slightly purplish face made it clear that an explanation was needed before his imagination got the better of him. "Daniel . . . kind of proposed to me," I'd explained. "Before Caleb threw me in the wolf pit. And I said yes."

"Ah, that would explain it," Gabriel had said, as if getting engaged at nearly eighteen was a perfectly normal thing to do.

But Dad's face went an even darker shade of violet, and he started going on and on about how young we were and how even though he and my mom had gotten married when they were twenty, it was no excuse for such irresponsible behavior on my part. And because I hadn't been able to get a word in explanation-wise, I'd finally shouted, "I only said yes because I thought we were going to die! I wanted him to be happy."

My dad had closed his mouth with a snap, and his eyes got all shiny with tears. He reached out and grabbed me in a death-grip hug at the reminder that he'd almost lost me only a few days before. With a pang of guilt, I glanced back at the white wolf that lay next to the desk with his eyes shut, seemingly asleep.

I could only hope now that it had been purely a

coincidence that Daniel had started his wanderings into the forest only a few hours later.

I used my guilt, and the adrenaline created by the sudden appearance of the two wolves, to muster up enough power to start running despite the pain in my leg. I'd been able to use my abilities to speed up the healing process of the injuries I'd suffered because of Caleb's cruelty, but Gabriel had cautioned me to take it easy. I ignored the echo of his warnings and jogged along the rocky path in the direction of the howls. The two wolves loped behind me, so close I could feel their warm breath against my back. I dug down deeper inside of me for more strength and picked up my speed, sprinting faster and faster until the two wolves dropped behind me—but I knew they still followed.

I ignored the ache in my lungs from the crisp, autumn air and the searing sensation in my ankle, and veered off the dirt path into the thick of the forest's trees, with only Daniel's mournful howls to guide me. I melted into the run, let it take me over for fear that I'd lose all steam if I slowed even a little. I was nothing but a pounding heart, sharp breaths in and out, and feet that slammed against the forest floor.

I didn't want to be anything else anymore.

Not without Daniel.

If it hadn't been for a sharp bark from one of the wolves behind me, I probably wouldn't have snapped back into reality in time to stop myself from sprinting

right over the edge of the ravine. With the warning, I grabbed onto the crooked branch of an old tree just as my boots slipped on the muddy cliff's ledge. I steadied myself against the trunk and looked out over the twenty-foot drop that lay right in front of me. The ravine was about another twenty feet wide. I realized as I scanned the terrain that this was the same spot where Baby James had taken his near-fatal fall last Thanksgiving.

The warm, tingling memory of Daniel miraculously saving my little brother in this very place filled my mind—only to be tarnished by the sight of the great white wolf standing on a rocky outcropping on the other side of the ravine. His head arched back as he howled up at the three-quarter moon like he was desperate for it to answer his cries. The shrillness of his howling screams pierced my oversensitive eardrums, and I fought the urge to cover my ears.

“Daniel!” I shouted, not sure the sound of my shaky voice could penetrate his cries. I pushed myself up taller against the bowed tree trunk, clinging to it for support. My legs burned with lactic acid, and my ankle kept trying to bend in the wrong direction—threatening to buckle. If I thought it had hurt when it was first broken, that was nothing compared to the extreme stabbing that shot through my ankle, up into my body, now that the adrenaline from my run had washed out of me. “Daniel, stop!”

The white wolf's head arched farther back, and

another desperate howl ripped through the night, louder and more deranged sounding than ever. The two wolves behind me picked up Daniel's cry and joined in with their own howls. *Great, just, great.* Surely, the whole town would be at their windows now. I imagined bullets being locked into the chambers of more than one shotgun.

"Get!" I snapped at the two wolves that had followed me here, and stomped my good foot in their direction. "Get out of here, now!" I said, harsher than I'd meant to. The two whined and backed away with their tails low to the ground. When they were gone, I turned back to the sight of the howling white wolf.

"Daniel!" I screamed louder, my voice echoing his desperation. "Daniel, please. Dan—" A sinking feeling pulled at my stomach, and I realized that if by chance I wasn't the only one in the woods searching for the howling wolf, I shouldn't go shouting Daniel's name. "Stop, please . . ." I left off his name, even though I hated to. Like doing so was acknowledging that he wasn't "Daniel" anymore.

"Please stop! You have to stop this, now." My voice caught in the back of my throat, and I clutched my hand over my mouth. I couldn't let myself cry. "Please. Stop before you get hurt," I whispered against my fingers.

The white wolf's howl trailed off suddenly, and when I looked out across the ravine, I saw him staring at me. His furry head cocked with curiosity. I met his glinting

eyes for a moment, and then he backed up slowly on his four paws.

“No,” I said. “Don’t leave.” I held my hand up as if to signal “stop”—the same motion I learned when training my old three-legged dog, Daisy. “Don’t run away again, please.”

The wolf took two steps forward to the edge of his side of the ravine and looked at me again with that curious tilt of his head. *Did he still recognize me?* Hope burned in my chest, and I stayed as still as I could so as not to frighten him away. And I swear, in the silence that engulfed the dark woods now that his howling had stopped, I thought I could hear his heart beating.

His solitary heartbeat. Not two heartbeats like every other werewolf I knew. I still didn’t know what that meant. I still didn’t know *what* he had become.

For a moment it looked like the Daniel wolf contemplated making the jump over the ravine to get to my side as he crouched back slightly on his hind legs.

“Come,” I motioned to him. “Please, Daniel,” I said softly. “I need you. We need each other.”

The Daniel wolf seemed to startle at the sound of his name. He dropped my gaze, and my heart felt like it fell right into the depths of the ravine as I watched him turn away from me.

“No!” I shouted, both of my hands extended as if I could reach out and grab him, stop him, as he bounded

away into the trees, deeper than we'd ever ventured together in these woods before.

For half a second I contemplated trying to go after him—trying to jump the ravine, even if I didn't have the strength to make it in one piece. Anything to be near him again. But without the support of my hands against the tree trunk to hold me up, my ankle finally gave out, and I collapsed at the base of the tree.

I pulled my knees into my chest and listened for the howls to start up again from some unreachable part of the forest, counting my own lonely heartbeats as the minutes passed and no sound followed. A sigh of overwhelming exhaustion shuddered through me—mixed with relief that the howling had stopped and remorse that I wasn't able to get Daniel to come back to me—and for the first time since we escaped Caleb's warehouse, I allowed myself to cry.

I let out a string of long sobs against the forest floor until a terrible voice whispered inside my head, *You're losing him. And there's nothing you can do.*

Another wail tried to escape my throat, but I swallowed it back down. "No," I told the monster in my head. I pushed myself up and wiped the muddy tears from my face, hating myself for giving in to that weakness. "Daniel and I have been through too much, we've come too far, and I am *not* going to lose him. I won't let that happen."

No matter the cost.