



*Books by Skye Lewis*

LIFE FULL OF EMOTIONS – INCIPIENT EMOTIONS

LIFE FULL OF EMOTIONS – RECURRING EMOTIONS

LIFE FULL OF EMOTIONS – RELENTLESS EMOTIONS

LIFE FULL OF EMOTIONS – JOURNEY FULL OF EMOTIONS

LIFE OF EMOTIONS – FINAL EMOTIONS

RAVEN'S PHOENIX

*skye-lewis.com*

# Raven's phoenix

A YA fantasy novel by  
Skye Lewis

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*For Charles, Jordy, my family, friends and the DG community,  
those who kept believing in me  
and for my cat who kept me company  
at the right moment*



# Chapter one

The wind blows hard, the storm increases. Chased by villagers, a black-clad shadow runs through the woods. The torches of the villagers make the trees light up while the sound of the wet mud can be heard. Someone committed a murder, pushed someone off the bell tower. The victim? Unknown. The perpetrator? Unrecognisable. But in the end, everyone will know her name: Raven.

Dressed in black clothes with black, long hair and white skin, she's diametrically opposed to the man who experimented on her. She had one opportunity to escape and there she was, so close to her freedom. She looks down at her body covered in burns and scars. They'll always stay visible, for as long as she draws breath.

'Stand still!'

An infernal voice reverberates across the plateau on the top floor of the bell tower. It's a dead end. Behind the wall, a depth of more than thirty-five meters.

'You can't escape, Raven; you are and remain mine.'

She looks down and knows there's no escape attempt left. Finding a way out seems pointless. Or she's caught again, or she jumps to her death. The scientist walks over to her, his posture seems threatening. She looks at his movements, tries to predict his actions. He walks closer, ready to enclose her. He knows she won't jump. According to him, she's too weak for that. He wants to grab her, but she dives out of the way as she hooks his leg with her foot. He falls over the wall, his head hits the edge. His last scream echoes through the night before his body hits the ground, the sound of it goes straight through her soul. He's right; she's a monster. Cursed. A murderer.

Seventeen years ago, Raven was born. Her parents were murdered after her birth, their daughter taken away by the one who killed them: the scientist she just killed. He tortured her, experimented on her. She barely spoke, ate and drank too little and didn't fight back. For seventeen years, she saw no other person than that one scientist, that one murderer. For seventeen years, she was his property.

The villagers take care of his body as they look up. Raven looks over the edge, her hand covers her mouth.

'That witch pushed this poor man for no reason!'

Torches are held in the air, knives sharpened and pitchforks taken away from the hay bales. Running down the stairwell, Raven manages to get outside through the wooden door at the back of the bell tower. Followed by the villagers as they hunt for her, she tries to make her way through the woods. She hears screams behind her, angry people who want justice for the death of an innocent man, at least in their eyes. An arrow ends up in Raven's shoulder. She doesn't have time to remove it as more arrows make their way to her. She tries to avoid them as best she can. She looks for cover behind the waterfall. Her clothes are pitch black; the water transparent, bad idea. The villagers have her in their sights as she spots a cave. Without hesitation, she throws the long fold of her dress over her face. She can only hope it'll be good enough to cover her snow-white skin. She lowers herself as she feels the wall graze her cheek before she hits the ground. Her heart beats fast as she sees the villagers run by, the torches' lights fade. The footsteps get further away from her, but she wants to wait until there are no more sounds. Only silence will reassure her to leave the cave and travel on.

It's quiet; even the crickets are silent. She shivers as she sits in the cave. The walls she leans against and the ground she sits on are extremely cold. She tells herself it's safe to climb out and gets up, climbing up the wall as she listens. There's no wind, no footsteps. It's her only chance to flee. She climbs up as she uses the cracks in the wall, though the arrow in her shoulder makes it hard for her to pull herself up. She gets her left foot stuck in a crack and uses her right foot to push herself up to the edge. She peeks, it seems safe. She uses all her strength and unharmed arm to reach the surface. She pants, her hands on her knees as she stands safely on the ground. She touches her cheek to try and find the cut, her finger now covered in her own blood. She tries to walk but limps straight away. She must've hurt her foot as it was clamped in the wall. She lowers her dress after checking her foot, hoping no one sees the black tattoo on her leg. She walks away from the cave, still shivering as she searches for weapons to defend herself with against the monsters hiding in the woods.

It's full moon as Raven sees a tree stump in the distance. She staggers over to it, her foot trails behind her. She sits down on it and reaches for the arrow in her shoulder, ready to pull it out as she hears rustling in the bushes. She lies behind the tree stump, hoping no one has seen her. Then the sounds stop. She peeks over the edge to find out whom or what's close to her. She feels a drop on her head and wipes it off, a



long thread of spit sticks to her hand. She hears a deep, ragged panting above her as she turns her head. A werewolf with bright green eyes looks at her, his mouth opened, his teeth exposed. There's blood on the left side of his mouth, he just ate. She doesn't move. He may think she's no longer alive if she stays still. The werewolf howls as she scrambles to her feet, running away. He chases after her, his growling can be heard. She doesn't dare to look back, doesn't want to know the exact distance between her and the bloodthirsty werewolf. She gets trapped in a large net that lifts her far above the ground. The werewolf stands up against the tree as he tries to hit her with his claw, but he can't reach her. A bow shoots an arrow, which flies past the werewolf's head. The werewolf turns around, there's no one near them. He looks up at Raven and runs away. She looks around in the darkness, her heart pounds in her throat, the fear consumes her. She doesn't know who shot that arrow and realises it could be someone who wants her dead. After all, he or she didn't hit the werewolf.

'Who's there?' she asks confidently.

She's scared to get a reply, but has to know who's there. Then she hits the ground, hard, flat on her back. The arrow goes deeper into her flesh, the end of it sticks out of her shoulder. She bites her own hand as she tries not to scream. She lies on top of the net, unsure how it happened. She hears someone coming. She crawls back until she feels the tree behind her. She can't move, she can't escape, the pain unbearable. A shadow walks over to Raven as he puts his bow behind his back. The shadow comes closer, the moonlight reveals his face.

'Are you okay?'

A hand reaches out to her. She looks up. A friendly, young face appears with short, light brown hair, bright blue eyes and a scar on his cheek. Though he seems a little bit older than her.

'The arrow, it's stuck in your flesh, isn't it?'

He looks at the arrow; his face right next to hers. She hears his breathing in her ear.

'Why's there an arrow in your shoulder?'

'That's none of your business.'

He laughs as he helps her up. She can't stand on her own feet and staggers. He puts an arm around her waist, steadying her.

'Gabriel. And you are?'

'Raven.'

'You're seriously injured. Let's go to my cabin, I can help you.'

'How do I know I can trust you? For all I know you might try to kidnap me.'

'I could've shot you, but I didn't. Neither of you.'

'So, you're not a murderer?'

'I try not to be, I only injure people or warn them.'

He wraps his arm around Raven and helps her towards his cabin, deeply hidden in the woods. A small campfire burns in front of a chair, which faces the fire and the river. Gabriel takes her to the porch. He opens the door and helps her inside.

'I hope it's to your liking.'

'It's a lot warmer in here than outside.'

He chuckles as he helps her towards the sofa before leaving the room. She stops shivering as the inviting warmth of the cabin reaches her skin, ridding her of her goosebumps. She looks at the photos on the wall as she spots his face. There's another person standing next to him on every photo she sees. But there's no family photo. She then spots his wooden bookcase, filled with books about spells, mythical beings and manuals for weapons. She recognises some books, especially the ones about mythical beings. A hunter seems to be his profession. Gabriel comes back with a rag, a bucket and some bandages.

'Are you allowing me to remove the arrow?'

'Do you even know how to do that?'

'I'm pretty experienced, believe it or not.'

Gabriel wraps the rag around the end of the arrow. He looks at her as he asks for a sign that she's ready. She nods. He pulls the arrow out in one attempt, blood gushes out. Gabriel puts pressure on the wound as she remains silent. She's used to it, to suffer in pain. He puts a bandage around her wound as she looks at him from the corner of her eye. The scar on his cheek makes her curious. Is it a battle scar or something else? Is it new or old? He notices that she's looking at him and smiles at her.

'I assume you want to know the story behind my scar?'

'Only if you want to tell me.'

He cleans the rag in the bucket as the water turns red. He rinses it out and continues his obligation as he focuses on the wounds in her face. Her shoulder hurts, but she hides it; a trauma that haunts her. If she showed the scientist she was hurting, she'd receive more pain. But he gave her something worse than the pain she endured: anxiety.

Gabriel stands up as he grabs a new, clean rag from the kitchen. Once he comes back, he notices her pale face.

'Maybe you should lie down.'

'I'm fine.'

He sits down on her other side and sees various scars and burns in her neck. He raises her hair to take a better look, but she slaps his hand away. She lowers her hair.

'How did you get those burns?'

'It's nothing.'

'It certainly is, who did this to you?'

She wonders if she can trust this stranger. He may have helped her, but who says he's not a traitor who wants to win her trust? He could hand her over to the peelers any minute.

'I'll start. I'll tell you about my scar and you'll tell me about those burns in your neck. Deal?'

'Sounds like a fair exchange.'

Gabriel looks at her as he folds his hands, sighing deeply.

'I met a grown man a few weeks ago. I had no idea who he was, but he strolled through the woods, mumbling that he was in danger. I was out collecting wood as I heard him. So, I studied him while hiding in the bushes. It was almost midnight as there was a full moon. I never realised that the phenomenon was true, so I walked up to him to help him. He yelled that I had to stay away from him and ran away. I thought that he was confused, so I chased after him. The clouds disappeared and the moon shined in its full glory as he collapsed. I walked up to him as he transformed into a werewolf. It was a horrible sight honestly. The way he grew hair, how his body changed in an entirely different shape...' He sighs. 'The man slashed my cheek with his claw and ran away.'

She needs time to process everything he just told her. She then realises that she met the werewolf before.

'Is that the same werewolf who just chased me?'

'Yes, but I can't kill him. He's confused, anxious. He's not dangerous.'

'I like the way you think.'

'What do you mean?'

She blushes.

'Most villagers consider every human, monster or mythical being they come across as dangerous, but they never think about the fact that they're simply doomed to be that way. Completely harmless.'

'Something tells me that what you just said, has something to do with the burns in your neck.'

'I don't know if that's the case.'

'What happened?'

She lowers the folds of her dress as she tries to hide her other scars. She sighs deeply. She wants to keep wearing her cloak so she can hide her story, let it be unknown, afraid to be condemned. But she somehow feels safe with Gabriel, at ease.

'I don't know where to start.'

'Where every story starts, right at the beginning.'

She feels the tears well up as she tries to hide them from him.

'I was taken from my parents after I was born. The man who took me away, murdered my parents as he kidnapped me. He took me to his workshop as he started his experiments on me. I've been through a lot you know.' She swallows. 'I experienced electric shocks, weapons tested on me, set on fire, drinking elixirs and mixers, getting whiplashes.'

Gabriel swallows.

'Why did he take you?'

'He never said why. He only told me how he killed my parents.'

'Why would he do that?' he asks disgustedly.

'I don't know. But I do remember asking him why he told me in the first place. He said it'd help to trigger something, but it never did. 'You serve a greater purpose than you can even imagine', is what he told me countless times.'

He looks at her scars.

'Is that why you don't care about the pain you're feeling now? You're used to it?'

'It belongs to me, pain.'

He looks at her cloak and the dress underneath. He wants to lift it so he can take a closer look at her legs, but she slaps him again.

'I'm not doing anything to you. I just want to examine your injuries.'

She hesitates before she takes her cloak off. He looks shocked at the wounds that appear on her arms and legs. Then he perceives something else as he sees the fresh wounds on her wrists.

'When was the last time he hurt you?'

'This morning.'

'How?'

'He tied my hands with chains, hang me upside down and gave me electric shocks.'

He moves his finger closer to her burn. As soon as he touches it, she gets a relapse from the shock she suffered a few hours earlier. He grabs her by her arms as he looks at her.

'Calm down, you're not getting a shock. Raven, do you hear me?'

She looks at him, her eyes are wide open. Her body trembles, her breathing uncontrolled. He rubs her arms as he tries to avoid touching her injuries, hoping to calm her down.

'What did that man do to you and why?'

He looks at her as he hopes that she can break her own trance. His bright blue eyes enchant her, the panic attack fades. She breathes heavily as she wraps her arms around his neck. He rubs her back as she breaks, tears roll down her cheeks. She never dared to cry before; she had kept it all inside. For seventeen years. Every tear that he saw made her suffer an electric shock. But Gabriel doesn't do that; he won't hurt people. He gently pushes her away from him and looks into her black eyes.

'You must rest and strengthen your power. I'll prepare a meal for you so you can sleep afterwards, okay?'

'I was never allowed to eat, let alone sleep.'

'He's gone, you're safe.'

He runs a hand through her black hair and stands up. He walks to the kitchen, but stops in the doorway. He turns to look at her. That girl he found in the woods; she's pained incomprehensibly. She's beautiful, even with all the wounds and scars she possesses. He feels the urge to protect her as he realises that she's dependent on him. He'll become her warrior, he's her destiny. He walks up to the kitchen stove and turns it on. Then he grabs a pan to make her a meal. He looks at her to make sure she's still awake. She stares ahead and touches the wounds on her body occasionally. He thinks about what she went through all those years and realises he wants revenge. That man must pay for his actions, for what he did to her. He looks back at the pan as he pours the soup into two bowls. He then takes some bread and walks back into the living room. He hands her the bowl as she looks up at him.

'Bread with soup?'

'I'm sorry. You deserve a real meal, but I don't have enough coins.'

'I appreciate it nonetheless. It's a lot more than what he gave me, so it's very luxurious to me.'

She eats it, a smile appears on her face. He looks at her as he's kind of surprised about the way she eats. She eats like a lady-in-waiting.

'How can you be so strong, while you're malnourished and weak?'

'I possessed the power of hope.'

She slurps the soup with a bright grin as he continues to look at her. He's astonished about the way she uses her fighting spirit to stay strong. Rarely does he see someone who's battered, but hasn't lost

hope on a better outcome. He takes the bowl from her once they're both finished. He grabs a blanket and resituates the cushions on the sofa.

'Here, a blanket to keep you warm.'

'I've never had a blanket before, let alone a bed. Or in this case, a sofa.'

'I hope you're feeling comfortable enough.'

'More than even.'

She lies down as he covers her in the blanket. The warmth embraces her body as her skin discolours, which makes him happy. Her skin shows a neutral colour, no longer pale. She closes her eyes as she drifts off to sleep. He looks at her, wanting to watch over her, protect her against any dangers. He grabs his sketchbook and draws her facial features.

A shriek echoes through the woods. The werewolf's back. Gabriel stands in front of his window as he looks outside. The full moon reflects onto the werewolf's fur, showing he's covered in blood. Gabriel opens the door and carefully steps outside. He walks towards the werewolf as he looks up at the full moon. Gabriel steps on a twig. The werewolf turns around.

'Easy, I come in peace', he says as he raises his hands in the air. Gabriel walks closer to him. The werewolf wants to scare him away as he raises his claw. Gabriel stops, not showing any fear.

'It's okay, I'm not here to harm you.'

The moon weakens as the werewolf gazes up to it. He looks back at Gabriel, who looks at him with a friendly expression. He points to the wound on the werewolf's chest.

'Did someone hurt you?'

The werewolf looks at his bloodied chest. He changes back in his human form as the full moon disappears. An adult man emerges, though he seems quite young. The blood seeps down his bare chest. He looks at Gabriel.

'I'm dangerous.'

'No, you're confused, not a threat. Not for me, not for yourself. Come with me, let me help you.'

'Why should I trust you?'

'The girl you met in the woods? She stays with me.'

He thinks back about the girl he saw earlier. She thought he wanted to kill her, but he wanted to help her with the arrow. If only he wasn't a werewolf, she would've let him.

'Where did that arrow come from? The one in her shoulder?'

'I don't know, but she's going through a difficult time. Just like you.'

They hear a scream coming from inside Gabriel's cabin. The man looks at him.

'Is that her?'

He doesn't even answer as he runs back to the cabin, the man follows him. Once inside they find Raven sitting against the wall on the floor, face buried in her hands, knees raised. Gabriel kneels beside her, her body trembles from yet another attack.

'Can you get a wet rag from the kitchen?'

The man rushes to his kitchen, grabs the bloody rag that Gabriel used before and wets it. Gabriel takes it from him and rubs her neck. She stops trembling as she calms down. She looks up.

'Who're you?'

She looks at the man who stands in front of her, a bloodied wound on his chest. He runs a hand through his medium, red-brown strands before he takes a deep breath.

'My name's Thorn.'

'Are you the werewolf?'

'He's not dangerous, if that's what you mean', Gabriel replies.

'I know, I read about him.'

'You did?' Thorn asks confused.

'Well, sort of. I know you exist, but that's about it.'

'What did you read about me?'

'Not much. The book I read stated that it's just myths, legends that aren't true. But I guess you proved that book wrong.'

He laughs as Gabriel removes a strand of hair out of her face. He helps her up and brings her back to the sofa, squeezing her shoulder before he grabs a chair. He gestures that Thorn should take a seat and grabs some first aid supplies. He kneels in front of him as he cleans his wound.

'How did you become a werewolf?' Thorn hears Raven ask.

He looks at her. An innocent girl, who apparently suffered a lot, wants to get to know him. The fact that someone shows interest in his story is extraordinary to him. He's overwhelmed for a second before he answers her question.

'When I turned twenty-one, I changed into a werewolf. It was the night that the first full moon occurred after a decade.'

'So, it's your second birthday?'

'You could say that, though it doesn't feel that way.'

They laugh for a short moment as Gabriel gets up on his feet.

'Let me find you a shirt you can borrow.'

'That's nice of you, thank you.'

Gabriel leaves as Thorn looks at Raven.

'Why was there an arrow in your shoulder?'

She's scared to tell that she killed someone. What if they're angry with her? What if they want to turn her in? She finally feels safe after seventeen years. She doesn't want to throw that away.

'They chased me.'

'What? Why?'

Though Gabriel interrupts them as he walks back in, handing Thorn a shirt. He pulls the shirt on as Gabriel sits down next to Raven.

'Shall I explain it to him? Why you had an attack?'

'If it's not a problem, then yes please.'

Gabriel tells Thorn about all the scars Raven has, all the suffering she experienced. While Thorn listens, he realises that his mutation doesn't seem to be a real punishment, he now understands why she looks so fragile.

'But that arrow, you said they chased you. Why and by whom?'

'You don't have to tell us, Raven. But we may be able to help you', Gabriel says as he notices her doubting.

He wants to reassure her. She sighs as she looks at the two men.

'Do you promise to keep this a secret? To not bail on me?'

'I'm a werewolf, it doesn't get any worse than that.'

She chuckles as Gabriel looks at her, rubbing her shoulder.

'I killed the man who hurt me.'

Gabriel looks at her as he doesn't show any signs of judgement. No, he seems relieved even.

'Can I admit that I would've liked to strangle him with my bare hands? For everything he did to you?'

'You don't dislike me?'

'On the contrary.' He looks into her eyes. 'Maybe it's a weird question but, how did you know that what he did to you, wasn't okay?'

'It didn't feel normal. I heard children laugh outside when I stayed in my cell during the day. I heard fathers talk to their children and ask them what they wanted to do, what they wanted to eat. I even heard them ask if their child was okay when they fell. And he never asked me that. He only cared about the experiments.'

'How did you kill him?' Thorn asks out of the blue.

His face shows kindness, which gives Raven the courage to tell her whole story.



'I managed to escape through a passage that he forgot to close. In fact, he even told me where it was. Which is weird, considering he kept me there for so long.' She nervously scratches her arm. 'He actually told me where we were, what the village looked like, where the woods were. As if he planned my escape.' She feels Gabriel's hand on top of hers, which makes her smile. 'Just before I escaped, he electrocuted me. I was weak, but that door was my only chance to escape. I ran away and fled to the bell tower in the village. I climbed the stairwell to the peak. However, I couldn't go anywhere. I couldn't jump as it'd kill me, I couldn't sneak past him to run back down.' Her hand shakes, though Gabriel holds it. 'He came closer and I literally froze. I had to act fast, so I hooked him with my foot and he fell over the edge. The villagers saw it all happen. They chased me; said I was a murderer of an innocent man.'

'But he was far from innocent', Gabriel says.

'I wish they knew that before they shot that arrow in my shoulder.'

'Do you know who it was?' Gabriel asks.

He wants to know. Maybe he knows that person, maybe he can avenge the pain he or she caused.

'No, I was scared to turn around; I wanted to keep my face unrecognisable.'

'If they don't know who you are, you can safely return to the village. Only if it's necessary, of course', Thorn says.

'Let's hope it's not necessary to return', Gabriel answers.

He looks at Thorn as he replies to his comment with a hint of anger. He walks towards the sofa as he asks Raven to stand up. He expands the sofa and takes another blanket to make a second bed on the attached piece.

'Thorn, you can take my bed, I'll sleep next to Raven. If you're okay with that?' Gabriel asks.

'Sure, no problem', he says, though he's surprised by his sudden offer. 'Are you sure it's not a problem? I don't want to intrude.'

'I insist.'

Thorn nods as Gabriel points him to the bedroom. Thorn lies down in Gabriel's bed as Gabriel lies next to her. He makes sure to give her enough space.

'Why are you helping us?'

Gabriel looks at her as she asks that.

'I'm a caring and protective kind of person.'

'There must be more than that.'

He chuckles as he nods.

'I help people in need; following in my father's footsteps. He always took care of everything and everyone, always saw the good in someone. He's my hero. I want to continue his legacy.'

'Is he dead?'

'He drowned in the river behind the cabin.'

'I'm sorry to hear that.'

She wants to grab his hand, but a part of her stops her.

'Someone drowned him, but I don't know who. He was very good in swimming; he was the best actually. Plus, the current isn't even that strong. Somebody killed him, on purpose.'

'Why would someone do that to a man like your father, with a heart that big?'

'I wish I could answer that.'

He turns to her so he can look at her.

'Why did he kill your parents?'

'He wanted to prevent that my parents would ever find me, said I needed to focus on the task ahead of me. They'd only distract me.'

'But why did he take you?'

'If I knew, I'd answer that.'

They laugh before she closes her eyes. He smiles at her and looks at her for a short period of time before he falls asleep too.

## Chapter two

Gabriel wakes up early the next day. He gets out of bed, looks at Raven and walks to the kitchen to prepare breakfast. She slept through the night, which is good news. He hears footsteps and looks at Thorn as he enters the kitchen.

'Did she have another attack?'

'No, she didn't wake up once.'

Thorn looks at her, then turns back to Gabriel.

'Aren't you afraid that I'll eat you when there's a full moon?'

'No, there are good and evil beings. You're one of the good ones.'

'You trust people within seconds without knowing them. That might be your downfall.'

'I sense whether someone's trustworthy or not. I've learned that from my father.'

'A good quality in my opinion. You could even save lives with it.'

'You're right, I didn't think of it like that. Are your parents also werewolves?'

Thorn doesn't meet his eyes as he sighs.

'No, I'm an orphan. They told me about my fate in the orphanage. At first, I didn't believe it, I mean who would. However, I noticed my body getting hairier around the day I turned twenty-one. The wisest decision I could make was for me to leave. I didn't know how bloodthirsty I'd become.'

'Your parents brought you there?'

Thorn nods, though he seems uncertain in a way.

'The head of the orphanage told me that growing up in a safe environment was the best decision my parents made. It reduced the odds that I'd turn evil as a werewolf.'

'It worked apparently. When did they tell you?'

'When I turned eighteen.'

'I can imagine it shocked you.'

'In a way. I was mostly afraid to injure my friends and family in the orphanage. I therefore ran away. Though it was also time for me to leave the orphanage as I'm an adult now.'

He laughs before he looks at Gabriel.

'How old are you actually?'

'Nineteen, almost twenty.'

'And Raven?'

'I don't know, we haven't spoken about anything else but her past.'

'Could she also be a being? Maybe she doesn't know that?'

'Perhaps, although I don't know what she could or should be.'

'You said she was imprisoned for experiments. Who did that to her?'

'I don't know, she didn't mention any name or specific profession.'

'I've never heard anything about a murder, let alone the kidnapping of a baby.'

'Me neither. That man managed to keep everything well hidden.'

They hear movement in the living room as they see Raven stretch her arms. Gabriel finishes preparing the breakfast and sits down next to Thorn. Raven rubs her eyes as she joins him. Gabriel gives them a plate with bread and a small slice of meat.

'Were you able to get some sleep?' he asks her.

'Yes, two hours of sleep. Thank you.'

'Thank you for what?'

'For letting us stay and feeding us. Thank you for that.'

Gabriel smiles at her as Raven eats.

'How old are you, if I may ask?' Thorn asks.

She looks at him as she nods. She swallows the bite she was chewing on.

'If he hasn't lied to me about my age, I should be seventeen.'

'You don't know for sure?' Gabriel asks.

'I've never celebrated my birthday. Each year, on the first of January, he said I was a year older. That's all I know.'

'He never told you which day you were born?'

'No, he said it was too dangerous to know.'

'So, let me get this straight. Your supposedly birthday, is on the first day of the new year, but you never celebrated that?'

'No, I may be a grown up already. I'm simply not sure.'

'We should figure that out. If you're already an adult, you're free.'

'Free of what?'

'You know, guardianship. As soon as you turn eighteen, you're free to go wherever you want. No one will stop you.'

'You mean living on my own? Not in an orphanage?'

'Yes, you don't need to. However, if they find out you're not an adult without a caregiver, there's still a chance you'll be taken to an orphanage.'

'That man, does he have family?' Thorn asks.

'He never said anything about that, so I don't think so.'

'We need to keep in mind that people might know about your existence and will look for you. There's a chance he gave them custody over you if anything would happen to him.'

'Do you think I'm in danger?'

'Let's hope you're not.'

Raven sighs as she stops eating. Her appetite fades like snow melts when the sun shines. Her hands shake when she thinks about everything that happened to her in the past seventeen years. She thought it was all over, for a moment she thought she was safe with Gabriel and Thorn. That seems like false hope. He may have family lurking in the shadows, ready to kidnap her. Gabriel puts his hand on hers and looks at her.

'You're safe here, okay? I won't let anything happen to you.'

'Why would you protect me? I'm a stranger, dangerous even.'

'You're anything but dangerous', Thorn says.

She looks at him.

'But there's something about me, why else did he take me?'

'Whatever that may be, I promise you I won't let you down.'

Gabriel squeezes her hand as he looks her straight in the eyes.

'The same goes for me.'

'I can't thank you enough, both of you.'

She tries her best not to cry as Gabriel pulls his hand back.

'What was the most painful thing he did to you?'

'Whipping and shocks. And some burns he gave me.'

'The burn marks on your arms?' Thorn asks disgustedly.

'Those didn't hurt that much. These do.'

She lifts her dress before she takes it off, the burns on her legs appear. Though those aren't the ones she means. She wears a shirt underneath her dress, covered in blood. She turns around as she reveals her bare back covered in burns. Some are superficial burns, some second-degree. And there's a few third-degree burns. He shakes his head as he can't imagine how much pain she suffered. He grabs a jar from his cupboard.

'This will soothe the pain and heal the wounds. May I?'

'Only if you're careful.'

'Of course, I will. I promise.'

He opens the jar, puts his finger in the thick substance and touches the first wound. She screams as she feels the pain; it burns. A tear rolls down her cheek as she lowers her head. She trembles; her hands turn bright red. Thorn kneels in front of her.

'Calm down, Raven. You're safe, okay? He'll never hurt you again. Find the strength to break free.'

He lifts her chin up at him, her black eyes meet his brown eyes.

'Fight against the pain and fear. You can do it, Raven. You're strong.'

Thorn looks at Gabriel and gestures that he should continue the treatment. She closes her eyes as she tries to ignore the pain. Though it reduces, she still feels the fresh burns on her skin. She tries to stay conscious as she feels dizzy. Thorn holds her hand and every time she squeezes his, he rubs hers. Gabriel closes the jar and lowers her shirt.

'It's done.'

She opens her eyes and looks at Thorn and Gabriel as tears roll down her cheeks. They look at each other, worried about her. With every touch, she suffers a panic attack. She's fragile, broken and weak.

'I'll go to the village, buy some clothes. I'll be right back.'

Thorn nods as Gabriel wants to leave. Then she realises where he's going.

'Don't go to the village! They'll try to convince you that I'm a monster!'

Another tear rolls down her cheek as Gabriel kneels in front of her.

'Nothing they'll say will make me believe that you're a monster.'

He stands up and leaves.

Thorn puts his arm around her as they walk to the sofa. She sits down and looks up at Thorn as he gives her the dress back. She shows no emotion as she stares ahead, putting the dress back on. Thorn realises that what happened to her won't leave her thoughts. She's truly traumatised.

'How was it to turn into a werewolf?'

Thorn looks at her as she still stares at the floor. Maybe she'll feel better when Thorn tells her about his own past. It may help to distract her.

'The day before I turned twenty-one, the lady of the orphanage told me that I'd change on my birthday. I didn't understand her and asked for clarification. She said I'd know when the time was right. That was all the information I got. I wrote every odd feeling down on parchment paper as I knew something would happen; I just didn't know what. Weirdly enough nothing happened, so I went to bed. But when I went to sleep, I could feel my hands tingling. That's when it all started. I got claws,