

Claire

"You need to accept Alpha Tereshan's rejection before you go, Claire. It's the only way you'll truly be free of him." One of the warriors from our pack says to me.

"I don't know how."

"He rejected you, right? He said the words?"

"Yes." I say, remembering that day, one year ago tomorrow, my birthday, as if it were yesterday.

The warrior tells me the words that I have to say. Then nods at me.

"I, Claire Roberts, accept your rejection,

Alpha Tereshan Colton as my mate, and I reject you as my Alpha.”

“Now go. He will have felt that, even if he was asleep. Get out of here. Run that way.” The warrior says pointing in the direction he wants me to go.

I feel the bond snap as well as my tether to the pack and for the first time in a year, I feel free, like I can breathe.

As I turn to leave, I think back on all the heartache and suffering of the last year. I thought this would be my final goodbye to Alpha Tereshan. I had no idea that I would have to reject him again so soon.

Only this time, I would be the Alpha.

One Year Ago

I wake in the morning like I do most mornings. Cold. My room has no heat and omegas are only allowed the tattered blankets that are discarded from the ranked members and warriors.

I uncurl my body from the tight ball I slept in, my joints and bones protesting the movement after spending so long in one place and the cold that has seeped in. I get up and stretch, washing quickly in the lukewarm water that is all I have to shower with. It's warmer than the air in my room and I'm thankful for that. It at least allows my muscles to loosen up a bit.

When I'm cleaned and dressed, I head to the kitchens. We must be up hours before everyone else to make sure the food is ready when the ranked members,

especially our Alpha and Beta come down to eat. In truth, this is my favorite time of day. Only the omegas are up this early and it's quiet. No one is yelling at you, no one is making messes then blaming you for them. It's just us and we support each other.

As I walk into the kitchen, I hear several of my friends whisper 'Happy Birthday!' to me. Today is my 18th birthday. It's the first day that we can recognize our mate.

"Make a wish." Feena, our Lead Omega says quietly, handing me a blueberry muffin with a candle in it. Blueberry is my favorite.

"Maybe you'll find your mate." My friend, Vivienne, says.

"Yeah, maybe you'll be able to leave this

miserable pack." Another omega says.

Every omega in this pack, the Ironbite Pack, hopes to find their mate quickly and really hopes they are from another pack. Leaving this pack is the only chance we have at a normal life. It's not guaranteed, other packs are as bad or worse than ours, but many are much better.

I take the muffin and wish for the same thing I wish for every year. 'Please let me find my mate and leave this awful place.'

When it's one of our birthdays, Feena adds a little extra mix to the muffins, so we have one extra for the birthday person.

"Here, let me cut this so we can all have some." I say, knowing that this may be the only thing any of us eats today.

"You don't have to." Vivienne says. But really, birthdays are the best for this reason.

It's not that we're not allowed to eat. It's just that we're told that we can't dawdle and not get our work done. Work that should take fifty omegas to complete, but there are only 25 of us. None of the ranked members care that there are too few of us. If the work doesn't get done, there is hell to pay.

Our pack house is filled with ranked members and warriors. My days involve getting up early, helping to make breakfast for everyone. Once everyone is eating, I help the other omegas clean the ranked members offices, preparing them for the day. And once everyone is doing their jobs for the day, I switch to cleaning the bedrooms, ensuring all of those rooms are

clean.

I usually finish in enough time to help with dinner. Once everyone is done for the evening, I clean the training rooms.

Sometimes there are still warriors in there working out. Most of them are nice, but sometimes we have to work fast to stay out of their way, so we don't get kicked.

Neither our Alpha nor our Beta have found their mates, but our Gamma, Bryson, found his mate nearly a year ago. We were all hoping that having her around would make our lives a bit easier, but it hasn't. She's as mean and nasty as our Alpha and Beta.

I hand out the pieces of my muffin.

"Mmm, it's so good." One of my friends says. She's right, it's really good.

"Now, hurry up and finish that. We have a lot of work to do today. You all know that Claire shares a birthday with Alpha Tereshan. There is a big party planned this evening, so we have to start cooking dinner this morning."

"What about the rest of the day?" Vivienne asks.

"Alpha Tereshan apparently left last night with Beta Roman to party and try to find his mate. They are not expected back until later this afternoon. However, that doesn't mean that everyone else here doesn't expect to eat and have their space cleaned."

Feena looks at me kindly. "Since it's your birthday, dear, I'll give you the Alpha's bedroom and office to clean. Then you can

have the evening to yourself.”

“Oh no, Feena. There’s too much to do. I can help.” I say and she gives me a look.

“What else am I going to do? It’s not like we’re allowed to train. I won’t be at the party.” I shrug. “You know you need the help and I have nothing else to do. But I’ll take you up on cleaning the Alpha’s room and office, since he’s not here.” I say and smile.

“Are you sure, dear?” She asks me.

“Absolutely.”

“Okay, then, let’s get to work.”

After helping to prepare breakfast, I move to the Alpha’s office. I’ve cleaned in here before, so I’m accustomed to how he likes

things. When I walk in, I take a deep breath and my mouth instantly starts to water.

"Mmm, blueberries!" I say out loud. I love blueberries.

I take a moment to walk around and look to see if I can find the source of the smell. Blueberries aren't even in season yet, but whenever we get them in the pack, I always swipe a few. It's worth the risk of getting caught, because they are so delicious.

After searching the office and not finding any cause for the smell, I begin cleaning, making sure that Alpha Tereshan's desk is in order, that his papers are placed neatly together. My parents died years ago, but before they did, my father taught me to read. He wanted to make sure that if I ever

had a chance for a better life, that my lack of reading ability wouldn't stop me. I'm one of the few omegas that can read, so I'm able to make sure that Alpha Tereshan's work is in appropriate piles. The others that can read are sent to the offices of the other ranked members.

When I'm done with the office, I move to Alpha Tereshan's room on the top floor of the pack house. He is the only one that lives up here. I go to his room and unlock the door with the omega's key. When I walk in, the scent of blueberries is even stronger. Again, I search for the source of this delicious smell, but find nothing.

It's getting late in the afternoon, and I know the Alpha will be back soon, so I begin cleaning his room. He's left his clothes in a mess on the floor, as usual.

His bathroom looks like a windstorm hit it with bottles and sprays scattered everywhere.

I straighten up the bedroom, changing the sheets and putting his clothes in a hamper that I will take down to the laundry when I'm done. Then I clean his bathroom, sniffing his shower gel to see if he's changed it to blueberry. He hasn't.

I dump the waste basket filled with used condoms into a garbage bag, before giving the bathroom one last check. Once I'm satisfied, I take a last look around before grabbing the garbage with one hand and the laundry with the other. I close and lock his door, before heading downstairs to begin helping with dinner preparations.