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Honors Thesis

BLUE MOON: EXPLORING THE COMPLEXITIES OF HUMAN LOVE THROUGH
A WEREWOLF ROMANCE NOVEL

by
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graduation requirements for University Honors

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ABSTRACT

BLUE MOON: EXPLORING THE COMPLEXITIES OF HUMAN LOVE THROUGH A WEREWOLF ROMANCE NOVEL

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Blue Moon is a werewolf romance novel that emphasizes the heartbreak and triumph of human love through a cast of non-human characters. This story is written to explore the complexities of love, acting as an intersection between werewolves and romantic tragedy. In *Blue Moon*, Luna's perfect world comes crashing down when her soulmate, Aspen, rejects her as his mate, something unheard of in werewolf culture. In a desperate attempt to win his affection, Luna feigns a soulmate bond with Kodiak, an alpha werewolf who is looked down upon for having no mate. As the layers of Luna's relationship with Aspen are revealed, it will be shown that love does not only make Luna beautiful and deep, but it can turn her jealous, mean, and at times a bit cruel. *Blue Moon* aims to contribute to the romantic tragedy genre via the use of werewolves, offering a unique exploration of love's complexities. This creative thesis showcases the first three chapters of *Blue Moon*, accompanied by a critical introduction regarding the background, research, and analysis behind the novel.

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I. Introduction

What do werewolves and romantic tragedies have to do with each other?

At the end of his world-renowned play, Shakespeare wrote that there “never was a story of more woe, than this of Juliet and her Romeo” (Shakespeare, Act V, Scene III). *Romeo and Juliet*, considered by scholars to be “the preeminent document of love in the West” (Kottman 1), showcases a beautiful and tragic tale of two lovers forced apart by awful circumstance. For centuries, tragic romances—or romantic tragedy—have been a formidable genre, from *Tristan and Isolde* to *Wuthering Heights* to *Titanic*. These stories are passionate, moody, and often end in the untimely death of one or both star-crossed lovers. As this romantic subgenre has evolved, death is not always the dramatic outcome—often, it’s the end or failure of a relationship that leaves discomfiting questions of “what if” lingering in the air. Modern examples include movies such as *(500) Days of Summer* and *La La Land*. Though society has vastly changed throughout the past several hundred years, it seems that humanity’s interest in romantic tragedy remains steadfast.

And what about werewolves? This creature has drastically changed over time, transforming from a horrifying monster myth used to frighten children (Edward) to something romantic and sexy. Werewolves were once portrayed as cursed humans burdened with changing into murderous creatures of the night. However, in the 20th century, werewolves began to be portrayed as having a certain sex-appeal, and with Stephanie Meyer’s *Twilight*, the perception of werewolves was irrevocably altered, turning werewolves into alluring and attractive figures in novels, film, and television. Now, many modern werewolf novels center around carnality and desire. No longer do we

see werewolves as terrorizing monsters who murder children in the night. Instead, the stories often revolve around the hot alpha werewolf mating with a young woman of a low social status and pleasuring her sexually.

So how does the romantic tragedy genre intersect with werewolves? My novel *Blue Moon* utilizes certain tropes from modern werewolf stories to create a unique piece that operates under the romantic tragedy genre. *Blue Moon* borrows the idea of “mates” (or soulmates) from the werewolf genre, along with the common trope of the rejected mate. When the main character, Luna, is rejected by her mate Aspen, she feels as though her world has come to an end. However, *Blue Moon* dives deeper than most modern werewolf romances as it explores the complexities of her relationship with Aspen. As with romantic tragedies, in the end Luna does not end up with Aspen or anyone else.

Comparative titles to *Blue Moon* include works such as Maggie Stiefvater’s *Shiver* and John Green’s *The Fault in Our Stars*. While no one dies in the end of *Blue Moon*, similarly, *The Fault in Our Stars* is a teenage romance novel where the main two characters undergo life-changing experiences and do not end together. *Shiver* is a teenage werewolf romance that explores forbidden love and themes of identity and sacrifice. *Blue Moon* also explores the somewhat forbidden longing that Luna has for Aspen during the flashbacks of their relationship and delves into themes of sacrifice—specifically, sacrificing a relationship so that the other person can live a better life. However, *Blue Moon* creates its own space in the genre by combining the moody elements of tragic romance with mystical werewolves to weave a unique story that will make readers ponder on what it means to love as a human.

This thesis presents the first three chapters of *Blue Moon*. In this introductory essay, I discuss the evolution of the werewolf concept, followed by the evolution of the romantic tragedy genre. Then, I show how the tropes and themes from each come together in *Blue Moon* to create an interesting and unexpected piece of literature.

I. What are Werewolves?

Unlike other monsters, werewolves do not have a singular literary origin. Elisabeth A. Lawrence explains that the werewolf image did not arise from a single classic like Mary Shelley's work did for *Frankenstein* or Bram Stoker's novel did for *Dracula* (103). Instead, werewolves have acted as a myth that has been sporadically used throughout literature.

On the origins of werewolves, Nicole Jacques-Lefèvre notes that the werewolf has been defined as a kind of witch that changes into a wolf (Edward). It is particularly interesting that werewolves were defined as a sub-category of witch, since during the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries in Europe, werewolf trials akin to America's witch trials were conducted (Beck). Individuals were convicted of transforming into horrifying werewolves and killing children. This idea of shape shifting into another animal was not limited to werewolves, but wolves became the most popular legend. Lawrence explains that over history, "shape-changing" has involved many animals, but the wolf has been used most often. The persistent myth of humans shifting into wolves underscores the idea that humans have a wild side to them.

Lawrence ascertains that "werewolves embody the conflict between instinctual urges and rational behavior". She explains that this challenges the notion that humans are

vastly different from animals, instead addressing the clash of animalistic and human tendencies within us. We are captivated and horrified by the identification we feel with wolves (111-112). We are both curious about the exploration of our own bestial impulses and abhorred by such uncivilized behavior. Throughout literature and movies, we see this theme of duality explored time and time again. While werewolves are monsters, they fascinate us because they act as a reflection of the beast within us.

Werewolf classics began cropping up during the Victorian era (Nour), when the duality of man was explored through several different avenues. This concept can be found in Victorian literature such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. The *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* follows the story of Dr. Henry Jekyll and Mr. Edward Hyde. Dr. Jekyll is a respected scientist and physician while Mr. Hyde is an immoral man who indulges in all his base pleasures. Dr. Jekyll's friend, Mr. Utterson, is trying to figure out the connection between the two men, only to discover that Mr. Hyde and Dr. Jekyll are one and the same. Jekyll's experiments allowed him to split himself into two personalities—one that was wholly good, and one that was wholly bad.

Heart of Darkness similarly explores the human capacity for evil. Charles Marlow recounts his voyage into the Congo Free State in Central Africa, where he was sent to find a man named Kurtz—a European man who had risen to prominence in the hinterlands of Africa. During his journey, Marlow discovers Europe's exploitation of the African people, and when he finally meets Kurtz, he discovers that Kurtz has embraced his primal desires and moral depravity. *Heart of Darkness* is an exploration of the human disposition towards evil. Similarly, werewolves have been used as an alternative way to

explore the animalistic impulses that reside within us and to showcase what giving into those desires might look like.

The werewolf is a multifaceted monster, one that blurs the boundaries between human and animal. While werewolves have been considered simple shapeshifters, they also can act as a complex mirror to humanity.

II. Evolution of the Werewolf

Werewolves themselves are not a genre, but they've shifted from starring primarily in the horror genre to becoming leads in the romance genre. The first recorded instance of a werewolf-like figure occurs in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, written circa 2100-1400 B.C. In the story, Gilgamesh rejects a potential lover because she had transformed a prior lover into a wolf. In Greek Mythology, the Legend of Lycaon tells the story of an angered Zeus, who turned Lycaon and his sons into wolves after Lycaon served him a meal with a sacrificed boy's remains ("Werewolf Legends"). This is likely the origin of the term "lycanthropy", which refers to a mental disorder where someone believes that he or she is a wolf or some other animal ("Lycanthropy"). In early Norwegian folklore, wolves appear in the *Saga of the Volsungs*, where a father and son discover they can turn into wolves via wolf pelts.

"Real-life" werewolves cropped up in the 1500s. Serial killers would claim that they had turned into wolves before brutally murdering and eating children, which served to further perpetuate the myth ("Werewolf Legends"). Following the serial killers of the 1500s, the 1613 play, *The Duchess of Malfi*, stars a rageful and violent character named Ferdinand. Throughout the play, Ferdinand descends into insanity, coming to believe he

is a wolf. In the final act, he is diagnosed with lycanthropy. In this story and others such as 1787's *Vathek* and 1820's *Melmoth the Wanderer*, allusions to werewolves were made, but it was the Victorian period that produced literary werewolf classics (Thomas).

There are several examples of novels and novellas from this time-period. George W. M. Reynolds' gothic horror novel *Wagner the Wehr-Wolf* follows Wagner, a nobleman who made a deal with the devil to receive wealth and power in exchange for turning into a werewolf every seven years. While in werewolf form, Wagner commits violent atrocities, consuming him with grief and despair. His werewolf secret further threatens to upend his budding romantic relationship with Matilda. *Wagner the Wehr-Wolf* introduces sympathy towards the werewolf figure, as it portrays a man struggling with his werewolf nature. Furthermore, there's a romantic tragedy element to the story, as Wagner dies in the end and cannot be with Matilda. While the book is considered a horror novel, there's a seedling intersection between werewolves and tragic romance.

Clemence Housman also introduces romance into her 1896 short story, *The Were-Wolf*, where a young woman named White Fell is under a werewolf-curse that can only be lifted if she finds a true love who accepts both her human and wolf forms. Ultimately, she and her lover break the curse and she finally has peace, marking a happy ending to the story. Werewolf novels continue into the 20th century, with works such as 1933's *The Werewolf of Paris* by Guy Endore. The story follows Bertrand Caillet, a man who becomes a werewolf due to a hereditary curse. Throughout the novel, Bertrand grapples with his curse, struggling to control his bestial urges and reconcile his dual nature as both man and monster.

In the 20th century, werewolves made it onto the silver screen. In 1913, the first werewolf film, *The Werewolf*, was released, with a run time of eighteen minutes. This movie introduces the idea of Native Americans shapeshifting into wolves. In 1941, Universal Studios released *The Wolf Man*, where Larry is bitten by a wolf and terrorizes the town when in werewolf form. He is killed by his own father using a silver-topped cane, which first introduces the idea that silver is a werewolf's weakness into mainstream media (Nour).

Other werewolf horror-movies released in the 20th century include the 1981 comedy-horror film *An American Werewolf in London* and horror film *The Howling* released in the same year. 1994's *Wolf* introduces dark humor and romance into its horror film. After being bitten by a wolf, Will starts to transform. His senses heighten, and his strength and libido increase. *Wolf* depicts that being a werewolf not only increases violent tendencies, but also sexual tendencies, as Will becomes more sexually aggressive. This may have planted some of the seeds for how erotic werewolves would become.

In 2005, Stephanie Meyer released *Twilight*, her pop culture phenomenon vampire-romance novel, followed by sequels and movies in the subsequent years. In the second installment of *Twilight*, we discover that Jacob Black, one of the suitors vying for Bella, is actually a werewolf. Interestingly, Jacob is also Native American, hearkening back to the 1913 short film *The Werewolf*. Jacob was not bitten by a wolf and turned into a werewolf—it is in his genetic coding. He was born this way. In the *Twilight* saga, Jacob and his werewolf friends can shift into wolf form at will, and while they may have occasional spurts of violence, it is nothing to the level as depicted in previous horror films. Furthermore, *Twilight* introduces a concept of “imprinting,” which is how the

werewolves involuntarily find their soulmates. As soon as a werewolf first sees his would-be soulmate, he is unconditionally bound to her for the rest of his life.

After *Twilight*, werewolf romance novels increased in popularity, with books like *Shiver* by Maggie Stiefvater and the *Alpha and Omega* series by Patricia Briggs. Online platforms used for sharing stories, such as Wattpad, also exploded with werewolf romance novels, and hundreds of self-published books on Amazon are werewolf romance novels. While *Twilight* was not super sexual, many contemporary werewolf romance novels have become so, and they often utilize the following tropes.

These books shy away from the concept of humans being turned into werewolves, and instead show characters who were born werewolves. They also put an emphasis on the hierarchal wolf system, with the alpha wolf at the top and the omega wolf at the bottom, with all the betas in between. The most common and important element in these modern novels is the “mate” system. While it may vary from book to book, this system is crucial to these stories. Many novels center on the following trope: a weak, bullied girl (either an abused human girl or an omega), discovers she is actually the mate of the hot alpha werewolf. Many times, there is also a “rejected mate” trope in these stories. The weak omega girl is initially rejected by her alpha mate, but eventually he comes to realize that he wants to engage in all manner of sexual activity with her and eventually accepts her as his true mate.

While I’ve seen premises and read random chapters of werewolf romance novels here and there for years, in preparation for this thesis, I read *The Tyrant Alpha’s Rejected Mate*, which exemplifies the current position of werewolves. This novel is also labeled as a “shifter romance,” which is a common term for werewolf romance novels. In *The*

Tyrant Alpha's Rejected Mate, Una realizes that her mate is the Alpha, Killian. However, he rejects her and claims that she isn't his mate, which causes Una a lot of pain. However, the pack's old wise woman is able to rip the mate bond out of Una that connects her to Killian, which severely dampens Una's agony and makes her able to resist Killian. However, the mate bond still exists within Killian, making him over-protective of Una and at some point, half mad with desire. In this story, the physicality and sexuality of the bond is very predominant, and they often talk about "being in heat" for one another.

While early werewolf tales often centered on horror and fear, modern iterations have expanded to explore complex relationships, societal hierarchies, and the blurred lines between human and animal instincts. Werewolves have further become mechanisms to explore romance, whether it's erotic for the more sexual stories, or romantic in others.

III. The Romantic Tragedy Genre Defined

Moving on from werewolves for a moment, let's discuss romance—specifically, romantic tragedy. Scholars have offered their perspectives on the genre of romantic tragedy, or tragic love stories, particularly in the context of works like Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Ruth Nevo notes that "In *Romeo and Juliet*...[Shakespeare] sets out to dramatize the vulnerability of young love" (241). Young love is vulnerable and delicate, and Shakespeare brings the drama and passion that comes with it into the limelight through his work. His romantic tragedy shows both love's strength and fragility. Their love is thwarted via their deaths, but their love story lives on.

Ruth Nevo remarks that we do not reconcile ourselves to their deaths and they have achieved immortality in literature, whereas they would have inevitably aged and lost their youthful allure over time (256). Through literature, their story is immortalized, and I'd further argue that through tragedy, their love is idealized. Their love is caught in a state of romanticized potential. We do not have to read about the day-to-day minutia they would inevitably face had they successfully run away together. Instead, we focus on the power of their love—that they would die for each other—and ponder on the “what ifs” had their love been actualized. Nevo affirms this sentiment, noting that the idealized nature of their love leaves readers with a mere glimpse of the freedom, tenderness, and gaiety that their love could have had (256). Because readers only get a taste of all that it could have been, this tragedy evokes strong emotions and leaves a lasting impact on those who encounter the story.

Paul Kottman further explores the enduring significance of *Romeo and Juliet*, stating that "Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is arguably the preeminent document of love in the West" (1). Despite ending in tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet* is perhaps the greatest love story in Western culture, indicating that there is something powerful within the tragic love story genre. In his article, Kottman discusses the debate surrounding the nature of *Romeo and Juliet*'s love, as some consider the lovers to be victims of bad circumstances, while others think their love falls apart because of their intemperance (1). This ongoing discourse underscores the complexity of romantic tragedy, as it invites interpretations that range from tragic inevitability to the consequences of youthful passion.

Loren Samons adds another layer to the discussion by examining the dynamics of communication and misunderstanding in romantic relationships, as exemplified in the doomed love of Hamlet and Ophelia. Samons suggests that despite their feelings for each other, the inability to reconcile differing definitions of love ultimately leads to the breakdown of their relationship (1). Miscommunication, misunderstanding, and lost opportunities are hallmarks of the romantic tragedy genre, which we will explore as we discuss the development of this genre.

Romeo and Juliet is a classic example of the romantic tragedy genre, where both lovers die in the end. However, the romantic tragedy genre can take on different forms and has grown and changed to adapt to modern times. Romantic tragedy is not limited to romances where the lovers die in the end. Romantic tragedy includes stories where the two lovers don't end up together for one reason or another. As Samon said, "their inability to reconcile their definitions of love compromises their ability to communicate and essentially dooms the relationship." Doomed relationships, even those that don't end in death, can create echoing, empty feelings, and the questions of "what if" can still linger in the air. *Romeo and Juliet* type stories are predecessors to the modern and toned-down versions of the romantic tragedy genre.

IV. Evolution of the Romantic Tragedy Genre

To consider the evolution of this genre, let us explore *Tristan and Isolde*. Written circa 1205-15 (Gottfried), this story is centered on longing. It begins with Tristan escorting Isolde to his homeland so that she can marry his uncle, the king. However, by mischance Tristan and Isolde drink a love potion, and the two fall madly in love. The two

begin a secret affair, but when they are caught, Tristan must leave the country. In the end, Tristan dies just before Isolde is able to save him, and she in turn dies in his arms (“Tristan and Isolde”). We see similar storyline threads in *Romeo and Juliet*. Romeo and Juliet’s love is forbidden, and so the two enter into a secret courtship. In the end, the two die in their efforts to be together forever, cementing *Romeo and Juliet* as the quintessential tragedy.

In these examples, the protagonists’ love for each other is unwavering and true; it is mostly due to unfortunate outside circumstances that their love cannot be. As the genre develops, we see that the conflict often resides within the relationship itself, but the themes of longing and missed opportunities are still present throughout these examples.

Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* is another step in the evolution of the romantic tragedy genre. The novel tells the story of Heathcliff and Catherine. Despite their passionate love for one another, Catherine chooses to marry Edgar Linton to improve her social standing. Even after Catherine dies, Heathcliff’s feelings for her remain unresolved, and he devotes his life to seeking revenge on those he feels have wronged him, including Edgar Linton. The themes of unrequited love and obsession explored in *Wuthering Heights* can be seen in modern interpretations of the romantic tragedy genre. F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* shows Gatsby’s obsessive love for Daisy, even though she married another man who was of higher status. While Daisy cared for Gatsby, his love for her was clearly stronger, and his affair with Daisy eventually leads to his death.

The theme of unrequited love, or unbalanced love, is further explored in the 2009 rom-com *(500) Days of Summer*. Despite its official label of “rom-com”, *(500) Days of*

Summer better falls under the romantic tragedy genre. In the film, Tom's complex relationship with Summer is shown via a series of non-linear events. While he falls in love with Summer, something is not clicking for her within the relationship. Months after Summer ends things with Tom, he discovers she is marrying someone else, despite her repeated affirmations that she didn't even want a boyfriend. In the end, she explains her relationship with her new husband to Tom, saying that "I just woke up one day and I knew." "Knew what?" he asked. "What I was never sure of with you," she answered. At the end of the film, Tom meets a girl who he is a bit interested in, giving a kernel of hope. However, the whole film shows the anguish of unrequited love, the stress and heartache it can cause, and it ends with the two main lovers apart from each other.

Similarly, the movie *La La Land* offers a modern take on romantic tragedy. The film follows the love story of Mia and Sebastian as the two struggle to fulfill their career aspirations. While the two have a deep connection, their blossoming careers begin to put heavy strains on their relationship. Eventually, they choose to sacrifice their relationship in pursuit of their individual careers. Years later, they see each other again, triggering a nostalgic dream sequence that imagines an alternative reality where they had stayed together, creating a lingering sense of longing and raising heartbreaking and difficult questions of "what if." The film offers a nuanced exploration of the complexities of love and highlights how the romantic tragedy genre has matured. It still maintains themes of longing and missed opportunities, and Mia and Sebastian's story captures the essence of the genre while offering a more modern and nuanced take, akin to *(500) Days of Summer*.

Celine Song's *Past Lives* carries the genre into 2023, telling the story of Nora and Hae Sung. The two grew up together in South Korea and developed feelings for each

other, but Nora moved to Canada when she was twelve. Twelve years later, they reconnect over video-chat and have a semblance of a relationship for a year over the internet, but Nora ends things because their lives are incompatible with each other. Twelve years pass again and she and Hae Sung finally meet up in person. However, Nora is already married and so nothing can happen between her and Hae Sung. Despite never having had an official relationship, the film expertly captures the tragedy of “what if,” and brings in questions about soulmates, fate, and connection in past lives.

Past Lives serves as a contemporary exploration of the romantic tragedy genre. While the narrative differs from classic tales like *Tristan and Isolde* or *Romeo and Juliet* in its setting and circumstances and is far less dramatic, it still echoes the themes of missed opportunities, soulmates, and the haunting question of "what if." The film portrays the complexities of modern romance, where geographical distance and personal obligations often stand in the way of true love, leading to a sense of longing and regret.

V. The Intersection of Romantic Tragedy and Werewolves within Blue Moon

My novel, *Blue Moon*, is both a werewolf novel and a romantic tragedy. The story more closely reflects the modern examples of romantic tragedy, but it still has elements of mystics and drama that can be seen in earlier examples of the genre. *Blue Moon* aims to add a fresh perspective to romantic tragedy via the use of werewolves.

While the werewolf romance subgenre has become highly stigmatized as being trashy and overly sexualized (a reputation that is somewhat warranted), certain tropes within the werewolf romance genre lend themselves very nicely to developing a romantic

tragedy. Within werewolf stories, one common element has become the idea of mates/soulmates, and even more specifically, the idea of rejected mates. Another important element is the strong communal and hierarchal aspect of the werewolf packs. These mechanisms will be used to highlight the complexities of human love, even though no major character will be human.

The main character, Luna, is the alpha wolf's daughter. This is a deviation from the norm, as the main female character in werewolf romance novels is often at the bottom of the werewolf pack. However, as the alpha's daughter, she is at the top of the hierarchy and vocally praises having a predestined mate, even though she is conflicted inside about finding her mate. She is already in love with her long-term friend, Aspen, and fears she won't be with him.

I chose to make Luna the alpha's daughter and Aspen a beta because it creates an interesting power dynamic. Luna does not love Aspen because he is the hot alpha wolf that everyone loves, nor is she desperate for salvation. In fact, Luna is ranked higher in the pack's hierarchy. However, love does not always follow rules and boundaries, and she ends up falling for someone whom the pack would deem as "lesser" than her. Because she is the one suffering from (mostly) unrequited love, Luna actually has less of a say in the relationship than Aspen, as the person who likes the other one less often holds the power in the relationship. Furthermore, as an alpha-blooded, she exalts the werewolf way, as the hierarchy favors her. This creates a strange tension within her as she tries to grapple with her belief that soulmates are the best way to find love while also recognizing that she's in love with someone who may not be her soulmate.

The novel begins with Aspen walking Luna home, where her strong feelings for him are revealed. The soulmate process is explained, namely that when a werewolf turns eighteen, he or she is eligible to find their soulmate. This process is a commonly used trope within werewolf novels. Luna then runs into Kodiak, the young alpha wolf of the neighboring pack, who is suspected to be a “lone wolf”—someone who doesn’t have a soulmate. In this novel, being a lone wolf is highly stigmatized. Despite being at the top of his pack’s hierarchy, Kodiak’s position as an alpha wolf is questioned because he does not have a mate. The absence of love in his life has mitigated his power and status, similar to Luna. This is done to represent that unrequited love or being unable to find love can hurt our self-esteem and the way others perceive us.

The next night, just after she turns eighteen, Luna gets a knock on her balcony door from Aspen. She and Aspen discover they are mates, but her elation is cut short when he formally rejects her, sending her into a fit of physical and psychological pain. While human heartbreak does not often send one into a fit of physical pain, there’s emotional turmoil that can feel as or more painful than bodily pain. By showing Luna’s intense physical reaction, triggered by the failure of the werewolf mating system, it represents the internal pain of heartbreak.

In an attempt to make Aspen jealous, Luna pretends to mate with Kodiak. As Luna attempts to convince everyone else that she has mated with Kodiak to increase Aspen’s jealousy, she continually recalls tender memories with Aspen. Luna accompanies Kodiak to his pack’s coastal territory, where she reminisces about memories with Aspen by the ocean. The ocean is a reoccurring icon in the book. The tides represent the push and pull of love, the unstoppable power of the ocean represents fate, and the

depth of the ocean represents one's depth of feelings and how one can drown in them.

Aspen himself has physical characteristics reminiscent of the ocean, with deep blue eyes and hair the color of sand.

When she returns home, Luna's emotional turmoil escalates when Aspen starts dating her best friend. She grapples with feelings of jealousy and anger towards her friend and Aspen. As Kodiak provides comfort, Luna finds that she's developing inkling feelings for him, but she still has her lingering soulmate bond and years of feelings for Aspen to wrestle with. This inner conflict reaches a tipping point when she discovers that Aspen is planning to leave for college, an uncommon path for werewolves. He reveals that the reason why he rejected her was not because he had no interest in her, but so that he could pursue his dreams in the human world and so that Luna could remain in the community that she loves. Aspen hoped that by rejecting her, she could find a new soulmate. However, their lingering soulmate bond is eating him up inside, and he feels compelled to restore their bond and become her mate once more.

I thought it would be interesting to play with the loyalty aspect of wolves and to incorporate the idea that it's considered almost a betrayal to leave one's pack. In *The Tyrant Alpha's Rejected Mate*, it was also considered wrong for Una to leave her pack and it was very important for everyone to stick together. In *Blue Moon*, there are similar expectations, creating an unexpected obstacle for Luna and Aspen's relationship—she never expected him to leave, as that is so uncommon. However, it's a very real human issue that many people face. Often, distance can tear people apart. Furthermore, this fleshes out Aspen and makes his actions more justifiable. He's not cruel; he has solid

reasoning behind his actions. Pursuing higher education and leaving his small community is a choice that many people can understand.

After talking with the pack's old sage, Luna learns that her mate bond with Aspen remains because she has not rejected him as he rejected her. She must decide whether to be with Aspen, who is compelled by the mate bond to be with her, or to cut off their bond in hopes of mating with someone new. Though she loves Aspen and in some ways he loves her, she realizes that he does not love her the way she has always loved him, and that by clinging onto him, she would hold him back from his aspirations. In a heartbreaking decision, she rejects Aspen and cuts off their bond. She hopes that she can find that soulmate bond with Kodiak, but the future remains unknown.

The next day, Aspen comes to say goodbye as he heads off to college. They share one last moment together before he leaves. The book ends with a knock at the door—it's Kodiak, but she doesn't know if he'll be her mate or not. The novel ends on this ambiguous note to represent the feeling that when we close one door in dating, we don't know when or if another door will open. It's a leap of faith we must make in hopes that the future holds something better.

The most important part of the novel is exploring the repercussions of Aspen's rejection and revealing the depth of Luna's feelings for him. I use the common werewolf mate-rejection narrative as a way to dramatize what unreciprocated love can feel like—you've lost the person you're supposed to be with, and you don't understand why. Like Shakespeare, I too am trying to dramatize the vulnerability of young love. The romance is more tragic because Aspen is not merely a boy she has a crush on: he is her soulmate.

While the rejected mate trope is intrinsic to *Blue Moon*, the novel strays away from the carnality of the mate trope and instead leans into the emotions. What makes the tragic love story so tragic is not the loss of a great sex life, but the loss of that emotional promise. *Blue Moon* focuses less on “being in heat” and more on the vast range of love and the complexities within it. It showcases the messiness of Luna’s feelings—love does not only make her beautiful and deep, but it can turn her jealous, mean, and at times a bit cruel. As the duality of human nature has historically been explored via werewolves, in *Blue Moon* the duality of love explored. Love can feel wonderful but can also cause heartbreak and frustration.

Luna herself has a dual nature about her. She is not the typical doe-eyed heroine of werewolf romance novels who’s only flaw is not standing up for herself as much as she could. Luna is in a privileged position in her hierarchy, and in her frustration with Aspen, she sometimes lashes out at the betas beneath her. She becomes bitterly jealous of her good friend Anika when she starts dating Aspen, despite the fact that Anika has done nothing wrong and has always been a good friend to Luna. However, Luna is not all bad. She’s an eighteen-year-old girl with high emotions, but she cares deeply for her family and her pack. She experiences perspective shifts throughout the novel and feels remorse after making mistakes. Luna’s inner-turmoil reflects *Blue Moon*’s focus on emotional complexities rather than the brawls and the sex of other werewolf works.

Luna and Aspen’s relationship dynamic is better reflected in romantic tragedy works than in werewolf romance novels, such as *(500) Days of Summer*. In the movie, Summer clearly has feelings for Tom and cares about him a lot, but Tom’s feelings run so much deeper. He feels that he has found his soulmate, and Summer just doesn’t feel as

strongly. While Luna is head over heels for Aspen, his feelings for her are complicated. In flashback chapters, it is revealed just how close Aspen and Luna are as friends. In the first flashback, he is comforting Luna on the anniversary of her mother's death and tells her that he loves her. It's not necessarily romantic, but it's repeated throughout the book that he loves Luna. It makes their relationship more confusing and complex.

In many modern werewolf romances, the alpha male initially rejects the omega female because he doesn't think he could possibly be with someone so weak. However, as he becomes more physically attracted to her, he realizes her good qualities. Aspen's feelings for Luna and motivations for rejecting her are more nuanced. He does love her, and he is in many ways attracted to her and he does have some romantic interest in her, but he doesn't like her to the extent that she likes him. At the end of the book, Luna has to come to terms with the fact that while Aspen loves her, he doesn't love her enough.

Aspen's characterization is important to the story, and his goodness and complexity turns *Blue Moon* from a cheesy werewolf romance into a romantic tragedy. When I first thought about writing this story, I hadn't planned on turning it into a romantic-tragedy, and Aspen wasn't an interesting character. I was originally inspired by the first two chapters of a random web-novel that I read years ago on Facebook, since lost to me within the stratosphere of the internet. In this chapter, the main character was rejected by her mate before catching the eye of an alpha wolf from a neighboring pack. While I was unable to read the rest of the story, this premise spun the wheels in my head, and I considered how I would write the story. Originally, Aspen was going to be a villainous character of sorts—a callous, stupid boy who Luna liked primarily due to their

soulmate bond. Kodiak would be the heroic, true male protagonist, and in the end Luna and Kodiak would end up happily together.

However, I realized that there was something fascinating within the rejected mate trope, and that this story would be more powerful if it was a tragedy. To do so, Aspen needed to be a multidimensional character—not just a dumb werewolf kid. Luna has strong feelings for Aspen due to his intelligence, his warmth, his wit, and his caring. It makes it more tragic that he does not fully reciprocate those feelings. Aspen’s inner-conflict resembles the issue between Sebastian and Mia in *La La Land*. He’s not a bad guy and he does have feelings for Luna, but he wants to take his life in a certain direction, and mating with and marrying Luna would hold him back from his goals to do more with his life.

The ending of the book is left ambiguous. It’s not totally hopeless, as with *Wuthering Heights* or *Tristan and Isolde*, but the story isn’t neatly wrapped up with Luna finding a new soulmate in Kodiak. Putting them together in the end would undercut the novel and take away from the key relationship in the story: namely, Luna and Aspen. The last scene of the novel is between the two of them alone. While there’s still a glimmer of hope that things could work out between Luna and Kodiak, I want to leave readers with that lingering sense of “what-if” that is so important to these romantic tragedies.

Blue Moon uses the werewolf setting to create a romantic tragedy. Throughout history, werewolves have been used as a mirror of humanity, and *Blue Moon* is no exception. While the novel doesn’t really explore the idea of the beast within, I manipulate the otherness of werewolves to reflect human experiences and to create a work that readers will resonate with. I use specific werewolf tropes to accomplish this

goal, such as the cultural and hierarchical expectations of werewolves. This tension puts a strain on Luna and Aspen's relationship, creating a conflict that is recognizable in modern romantic tragedies. The werewolf mate system creates the integral issue of the story, and further dramatizes how devastating unrequited love can feel. The genre of romantic tragedy and the werewolf as a monster have both developed and changed greatly, and now they reach an intersection within *Blue Moon*.

VI. Introduction to the First Three Chapters

The following three chapters open up *Blue Moon*. Chapter 1 is very short, just shy of a hundred words, but it is an important introduction to the story. The chapters in *Blue Moon* will vary in length, and right from the beginning I establish that chapters can be as short as ninety-four words. Furthermore, it sets the tone and is used to intrigue the reader about what lies within the story.

Chapter 2 is the real first chapter. It introduces the reader to the two main characters, Aspen and Luna, and establishes that Luna has strong feelings for Aspen. His feelings for her are left ambiguous. As soulmates are the key issue of *Blue Moon*, the soulmate system is explained in the first chapter. Chapter 3 is less emotional than chapter one, but it introduces two more important characters—namely, Kodiak and Luna's sister, Aurora. Kodiak's status as a lone wolf is brought into Luna's conversation with her father, and hints of Luna's frustration with Aurora are planted in this chapter.

VII. Blue Moon: Chapters 1-3

Blue Moon

by Kayla LaFroth

Chapter One

To humans, the blue moon is just another moon. It's little more than an interesting fact, a turn of phrase. For us, the blue moon is magic. It's the collision of fate, the makings of destiny, the promise of the extraordinary. But then again, we are not like humans. For humans, love is a game of tricks, confusion, and heartbreak. For us, love is simply ours. Our soulmates are written in the stars, and like the tides of the ocean, fate cannot be controlled or changed.

At least, that's what I used to believe.

Chapter Two

"So, the big birthday's coming up," Aspen said. The vibrant forest crunched beneath our sneakers and stood tall overhead as we made our way to my home. Moss and fern lined the trail, a beaten path of brown dirt with pebbles and roots.

We never took the paved road.

"So it is," I said. Though we'd just eaten breakfast, my stomach clenched and turned. I closed my eyes for a moment and drew in a deep breath. I could smell the damp moss, the whiff of squirrel hide and sparrow feathers, the needles of the Douglas firs, the

scent of fresh dirt. The forest chattered with the life of late spring—the chorus of birds, the distant hammer of a woodpecker, the rustle of leaves.

Patches of summer sunlight pierced through the foliage to dance on Aspen's face, but he didn't wear his usual grin. He just looked at me. "How do you feel about that?"

I'd expected him to tell me how excited I must be and to launch into some speech on the magic of the blue moon like everyone else. I should have expected better of him. I shrugged and walked forward, continuing down the worn and familiar trail. A warbler's tune played like the warm breeze, light and carefree in contrast to the weighty feelings in my heart.

It was the day before my eighteenth birthday, and I should have been ecstatic. Not only had I been dreaming of my eighteenth birthday my whole life, but it also fell on a blue moon. That was good luck, everyone told me. Extremely good luck. They told me that tomorrow would likely start my 'happily ever after', to use the human phrase. "You must be so excited," they told me. But instead, my heart squeezed every time I thought about my impending birthday. It was the day that all my dreams would come true or the day that all my dreams would be dashed like ocean waves upon the craggy shore. It was the day I would find out that Aspen was my soulmate, or that we were nothing to each other.

"I couldn't sleep the day before my birthday," Aspen said.

I glanced back at him.

"I was terrified of turning eighteen." He laughed. "I thought I'd have a heart attack, walking into school that night. I was just waiting for my mate to show up at any

moment, and then everything would be...I don't know. That would be the end of all that I guess."

He was walking right next to me now, and I wondered if he could read my thoughts like printed text.

"But hey," he said. "I haven't found my mate. Maybe I'm a lone wolf."

"Oh please," I said. "You're not even nineteen, yet. Don't jinx yourself."

"Maybe it wouldn't be so bad, being a lone wolf," he shrugged.

I rolled my eyes with the shortest of laughs. "Yeah right. Talk about a terrible fate."

"Who knows? Maybe I'd just run off with some human girl and live the rest of my life with her."

I whacked his arm. "Don't even joke about that." I laughed, but something coiled in my stomach. Aspen, running off with some human girl? It was unthinkable, and yet, he'd had his fair share of human girlfriends. He'd bring them to Bruno's diner and they'd gush about being in an authentic werewolf diner, even though Bruno sold burgers and shakes like any human place. Werewolves weren't some hushed secret—humans and wolves were very aware of each other—but we wolves kept to our own kind. Well, expect for Aspen. He enjoyed fraternizing with humans, but even he couldn't outrun fate. Once he met his soulmate, he'd never think of human girls again.

Or me.

When a werewolf turned eighteen, he or she became eligible to find their mate. If their mate was also at least eighteen, then they would know it from the first time they looked into their mate's eyes. It had been described to me as an instant, overwhelming

attraction, an outpour of love so full that one's heart could not contain it—it had to be shared with one's mate. We considered this mating process as something written in the stars and gifted by the moon. Many believed that our mates were stitched into our hearts from the day we were born, and we all agreed that to find him or her was the most sacred part of being a wolf. Humans, on the other hand, wanted to dissect the “science” of this process, trying to understand it like cogs on a clock. They would talk about it as genetic coding, something wired in our DNA, some mere product of evolution.

Everyone said that the first time they saw their mate was the most magical moment of their lives, and I had waited all of mine for it. Now, on the precipice of great love, fear of mating with someone other than Aspen gnawed at me like termites.

Aspen had this faraway look in his eyes, and I knew that brilliant mind of his was churning. He was far from the forest path now, lost in some sort of dream or considering the world through lens completely unique to him. I loved prodding his mind, like poking a water balloon and watching all his thoughts flow out.

“What are you thinking about?” I asked.

“Being eighteen,” he said.

“And what about it?”

He sighed, and I knew there'd be a pause before he spilled his thoughts. That pause was when he would consider if he should tell me what he was thinking, and then how to voice those thoughts.

“It's just...” he started. “It's just that being eighteen can be terribly unexciting.”

“Unexciting?” I asked. “When everyone you meet could be your mate?”

His lip quirked upward. “That’s what you’d think. That’s what everyone talks about. But think about it, Lu. I mean, from now on, if you meet any wolf who’s over eighteen, you’ll immediately know that they aren’t your mate, and that’s that. There’s no excitement anymore. It’s all just—bland. There’s not a lot of fun in liking someone that isn’t younger than you because you either match or you don’t.”

His words struck me—they gave voice to the fear that gripped my heart. I knew I should have more faith, put trust in the moon and whoever she chose for me, but I couldn’t quite imagine being truly happy with anyone else. They said it was like magic when you met your mate, that all others melted into the background, that nothing could compare to such true love. Yet I couldn’t imagine ever feeling quite satisfied if it wasn’t Aspen.

“I like the way humans do love,” Aspen said, breaking through my thoughts.

“Humans?” I asked, wrinkling my nose. Sure, I was anxious about my birthday, anxious about *him*, but that didn’t mean I’d trade in my soulmate for that fickle, human love. A love life plagued with confusion and break-ups and divorce and sorrow. We might have looked human most often, but we were werewolves. We didn’t waste our time with such nonsense. Everything was clear cut and simple—we had our mates, we had our order, and thus we had our peace.

Aspen laughed. “Don’t look so enamored, Luna.”

“I just—why? Why would you like anything about the way humans love?” Maybe he’d never seen a rom-com. I’d only watched a few in my life, but they were nothing if not stressful, fraught with misunderstandings and social blunders. Sure, they got together in the end, but not before humiliating themselves.

“‘Why’ is a great question,” Aspen said. He looked up at the canopy of trees overhead, his eyes sparkling with whatever he was going to say next. “When you’re human, you never know.” An easy smile grew on his face. “You meet someone you like, and you don’t know if they like you back. And so you test the waters and they test the waters, and it’s exciting and fun and nothing quite beats that feeling of falling in love without knowing if it’s going to work out.”

Could he hear my heart stop?

He turned to me with those deep eyes of his. A warm breeze blew through the trees, tousling his blonde locks. Soon it would be summer, his favorite season. “But I guess you wouldn’t understand that feeling, would you?”

I could have set him straight. I could have said that I understood that feeling well. I could have told him that despite being a werewolf, despite believing that our way was the proper way, I had felt all of that and more. But instead I asked, “why do you say that?”, because it was easier to say than the truth.

“You’ve never dated anyone.”

“What would be the point?” I asked. “I mean, I could have dated someone, and then what? Chances are he wouldn’t be my mate. Then he’d find his mate or I’d find mine and the whole thing would be a mess. It’s better not to waste time.” It was a true answer, it was the correct answer, and yet somehow it felt like a lie. If hypocrisy was a smell, I was sure I would have reeked of it. Maybe I hadn’t dated anyone, but I was still in the middle of a mess. I had years of pining and wondering and hoping behind me, years of wasted time.

“Well, makes sense that you’d feel that way. You are our Alpha daughter, after all.” *Alpha daughter* felt like a barb coming from him instead of a praise of adulation like how everyone else said it. His tone was not cruel, but the word pricked the back of my neck all the same. Unlike most of my peers, Aspen did not worship the ground I walked on just because my father was the Alpha of our pack. He didn’t care that I was the Alpha daughter.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” I kicked a pebble with my black Converse shoe. Even though his tone hadn’t been prickly, mine was.

“It just means that you do things the wolf way,” he said. “Which is good, of course.” He added a bit too late.

Annoyance stung my heart. Sure, I could understand why he found human culture interesting, or even why he thought human love could be romantic, but his little digs against our way felt like papercuts. Just because I hadn’t done everything perfectly didn’t mean our way was not better. Because it was, objectively.

I was quiet for a moment, simmering in my feelings. It wasn’t that we were so different than humans. We lived in homes, we bought clothes, we used phones, we ate at restaurants. The government even forced us to go to high school like human kids! But we believed in building our community, in supporting the leaders of our hierarchy, in connecting with nature and our inner wolves. We believed in soulmates. “Why can’t you be happy with the way we do things?” I asked.

His eyes widened. “I never said I wasn’t.” Maybe he was so used to reading me that he didn’t realize I could do the same.

“Look, I understand that...I understand why meeting people and not mating would be frustrating. I do get that. But the problem with humans is that they never know if they’ve found the right person. That’s why half of them get divorced! They pick wrong.”

This was why things were the way they were. Even if it meant my heart might shatter into a million pieces tomorrow, this was why we had mates.

“It’s not just picking wrong,” Aspen said. “It’s that they stop loving each other. They choose to not love one another.”

I sighed. “But we never choose not to love our mates.”

“I guess not,” Aspen said. A bitterness crept into his voice. “We just never get to choose at all.”

A quiet fell upon us. The gabbing woodland critters and the crunch beneath our shoes camouflaged the silence, but I still felt its pressure. The woods were thinning, we were close to home, and I didn’t want our time together to end. This would be the last time I’d get to be with Aspen before I was eighteen. Tomorrow, we would look into each other’s eyes and we’d know, one way or another.

“Aspen,” I started. There was my family’s backyard up ahead, with its trees and sizable pond before the large house that sat upon the hill. “Do you think the moon takes our choices into account? Does it care about who we would choose?” *And do you think the blue moon cares more about my choice than a regular moon does?*

He looked thoughtful for a moment. “I don’t know.” He sighed. “But I don’t want to have to wait for some moon to choose my life for me.” He stopped walking and looked at me, his eyes serious. As we stepped out of the forest, the setting sun washed him in

golden rays, lighting up Aspen's blonde curls and sun-tanned skin. "I make my own choices."

We stood there, a deep silence settling between us. "You always have." My voice was just above a whisper. "Aspen?" I asked.

"Yeah?"

Heartfelt words balanced on the tip of my tongue, begging to be released, but I couldn't say them. I just couldn't. So instead I laughed nervously. "Um, nothing."

"What do you mean, 'nothing'?" His voice held a little laugh, leaving behind its previous weight.

"I forgot what I was going to say," I lied. "Probably some question about humans."

"I guess I'm somewhat of a human expert," he said.

"I guess you are," I said, a small smile on my lips.

We were still facing each other. I took a deep breath as I took in his appearance. His beautiful mess of curls, a clean t-shirt and shorts with trendy sneakers, that easy smile on his face. I thought of the way we could ebb in and out of the serious and the not, the way our conversations always seemed to flow between us. No matter what happened, tomorrow would be irrevocably different. Maybe to him, our friendship would feel like the same old thing, but to me, everything would change.

"Humans have such a different way of looking at things," Aspen said. "For us, it's so black and white. You're either it or you aren't. But for them...the possibilities are endless." He took a step closer, his eyes dancing with his smile. "Isn't that something?"

My heart pounded against my chest. His face was close enough that I could see the smatter of sun-kissed freckles across his nose spilling onto his cheeks. “Endless possibilities,” I murmured. “But...we’re not human, Aspen.” I looked at his ears, slightly pointed. If he was smiling, he would have revealed his long, sharp canines. They marked us for what we were, marked us for what we were not. “We’re wolves. We’re made differently.”

I’d never wanted to be human. I still didn’t want that, I was proud to be a wolf, and yet, a sliver of my soul longed for the choice of which Aspen spoke. Because if I could, I would choose him. I’d choose him in a heartbeat.

As Aspen searched my eyes, I was half-certain he was reading my heart. His shoulders rose as he drew a deep breath. “You’re about to turn eighteen.”

“Yeah.”

“After tomorrow...” He didn’t finish his thought.

“Yeah,” I said. Because I knew what he meant. After tomorrow, it wouldn’t be the same. Either there would be no potential future for us, all of our little moments scattered throughout the past few years for naught, or we’d be wrapped up in each other’s arms from tomorrow forward, with full assurance that we belong to each other.

It was either or, and nothing in between.

Chapter Three

Aspen and I walked forward, letting the moment pass between us like sand through fingers. He asked me what presents I was hoping to get for my birthday, and I indulged the triviality by listing off random wish list items I had. I was hyper-aware of

each step that brought my house closer and closer. The hill leading to the back of the home was long, but for once I wished it was longer. We were talking about nothing, but I didn't want Nothing to end.

A faint, but certain scent wafted towards my nose—pheromones that were easy to recognize. I hadn't realized he was already here, hours early. I glanced in the direction of the scent and saw Kodiak strolling towards us from the side of the house. His arms swung back and forth and he wore that goofy grin of his.

"Well hello, Luna," he said. His voice loud was louder than necessary. As always.

"Kodiak." I nodded towards him. Maybe I could leave with a brief acknowledgement? It wasn't like I hated the guy, but my time with Aspen was precious.

"Aspen, isn't it?" Kodiak asked, donning a sharp smile. His teeth seemed to gleam in the waning sun; canines were sharp even for a werewolf.

"Yes," Aspen said. His smile was polite and nothing more. "Good of you to remember me, Alpha Kodiak."

"Your brothers are good hunters," Kodiak said. He tilted his head and narrowed his eyes, smiling like a hunter who'd just found his next prey. "I'm excited to see your skills tonight."

Aspen's smile remained, but I could see the strain in his eyes. "Yeah." He turned to me. "Well, I uh, I guess I'd better head back home, then. I'll see you later Luna, yeah?"

"Yeah," I said, my heart drooping as I watched him scamper off down the hill and back towards the woods.

Tonight would begin the Blue Moon hunt, hosted by my own family. Werewolves from nearly a dozen packs would be gathering to launch the first of their two-night hunt, so naturally Kodiak was here.

Kodiak was looking at me with a mischievous grin, like he'd caught me stealing scraps of meat before dinner was ready. "So, is he your mate or something? You do know that your birthday is tomorrow, right?"

I clenched my jaw against his mocking. "He's just a friend."

His eyes were as sharp as his smile. "You don't seem to think that."

"That's not true," I lied.

He took a step forward. "Luna, I can hear your heartbeat quickening."

I hated his hearing. It was exceptional, even for a wolf.

"Well, you wouldn't be the first she-wolf to have a boyfriend." His voice lilted like an elf's and grated against my ears. "I guess you'll know tomorrow if he's the one."

The gentle spring breeze now felt hot and bothersome. "I guess so." My voice was snippier than I'd meant for it to be.

"Why are you so frustrated?" His eyes widened along with his smile. Kodiak had crazy eyes that were way too expressive for a normal face.

"I'm not frustrated, I'm annoyed."

"And that's different?"

"Yes. Because you are annoying, Kodiak."

He was unperturbed. "I still think it's the same thing."

“Well I would think an alpha wolf wouldn’t have some obnoxious voice but here we are.” I was so close to the house, nearly in its shadow. Why did I have to get stuck in some conversation with him? I stalked off towards the house.

“You’d think the future Alpha female wouldn’t throw little tantrums just because she likes some boy, but here we are,” he said, unshaken by my comment.

I whipped around. “I’m not throwing a tantrum!” I said in a sort of way that did not help my point.

“I’m not throwing a tantrum,” he mimicked, his voice high. He stomped his foot in the grass for good measure.

I looked at the smatter of dark freckles across Kodiak’s nose and cheeks—they were a perfect target for where to punch the sharp smirk off his face.

“Oh wow. Real mature,” I drawled.

He cackled in response, because a *cackle* is really the only way to describe how he was laughing.

“You’re friggin’ crazy.” I turned away from him and walked the short remaining distance to the house. I crossed the patio and walked up the stairs to the deck before entering in through the back door. I was greeted by the strong smell of sizzling bacon and the sight of Dad laboring over a frying pan. He smiled when I walked in, the kind of smile where his eyes crinkled and his sharp canines were on full display.

“Lulu! You’re out and about early.”

I glanced at the digital clock on the microwave—7:23 PM.

“I visited Queenie,” I said, seating myself at a barstool. “She sold me a pair of earrings for my party tomorrow. I also got breakfast with Aspen, Anika, and Nova.”

"I'm glad you still visit Queenie," he said. "*Even though Rory's not here*" is the part he didn't say. "And how's Aspen feeling? Tonight's his first blue moon hunt!"

I paused for a moment. "Well, he's really excited," I lied. Aspen's dad, Allistar, was Dad's right-hand man and the top beta in our pack, Dakota Ridge. Other than us, Aspen's family was at the top of the Dakota Ridge hierarchy. Aspen's preference for books and philosophy over hunting and fighting wouldn't have enamored him to Dad.

"That's good," Dad said. "The boy's got good pretty blood, he just needs to come into his own. Accept the wolf within."

"Yeah," I said. "The wolf within." Dad talked about that all the time.

"Speaking of good blood...did you run into Kodiak?" He grinned and his eyes sparkled.

My eyes rolled to the back of my head. "Yeah, I did."

Dad half laughed. "Now, Luna." He passed me a plate full of bacon and picked up a piece from the frying pan for himself. "I know you can't choose your mate, but if you mated with Kodiak, that would be a dream come true."

I chomped down on a piece of bacon. "For who? You?"

"Yes," Dad said, his mouth full of food.

"Kodiak is a maniac." I widened my eyes as big as I could and pointed at them with two fingers. "He's got crazy eyes."

"He's a great hunter."

"But the eyes, Dad! You know what I'm talking about, don't you? The way they practically bug out?"

“Sure, he’s a bit intense at times.” Dad didn’t seem to care about my pressing concern of Kodiak’s insane eyes. “But the kid’s got a good heart. *And* he’s an alpha, which is pretty cool if I do say so myself.”

“Whoever my mate is will be the next Alpha,” I said. “So it doesn’t really matter, anyways.”

Dad still had that little twinkle in his eye, that slight physical glow that came out when he teased. His irises were purple, like mine. In many ways, I looked like Dad. We had the same black hair, pale skin, and violet eyes, along with similar facial features. I was fairly tall for a girl and Dad was tall, though I was slender where Dad was large and bulky.

Of course, he also had facial hair, which was basically a requirement for any self-respecting wolf who had found his mate. It was a style that suited wolves well, since we always had great hair—facial or otherwise. Whenever I went shopping in human malls or visited human towns, I was always surprised at the patchy peach fuzzed faces on teenaged boys or the thinning hair and shiny domes atop the older men’s heads. Then again, they were probably taken aback by my pointed ears and purple eyes.

“I’m just saying, it would be nice if you could mate with him,” Dad said with his cheesiest grin.

I pushed a piece of bacon around my plate. “Like you said,” my voice grew quiet. “I can’t very well choose.” I thought of blonde curls and tiny freckles and tanned skin. *I make my own choices*, he’d said.

“Good thing you can’t choose, because you wouldn’t choose Kodiak anyways. Chances are better with the moon in charge than you,” Dad said, grinning.

“You’re dumb,” I laughed, picking up a piece of bacon and throwing it in my mouth. Amidst the tsunami of my emotions, Dad felt like the eye of the hurricane. Dad and I had a pretty standard daddy-daughter relationship when I was growing up. He’d come home in the morning after a long night of running pack meetings, settling disputes, delegating work, and occasionally hunting and brawling. When he’d walk in the door, he’d swing me around in the world’s most dramatic hug and say “Little Lulu!” before kissing me on the head, saying he was grateful for a cub like me. We’d all eat dinner together and on lucky occasions, he’d read us bedtime stories. I had loved him, of course, but we weren’t particularly close.

Then Mom passed away.

He started spending quality time with me and Rory every night, asking us all about our day, giving advice, doing his best to make up for the love of two parents. We’d go on little road trips to other pack territories and he’d drive us into human cities to take us shopping and buy us dinner. After Rory left, it was just me and him. Sometimes it felt like we were all alone in the world, here in this big empty house. I still remember when he tried to braid my hair. It was the first day of my junior year in high school and I’d broken my wrist in an official inter-pack spar a few days prior (a spar that I won). Mom had always braided my hair the first day of school, and then Rory had, so Dad took the task upon himself. I remember the feel of his thick scarred fingers against my scalp as they stumbled over the glossy black waves. The braid was clumsy and lopsided, but I wore it to school anyways. Besides, who in a werewolf high school was going to critique the Alpha daughter on her father’s braid?

I finished chomping on another piece of bacon. “Dad, do you think that Kodiak’s a lone wolf?”

Dad chewed thoughtfully. “I don’t know.” He sighed. “Probably, poor guy.”

My recently enflamed hatred for Kodiak cooled as quick as dead animal in the winter snow. “It must be awful.”

“He could still find her,” Dad said.

“Yeah,” I said, though neither of us believed it.

Kodiak, the freshly minted Alpha of the neighboring Midnight River pack, was an uncommonly skilled hunter, was loud and eccentric, and was twenty-three years old. He still didn’t have a mate.

Since he’d been the Alpha-heir of Midnight River, I’d seen Kodiak plenty of times growing up. When I was eleven and he was sixteen, I was half in-love with him. His obnoxious loudness was charming to an eleven-year-old, and him being fit and handsome and older made him irresistible. I had secretly hoped that he would be my mate, and even pronounced my love for him to my parents. They laughed, but explained to me that Kodiak would have his mate long before I turned eighteen.

But here we were. Eleven-year-old me would be thrilled.

Most wolves found their mate within a year of turning eighteen, though it wasn’t uncommon to find a mate at nineteen. However, if you made it past twenty and still hadn’t found your mate, most likely you just didn’t have one. You were one of the very few lone wolves. The cause of lone wolves was unknown and a topic of speculation—maybe you just weren’t blessed with a mate, or your mate died before he or she turned

eighteen so you never met. Whatever the reason, it was a universally acknowledged tragedy, and being a lone wolf was my worst nightmare.

Luckily, Kodiak seemed far more excited with action and fighting and hunting and being the Alpha wolf to be very much concerned with his rather obvious lack of a partner.

“So,” Dad said. “How’re you feeling, cubby? Tomorrow’s the big day.”

“Oh, yeah, tomorrow. It’s uh, it’s the big hunt, right?”

Dad sighed. “I know, I know. And I wish I could be there right when you turn eighteen. But think about it: maybe your mate is from one of these other packs, and you’ll get to meet him that much sooner. We’re all going to be at your party, and Rory’s going to be here all during your birthday as well.”

How good of her to show up.

“Yeah,” I muttered. “I guess Grey had to come for the hunt, didn’t he?”

Dad didn’t say anything for a moment, but I felt his heavy gaze. “Luna, Rory would have come regardless if there was a hunt or not. It’s your birthday.” re

“Sure,” I said.

As if on cue, I heard the front door open and a voice call out, “We’re here!”

“Speak of the devil,” I muttered.

“Rory!” Dad cried, rushing from his bacon frying pan towards the front door. I sighed and planted my feet on the ground and before sashaying my way towards the front. As sounds of joyous reunion echoed throughout the house, I tried to push down the thrumming excitement in my own heart. I didn’t care that Rory was back. Why should I?

I entered the front hallway, overlooked by the large moose head hanging over the front door. The reunion took place atop Dad's black bear hide turned rug and was lit by the waning sunlight from the window, making Rory's blonde hair shine golden as she hugged Dad. Her mate, Grey, stood closer to the door, watching with that placid smile of his. Over Dad's shoulder, Rory locked eyes with me. She pulled herself from his arms and ran over to me, trapping me in a hug. She smelled nice, like earth and pine trees.

"Luna!" At least she sounded excited.

"Welcome home, Aurora," I said, hugging her back. She might have abandoned me, but I had to admit that the world still felt a little more right with her home.

VIII. Conclusion

Blue Moon seeks to explore what it means to love as a human via a werewolf cast that mirrors the human experience. Luna, Aspen, and Kodiak's experiences with love each highlight different facets of the complexity of romance, and by introducing the mythical element of soulmates and setting the novel in an abnormal culture, love is shown to be messy and heartbreaking, but also beautiful within its tragedy. These elements combine to create a unique intersection of werewolves and romantic tragedy in a story that is relatable and compelling.

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