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Chapter 1

The Family

Luna Skinner stared at the big old ranch house in the middle of nowhere. She frowned.

"It's not so bad," Carmen said. She put her arm around her daughter's shoulder.

"Nothing a wrecking ball can't fix," Luna's brother, Bane, said as he joined them.

"Bane, you're awful," their mother laughed. She went into the house, dragging a large suitcase behind her.

"I wish for once we could buy a new house with fresh paint and a front lawn," Luna sighed.

"Forget it, Luna. We are never going to be like other people," Bane said. He gave a nasty smile and added, "Hey, if

you want to fit in, start plucking your eyebrows. Unibrows aren't a good look these days."

Luna glared at her brother. How dare he talk about her eyebrows that way! So what if they grew across the bridge of her nose? It wasn't like his were any better. What bothered her most was how mean Bane was about it. He was 17, a year older than she, and he was so sure of himself. Once they had been close. They had roamed together for hours. Now, it seemed as if they were always fighting.

In her room, Luna hung up her clothes, put her few books on a shelf, and made her bed. Carefully, she picked two framed photos out of a box. One photo was of her father. The other one was of a silvery-black wolf. Luna placed the photos on a dresser and walked to the open window.

The hot sun was beginning to go down behind the mountains, making long, purple shadows on the desert floor.

Car horns honked in the yard. *The family has arrived*, thought Luna. She saw her cousins, aunts, and uncles getting out of vans and cars. Asher Stone, the loner who had forced his way into their family and become leader, was there, too.

Luna thought about her father. He had been the leader of the family until he was shot by a farmer's bullet. It had made him weak. In her family, you could not be weak. To be weak was to invite someone strong to kill you. For her father, that someone had been Asher Stone.

"Mom wants us to come and say hi to Stone and the others," Bane said from the doorway.

"I have nothing to say to that man," Luna said angrily. Her golden eyes flashed with anger. She shook her head, making her long silvery-blond hair fly around her shoulders.

Bane ran his fingers through his own silvery-blond hair. "At least we agree on something. We just have to

ignore him until . . .”

“Until *what?*” Luna asked. Her stomach felt tight. “Can’t we just live like other people?”

Bane said, “You can’t change who you are, Luna.” He gave her a disgusted look and left the room with a swinging stride.

Luna walked slowly to the huge living room. It was noisy with relatives. Luna stayed at the edge of the room, wanting to escape.

“Listen, everyone,” Asher Stone shouted. Everyone became quiet as the muscular, black-haired man spoke. “I just want to say I hope we will all be happy here. We have 400 acres—a lot of room to roam.” He flashed a brilliant smile of perfect white teeth. “We’ll start building more homes and a community hall soon. Until then, we’ll use the barn for family meetings.”

Luna watched her mother walk over to stand beside Asher Stone. “Why does

she even go near him?" she asked herself angrily.

Bane stared at Asher. "If he knows what's good for him, he'll hang around someplace else."

Luna frowned as she climbed the stairs to her room. She was sick of her family, sick of her life as a member of the pack. Why couldn't she just live a normal human life?