

Chapter 186: Life Part I

Claire

Tereshan and I bolt awake at the sound of the howls. We both know what this means. I look at him, running through dates in my mind.

"Our birthday is tomorrow. You and I need to live through this day. You and me, together."

He kisses me hard. "You get Sal and the others safe, I have to get out there."

"I'll meet you there. No arguments," I say as I rush to put on my knife belt and get Sal before we both race out of the bedroom.

He grabs me quickly. "We do this together. We live together, the rest of our lives, and those lives don't end today."

I nod. "Together."

"Together," he says, leaning in to kiss his son before leaping over the banister and shifting into Magnor on the way to the ground. I hear Magnor's giant paws hit the floor and begin racing out of the packhouse as I rush down the stairs.

As many times as we've gone through this during drills, there are many, many young mothers in our packhouse and the fear is palpable. I begin directing them into their assigned safe rooms. We did it this way to make sure that there are enough omegas with weapons training in each room. We reinforced the doors, but we aren't taking any chances with our pack

members.

I direct others, making sure no one is panicking so much that they aren't moving to where they need to be. I make my way to the safe room where I will leave Sal, finding Feena already there, handing her daughter to Elise. Once he is settled, Elise turns back to me. I hand her Salvatore, then turn to Feena.

"Are you ready?"

"To finally kill that fucking bastard Roman? Beyond ready."

"Good. Help me secure the safe rooms and then we'll head outside together."

Nita comes rushing up to us. "I've got the rooms on the other side secure, we just need to make sure these are secure."

We check all the rooms and then the three of us head out the back doors. Wolves begin rushing at us, ready to attack. Nita and I throw a knife and Feena shoots her arrow.

We all look around, trying to find our mates. When I spot Tereshan, I see he is squaring off against Alpha Eason.

"I have to go help Tereshan." I say, turning to the others.

"Go, I need to find Dane," Feena says.

"And I need to find Bryson," Nita says.

As I race into the battle, I see that Jesiah and Lucy are already fighting side by side. As I look around, I see many mated pairs fighting together. Many of the couples with mates that came from the brothel are fighting as well. They have a lot to fight for, since it was Eason and his pack that imprisoned most of them and gave them to Franco. And it was Roman that kept

them enslaved. They also then made sure to take advantage of their imprisoned state while they were in the brothel. There is a lot of anger and hate on this battlefield.

I see a wolf racing toward Tereshan, ready to attack him from behind, but I throw my knife at the wolf, hitting him in his eye. He falls at my feet, and I leap over his dying body, Damara forcing the shift as I head toward Magnor.

I refuse to allow either of us to die today.

Nita POV

I race around the battlefield trying to find Bryson.

'What are you doing out here? You should be in a safe room with Willow.' Bryson's voice flickers in my head. I can feel him fighting.

'I'm not leaving you to fight alone.'

'Nita, I need to know you're safe. You should be with our daughter.'

'Bryson, you know she's here.'

'It doesn't matter. And it's not like I'm going to see her anyway, not with all this fighting going on.'

Bryson may not realize it, but I understand Ivy in ways that he never did. He was always blinded by the mate bond. I can see it now with me. He refuses to see any of my negative qualities, making excuses for me if I act irrationally or get angry at him. He takes the blame for everything, even when he did nothing wrong.

I can only assume he did the same when he and Ivy were

mated. The difference is, I don't take advantage of it. I love my mate. I value our relationship. She used it against him, and she'll do it again. She'll find him, I know she will and when she does.....I have to hope that our bond is stronger than theirs, that this time, he'll be able to see through her manipulation.

But she was his first love, his first mate. It's not like she's dead. She rejected him, but how does that work? What if things begin to turn in this battle and she decides she wants him back, even if it is only to protect herself. He betrayed his Alpha once for her, would he do it again? To save her?

I'm battling, fighting my way through the group of wolves that are here to take over my pack, here to ruin everything that we've all worked so hard to create.

I stop on my way to find Bryson, feeling myself getting closer and feeling him moving to get to me. I help an omega couple that is fighting against two wolves. I throw a knife into the side of one, distracting them enough that one of the omegas can slam a hammer into the side of its head, bashing it in. She nods at me before turning to help her mate fight off the other wolf.

As I race past the wolf, I grab the knife out of its side and keep moving to where I feel Bryson. As soon as he sees me, he shifts, rushing over to me, grabbing me to him. A moment later I feel him reach behind me and I turn to see his claws slicing across the face and chest of another attacker. Bryson tries to push me behind him, but instead, I turn, slamming my knife up under the attacker's chin and into the back of his throat.

He gasps as I rip it out and Bryson pulls me away.

"Let's go," he says and as we turn, I see her. She's standing in the middle of the battle as if it's not even going on, and for her maybe it isn't. She's staring right at Bryson.

Ivy.

"Bryson," her voice is quiet, soft, but somehow it carries over the noise of battle and death around us.

I look around, seeing that the battle is turning. We are beginning to overtake Eason's pack. I turn back to Ivy. I was right. Now, when she's feeling defeat coming for her, death knocking at her door, now she comes for Bryson. MY mate.

"Bryson, I made a mistake. I'm so sorry."

"Ivy," he says and there's a softness to his voice that I've only ever heard when he speaks to me or our daughter. It makes my heart hurt and I turn to look at my mate. But is he my mate? Was he ever truly mine?

"Bryson, please forgive me. I'm so sorry. It was always you. You are the only one for me," she says, big alligator tears streaking down her face.

Bryson takes a step toward her, raising his arms to her.

"Bryson?" I say, my voice catching as my heart feels like it's going to rip out of my chest.

Ivy holds his gaze, giving him an adoring, loving look.

"I love you, Bryson," she says, and he pulls her to him.

As I watch, horrified, she looks at me, wrapping her arms around him and sneering that she's won, yet again. I clutch my heart, feeling pain like nothing I've ever felt before.

"Ivy," Bryson says, taking her face in his hands and pulling her back to look at him. She immediately switches back to the look she had before, the adoring, loving mate.

"Nita has been more of a mate to me in these few months than you ever were," he says, and I see the frown on her face a moment before he snaps her neck.

He lets her go, turning to me as she falls to the ground dead. He pulls me to him.

"You, Nita, are the only one for me. And I meant what I said, you've been more of a mate to me than she ever was, and I love you more than I ever loved her."

He pulls my face back to look at him, putting his forehead against mine. "Now, let's help our pack win this battle, so we can finally get on with our lives."