

Alpha's Redemption: My Luna Has A Son by Jessica Hall

Chapter Thirty-One

Valen

Ten weeks later

Everly has been put on bed rest. She's made it to thirty weeks and Doc already said there's a high chance she won't carry the pregnancy to term. He also told us at her last appointment that she'll need to have a c-section. But with everything going on, we haven't even started setting up the nursery.

Valarian and I stop by the hotel on the way to the baby store to pick up Macey and Zoe, who are coming to help pick out the baby stuff. Everly wanted to come, but she can barely walk a few yards without having to pee, and her feet are swollen. However, she doesn't trust my 'vanilla taste', as she calls it, so the girls are coming to advise.

She insisted Valarian go to spend some time with me after we learned he's received detention twice for hitting two boys at school and has been playing up. We spoke to him about it and all he said was the boy deserved it. He refuses to tell us what it was about, despite us trying to talk to him about it.

Though I'm glad the girls are coming because I know Valarian will have a meltdown when he learns the genders. We didn't have the heart to tell him when we got home after the ultrasound. When we picked him up from school that day, he was holding balloons he'd painted blue, so today will be his revelation that he's getting three sisters instead of brothers. I nervously chew my nails as I wait for Zoe and Macey to come out.

Zoe is first out of the hotel, skipping excitedly over just as I see Macey come out the side doors of the restaurant. Zoe spots her, and for a second, they stand there staring at each other. My brows furrow at the reason until they both start racing toward the car, shoving and pushing each other.

"Shotgun!" Macey screams.

"I called it first!" Zoe snarls, shoving her, only to be yanked back as she reaches for the door handle. Macey sticks her tongue out at her when Zoe falls on her butt. She hops in the car and I raise an eyebrow at her. Zoe huffs and climbs in the back with Valarian.

"You two are idiots. I can't believe you just fought over the front seat like damn children," I tell them, shaking my head while they place their seatbelts on.

"I shotgun the front on the way home!"

"If you can get to it first, small fry," Macey taunts.

"Enough. Zoe gets the front on the way back. Stop your bickering, or both of you will sit in the back," I tell them. Geez, they're like Everly's annoying sisters. I need to keep my daughters away from these two crazies, I think to myself.

"Well, looks like I'll be claiming that foot rub today," Macey says.

"Macey gets the front seat on the way back," I quickly declare. No way am I rubbing her feet.

"Ew! Dad won't rub your feet," Valarian says. Macey snickers.

"Your father has to. He lost a bet," Macey tells him.

"What sort of bet?" Valarian asks, and Zoe answers.

"Oh, you'll see soon," Zoe says, messing his hair. "Are you excited about going baby shopping?"

"Yep! I want to find the babies some dinosaur plushies!"

"And other plushies, remember. And we're mainly going to find cribs," I tell him.

"What girl—" Macey starts to say.

"Shh!" I hiss at her, not wanting Valarian to have a meltdown in the car.

"Huh?" Valarian asks.

"Nothing. I was saying dinosaur plushies sound great. Taylor used to love dinosaurs."

"She still does, but only T. rexes. She likes their little arms," Valarian says.

When we reach the store, I can't believe how terrified I am of entering, knowing my son will find out the genders today. Alphas fear nothing, yet here I am, scared to tell my child I wrestled in a girl way because my pecker decided it was throwing girls this time around.

Valarian wanders around the store, finding stuff with Zoe and looking at crib blankets, while I find the cribs Everly showed me on the store's website. They're white, and I checked to see if they had them in stock; they do, and for half price, too. Once I have them set aside, I wander around the aisles looking at baby clothes and blankets. Just as I pick up some pink stuff, Zoe and Valarian come over with some dinosaur plushies.

"Can I pick a mobile?" Valarian asks before his eyes go to the pink onesie in my hands. Macey wanders around the store with a cart that has a blue blanket over it.

"One's a girl?" Valarian asks, and I chew my lip, about to put it back when Zoe leans down beside him.

"Girls aren't so bad. You like Taylor and Casey," Zoe tells him, and Valarian nods, looking at me.

"I found the bottle sterilizer Everly was looking at online, and the breast pump. Oh, and I found the breastfeeding pillow," Macey says, showing us.

"I got blue plushies," Valarian says happily.

"Aw, that's great. They'll love them."

"Yeah, but now I need to find a pink one," Valarian says.

"Why? Girls like blue," Macey says, batting her lashes at him. She points to her eyes.

"See? Blue eyeshadow," she says.

"Hmm, I guess you're right," Valarian says. We buy a few more things—he picks out some colorful mobiles for their cribs—and the rest we'll order. He seems to be taking the news of one girl alright, but I know we have to tell him there won't be a brother. Macey and Zoe want to see Everly, so we head home afterward. The store is delivering the cribs and the rest of the furniture tomorrow.

When we get home, Valarian is questioning names. We haven't picked any names yet, though I have a couple in mind, and so does Everly, but deciding names is hard because the kid has to live with whatever we choose. The stress it's causing me is shocking.

We show Everly the few things we have with us, and Macey and Everly start pulling out the sterilizer and bottles, wanting to try them out. Valarian watches with eager eyes, drinking it all in. He talks of wanting to help with bottles, and Everly explains she's going to try breastfeeding, but he can help when she expresses milk, which launches us into a conversation about how she has milk. I think the boy will need counseling after that conversation—he seems to think she's going to grow teats like a cow.

"So, are you going to pick the girl's name and dad picks the boys' names?" he asks while testing the bottle brush viciously. Everly looks at me.

You didn't tell him? she mouths. I smile at her awkwardly and hold my hands out apologetically.

"Well, you know how your father has to rub Auntie Macey's feet because she won the bet?" Everly shoots me a look as she's about to break the news to him and break his heart. He shudders.

"That is so gross," Valarian chuckles.

"Hey! My feet aren't gross," Macey tells him.

I shudder at the thought.

"Yep. Dad won't tell me what the bet was, though," Valarian pouts.

"Well, Auntie Macey bet that the babies would be three girls," Everly tells him, and his brows furrow. He looks at me and I swear I feel the blood drain from my face.

"You said you would wrestle in a boy way!" he growls, stunning me. Astonished by the sound, I stare at Everly, who also seems startled by it.

"Now they won't like my plushies!" he sobs, placing the bottle down and burying his face in his arms as he leans on the counter. Everly brushes her fingers through his hair and glares at me.

"Now we have to take them back, all because you wrestled in Mom's butt!" Valarian cries. Macey snorts and chokes at his words, while Everly gapes at him and Zoe snickers.

"It's not funny! I told Dad to wrestle in a boy way and he got it wrong," Valarian pouts. He snatches the plushies off the counter, putting them back in the bag.

"Valarian, there is no way to wrestle in a boy or girl way," Everly tells him.

"Yeah! Casey said she came out her mom's hoo-ha, but I came out your butt. And Dad promised he wouldn't wrestle your butt!"

"Vagina," Everly corrects and laughs, and Zoe's face heats.

"Babies don't come out of the butt," I tell him.

"But Casey said—"

"Casey came out of my vagina, Valarian. Not my butt," Zoe states.

"And Taylor came out of my belly. They cut me open, but she's still a girl," Macey tells him, and he seems confused.

"Girls aren't so bad," Zoe tells him.

"I know, but now I will have to fight all the boys to protect them," he says, glaring at the plushies in his hands.

"Huh?" Everly says.

"Like I do for Taylor and Casey. The boys pick on them. I had to punch Blake in the nose the other day. He tugged on Casey's hair and made her cry and called Taylor a rogue whore," he says.

"So that's why you got detention at school the other day?" I ask him.

"He called Taylor that?" Macey asks, and Valarian nods his head.

"Did you tell the teacher?" Zoe asks, yet Macey's eyes water, knowing the title bestowed on her is now on her daughter by default. I despise that name. It sickens me, and to know children of my pack are referring to other children by it angers me.

"No. I punched him on his big nose."

“You shouldn’t have hit him—you should have told me. I’ll speak with Blake’s father. Violence isn’t the answer,” I tell him.

“I don’t want them to call my sisters names,” he says.

“They won’t. Besides, they’ll be tough, like your momma. And they’ll have you to protect them,” Zoe tells him. Valarian nods.

“So, do I still have to apologize to Blake?” Valarian asks. In my eyes, no, but the principal asked for an apology when he returns from his two-day suspension.

“You still need to apologize for hitting him, but I’ll be making sure Blake also has to apologize,” I tell him, looking at Macey. She folds her arms across her chest and nods once, clearly not happy that her daughter is being picked on.

“I’ll handle it,” I tell her, and she nods, yet, the look on her face says she wants to go deliver the boy the spanking his mother never gave him.

The girls stay for coffee and cake that Zoe made me stop at the bakery for on the way home, then I drive them back to the hotel so they can get the girls from school in an hour. Around 3:30, Everly’s phone rings and she reaches for it on the coffee table where Valarian is drawing.

“It’s Auntie Macey,” Valarian says, passing the phone to her. She quickly answers it, and a moment later, I feel the mind link open up.

Marcus's voice frantically echoes in my head.

‘Have you seen Ava and Zoe?’he asks.

‘Not since I dropped Zoe back at the hotel. What’s up?’

‘Ava and Zoe went to pick up a few things from the hardware store and were supposed to pick Casey and Taylor up. The school just called me because they weren’t picked up. I’m on my way there now to get them.’

‘Where’s Macey?’

‘With Tatum. He had a physical therapy appointment this afternoon. She’s meeting me at the school,’Marcus says.

‘Have you tried mind-linking her?’

‘Of course! But the bond is blocked. I can't feel her, Valen!’ he says more frantically. I can hear the fear in his voice.

‘What? Where are you?’ I ask, confused. Everly is talking frantically as she stands up and moves to the landline

“Driving to get Casey, I... I feel off, and I can't feel her. Why is she blocking me out?”

“Yeah, I'm trying her cell now,” I hear Everly say as she dials a number into the house phone.

‘Hang on, Everly's calling someone.’

“I'm trying Ava's phone,” she says. I listen to it ring out.

“I'll try my father,” I hear her say as she starts dialing more numbers with shaking hands. I make my way over to her when Marcus suddenly screams through the mind-link before it cuts off. My heart races at the agony in his voice. I instantly try to reopen it, but I get nothing but howling through the link—he's shifted.

Chapter Thirty-Two

Zoe

Half an hour earlier

“Did you grab the paint thinners?” I ask Ava as we line up at the hardware store. She rummages through her basket and holds up the tin, and I nod. We're revamping some outdoor furniture and stopped on our way to the school to grab a few things before picking up the kids.

“You think it'll get it off?” Ava asks, reading the instructions on the back.

“Yeah, it'll work. Just don't get it on your skin, it burns like a bitch,” I tell her while we go through the self-checkout. I take the tins from her and quickly scan them, then pay for our items before walking back out to my little car.

We're loading everything into the trunk when I hear the screech of tires on the road and we look over our shoulders to see a red van race past at alarming speeds. Both of us watch the commotion on the main street before the car leaves our sight.

“Geez! Asshole. It’s school time,” Ava says, shaking her head. I sigh, quickly closing the trunk before climbing into the driver’s side. I’ve just started the car and Ava is climbing into the passenger seat when my phone rings—it’s Marcus checking if I’m still set to grab the kids. I tell him we’re on our way to the school, he promises to meet me at home, then we quickly hang up.

Ava and I buckle up and pull out onto the road. We’re driving past the reserve toward Valen’s pack school when we hear the roar of an engine coming up fast behind us. Ava looks behind me and groans.

“It’s the dickhead from the hardware store,” she says, turning back to the front. Must be the day for idiot drivers. Just as I’m going around a slight bend, I’m jolted forward in my seat and my head hits the steering wheel. I vaguely hear Ava scream and the sound of creaking metal before everything goes black.

My head pounds when my vision returns and pain slithers up my spine. The smell of oil and rubber reaches my nose, along with the scent of blood. Dazedly, I blink, but my eyes blur and throb to the same beat as my head. Smoke and dust fill the car from the smashed windows.

My hands hang above my head and I slowly realize I’m upside-down—we’ve crashed. I try to remember what happened, but I groan, dazed and pained. Looking over at Ava, she also groans before tugging at her belt. I try to warn her and reach for her, but it’s too late; she undoes her seatbelt and crashes onto the roof of my upturned vehicle.

I try to put my hand on the roof to support my weight when shooting pain races through my hand. I shriek, looking at it to find my thumb dislocated. Ava unclips my seat belt without warning and I immediately land on my busted hand.

“Zoe, what happened?” Ava murmurs, clutching her head. My surroundings spin as I roll onto my back and glance out the window. We’re in the reserve. How long have we been out for?

“The truck,” I groan. As I roll back onto my side, and through the broken window, I see feet racing toward us. A gasp escapes me and my eyes widen when I see a man reach in through the broken window and grip Ava’s hair just before she can turn to see what I’m looking at. He starts yanking her through the smashed,

mangled window and she screams and thrashes. I grip her legs, trying to hold her, but she's torn from my grip.

Her screams ring out loudly until a man I've never seen before punches her and knocks her out—her body goes limp and he lifts her over his shoulder. I crawl out the window of my wrecked vehicle to try to stop him somehow, only I've forgotten about the other two sets of feet I saw.

As I scream for them to let her go, arms wrap around my torso. Twisting, I attempt to turn in the man's grip, trying to get loose before I sink my teeth into his bicep. He growls and lets go, allowing me to escape his clutches. The man with Ava is walking up the steep incline and I chase after. Before I can reach her, I'm tackled and the air is expelled from my lungs with an oomph

"What do you want to do with this one?" a deep baritone voice calls out above me as I thrash, trying to get out from under him—his knee presses into the center of my back, crushing my lungs further.

"Bring her. The boss may let us keep her," I hear another voice call out. The man above rolls me over, his hand wraps around my throat, and he smiles cruelly, his dark hair falling into his eyes. I wheeze, trying to catch my breath. Suddenly, I feel the mind-link open up and Marcus' voice flits through the mind-link.

'Babe?' Marcus says before he screams. 'Babe!'

'Marcus!' I shriek.

"Oh, we'll have fun with you, alright," the man growls, flashing his teeth as I try to free myself. I scream when I feel his tongue roll across the side of my face and he groans lewdly. His friend behind him is laughing. I try to alert Marcus, but a fist connects with the side of my head. I gaze dizzily up at the sky, my eyes losing focus before I'm hit again and see nothing but darkness.

* * *

Ava

Motion and bumps wake me. We're in the back of a van and my hands are tied behind my back. My fingers feel like they're losing circulation and I hit the side wall before hearing a chuckle.

I look up only to be kicked in the stomach by the man sitting along the side wall; his legs are what I slid into. I grunt at the impact and a whimper escapes me as I roll on my trapped arms. I can't even catch my breath before I'm winded again when the van stops, causing me to roll onto the other side. The double back doors are swung open and I suck in a harsh breath as pain rattles through all of me. I can taste my own blood and smell... smell...

Turning my head, I search for Zoe to find her also tied up and another man with ash blonde hair pawing at her and squeezing her breasts. Her chest is littered with bite marks, her shirt has been torn off her, and she's only left in her bra and black pants. Zoe is unconscious and completely limp. Fear coils and slivers through me. No! I gasp. I struggle against my restraints and growl at him.

"Don't touch her, you sick fucks!" I scream at him when I see the man push his hand down her pants. At the same time, I feel a pinch in my neck and the dark-haired man waves a syringe in front of my face.

"That'll do bitch. Now quiet, or you'll get a taste of what she gets," the man who kicked me says. He sweeps his dark hair from his eyes before gripping my arm and dragging me from the back of the van. I feel funny. My vision tunnels, though I remain conscious. However, I'm helpless as I feel the drug take effect; I can feel the wolfsbane burning through my system, stunning my wolf and muting the mind-link. I curse at myself—I should have played dead and alerted my father.

I'm tossed onto the cold, concrete floor. My head bounces off it painfully when Zoe falls beside me.

"Zoe?" I groan. She's drenched in blood. I know I am too, but she has a deep gash across her forehead and blood is dribbling out of the corner of her mouth.

"Zoe!" I cry when I see the man who stabbed me in the neck also stab a needle into hers. She doesn't respond. When I hear more footsteps, my eyes try to glance around, but my body is paralyzed, and it isn't until the footsteps draw close enough that I can see his face.

Carter.

A growl vibrates and dies in my chest. He's wearing a dark blue suit and looks like his father, only more unhinged. His eyes are half red and half green like snake

eyes, the aftermath of being forsaken. His scent is also off—not rogue but also not like a pack wolf either. His hair is styled messily, like he’s run his fingers through his gelled hair. Tattoos on his chest poke out from under the open buttons on his white dress shirt and on his arms where his sleeves are rolled to the elbows.

“Who is that?” Carter asks, motioning toward Zoe with his hand.

“Some whore she was with. I think Ava called her Zoe?” the dark-haired man says while looking over at his buddy, who shrugs.

“Uh... just a rogue whore,” the blonde man says.

She isn’t. She’s Beta Marcus’ mate, I try to rasp out, but my tongue thickens, swelling in my mouth and my words are not even audible with the way they are slurred. My heart races in my chest when I see him bend down and grip her face, turning it to look at her.

“She’s marked,” Carter sneers.

I watch as Carter stands up and nudges her onto her back with his foot. He sighs, looking at his men before his eyes roam over her half-undressed body.

“Do what you want with that one. No one touches John’s daughter, though; I need her alive for now,” Carter says, and the two men chuckle darkly. The blonde man licks his lips as he bends down to grab her.

My heart sinks into my stomach, a pit forming as I watch her get tossed over his shoulder before I’m also grabbed. We appear to be in some sort of warehouse, but as they move toward a door, we’re suddenly descending stairs. I try to take everything in, looking for an escape and trying to remember my way through the tunnels as they navigate the twists and turns.

We seem to be in the old emergency evacuation tunnels that run beneath the city. They were all supposed to have been closed up years ago. But it’s obvious Nixon’s pack has been opening them, because after about 10 minutes of walking, I’m deposited onto the cold floor in a part that opens up wider, creating a large space. Zoe is dumped beside me and when she hits the hard ground, she grunts as she comes to. She blinks rapidly as she wheezes, trying to catch her breath.

Her eyes fall on me. Tears burn my eyes and she opens her mouth, but like me, she can't get her tongue to work. Yet, it doesn't stop her blood-curdling scream when one of the men starts ripping her pants off. I want to help her, yet I'm powerless to do anything but watch and listen to her screams. I sob when Carter wanders into the room, his shoes loud on the concrete as he saunters over to me and crouches beside me. He peers over his shoulder as his men fight over who will get her first, then smirks and taps my face in his hand.

"Don't worry, Ava. I will make sure you get to watch," he purrs, sweeping my hair away from my eyes. "Should have taken me up on the marriage proposal. Oh well." He clucks his tongue.

"Your sister and father made an enemy of the wrong person. But," he pauses and laughs when Zoe screams again and I watch one of the men run a blade between her breasts, cutting her bra away. All she can do is lie there and watch what they do to her—feel what they do to her. A whimper escapes me.

"Now, if Valen and your father don't meet my demands, that will be you next," he says before rising.

The dark-haired man shoves her legs open and pushes inside her. Zoe cries and pleads for a while before her screams die out and she just stares off vacantly, her eyes fixed on the ceiling, like she suddenly becomes an empty shell.

I scream and cry, clenching my eyes shut, unable to watch as they rape her, praying someone will get to us before they kill her. But as the hours drag on, I lose track of time. At regular intervals, I'm jabbed, just like Zoe, with a needle.

I have no idea how much time has passed. We must have dozed off when I hear footsteps of the two men and Carter returning, along with another man. Carter nods toward his men, who then drag a screaming Zoe from the room, down the tunnel, and around the corner into the next room. Once again, her screams ring out loudly, and I throw up, choking on my vomit as it suffocates me.

I pray it will kill me. I can't handle her screams, her cries, or what I've seen. I want to tear my eyes from my head to unsee the horrible things they did to her, the horrible things I was forced to watch, and the vile things she's enduring.

Only, death doesn't come.

Carter swiftly walks over, turning my head enough that I don't aspirate on my own vomit.

"There, that's better. Can you see? Don't want you to miss the show," he taunts, wiping my wet eyes before he grabs my hair and drags me through my vomit so I have a better view of the new man raping my friend. Anger burns through me and I roar, my fury forcing words out.

"I hope Marcus rips you to shreds, you fucking pig!" I scream and Carter laughs and drops me on the floor. The back of my head smashes the pavement just before I see his foot come toward my face and everything goes black.

Time is lost to me when I come to. I have feeling in my limbs, yet my mind feels stunted. Warmth presses against my back and a body shakes, which makes me turn my head to find Zoe huddled beside me, her knees clutched to her chest—the dead look in her gaze is agonizing. Sluggishly, I pull myself up to a sitting position and lean against the wall she's leaning against. I press closer to her, trying to warm her naked form; she looks like she's been bathed in blood.

"Zoe?" I murmur, but she just stares vacantly ahead. I turn my head to find Carter on the phone.

"I'll hand the little one back; send the rogue to get her. But Ava stays until you stand down and hand the city back over to Valen. And don't forget my money," he snarls into the phone before hanging it up.

"What's going on?" one of the men asks, glancing over at us.

"Grab her. Her friend is going to do the exchange at the bridge."

"And if she doesn't bring the money with her?"

"Then we toss her over, but Everly won't risk her sister. You, watch Ava," he says to the ash-blond one.

"Grab the bitch. She's coming with us."

"What about Valen?" the dark-haired man says.

"Not an issue. He knows if he follows the woman, I kill Ava. He wants her back? He stands down as Alpha and relinquishes his pack to me," Carter says and I gasp.

“And John?” the man asks.

“He wants to swap places with his daughter. We’ll let him sweat it for a bit, maybe send him some pictures. But I think our only chance is keeping her. John will die for his girls, and Valen knows that. We aren’t doing the swap. Besides, I want John to live with the knowledge he’s the reason his family is dead.”

“Well, obviously. But what next?”

“Once Valen stands down, the city is ours. Then I’ll get revenge on Alpha John when I kill his daughters and grandson,” Carter says, confusing me.

“And her?” he motions toward me.

“We kill her. But first, we’ll play with her,” he cackles loudly while walking out. The dark-haired man moves toward us and reaches for Zoe, who spits on him. He backhands her and I launch forward only to be kicked in the face by the other man as she’s dragged out kicking and screaming by her hair.

ChapterThirty-Three
Valen

We find Marcus when we locate the car down a ravine by the reserve. He’s furious, and I can’t get a coherent thought out of him—whatever he’s feeling through the bond is making him want blood. He’s more crazed than any forsaken I’ve come across; it takes 12 of my men with me to take him down. We have to sedate him, which only causes fear to twist in my stomach.

Zoe’s car is on its roof—tire tracks in the mud tell us they were run off the road—but there’s no sign of the girls. We have the entire city out looking for them. None of us can locate them via the mind-link. Slasher pack is also out searching further away. John is beside himself and Everly is a frantic mess. In a matter of minutes, our worlds were once again turned upside down. I had sent men out looking for Carter and he was located quickly. He gave the council the all-clear to search his pack but they found nothing. Everly is convinced Nixon has come back and taken them, but makes no sense.

They’ve been missing for two days when the first ransom call comes in.

A growl tears out of me when I hear Everly answer the call and Carter’s voice is on the other end.

“Now that I have your attention, and you have been unable to locate them, you will meet my demands,” Carter states.

Everly stares at the phone, checking the number—it’s definitely Carter’s. She puts him on the loudspeaker and my brows furrow. The bastard even helped us search his pack territory! Is this some sick game to him?

“Carter?” I ask.

“Hello, Valen,” Carter drawls through the phone.

“Done wasting resources? Though I’m shocked at how hard you searched for... Zoe, is it?”

“You vile bastard! Marcus will kill you when he gets his hands on you,” I growl at him while opening the mind-link.

“I never touched her,” he claims.

‘Find Carter! He has them,’ I call to my pack through the link.

“Well, that was fast,” he says, confusing me.

“Excuse me?”

“Two seconds. You didn’t waste any time. I haven’t even asked for anything yet, and you’ve already called across the mind-link. You won’t find me,” he adds, then laughs.

I look at Everly. I knew he was crazy, but this is a whole other level.

“You have a mole,” he states. “Don’t be surprised—you have plenty of enemies in this city. It shouldn’t come as a shock to know one lives in your pack.”

Fuck! That renders the mind-link useless.

“Where are Ava and Zoe?” I demand.

“With me, of course. Now call off your men or I’ll send Zoe back in pieces.”

Everly whimpers beside me and I glance at her, the blood draining from her face. Macey bursts into the living room and rushes to Everly’s side, then helps her sit down when she sees the look on her friend’s face; Macey’s been staying here while we organize search parties.

“What do you want? I swear if you’ve hurt them—” Though I know he already has, by the fact my Beta has had to be sedated for two days.

“You'll do nothing, Valen. I am calling the shots. Now, I have two requests. One, I want the money John owes. Two, you stand down as Alpha, hand your pack over to me, and leave the city, leaving your mate and son behind until I know you are far enough away for me to escape.”

“Like fuck, I will! Hand them over and we can talk this out,” I tell him.

“Uh, uh, uh, you're not in a position to compromise. As I said, I'm calling the shots, not you. As a sign of goodwill, I want the money by 5:00 p.m.—I will select the meeting spot—and send Everly to drop the money—”

“No!” I snarl, cutting him off.

“I don't think you understand the position you're in, Valen.”

“I'll do it,” Macey says. I glance at her and Everly shakes her head, trying to get out of her seat, but I growl, telling her to sit down.

“See, you have a volunteer. May I know who the brave lady is?” Carter asks and Macey growls. “Oh, she sounds feisty,” he chuckles.

“You're a sadistic prick!”

“Oh, you have no idea how sadistic. But nonetheless, money at 5:00 p.m.. I will call with the drop-off point and tell her where to go. In return, I will give her Zoe. Once you see I made good on this, then we move on to the next part.”

“You want me out of the city? That’s fine, but I am taking my mate and son with me.”

“That isn't what I agreed to, but for now, I need the money. If anyone follows her, I will get one of my men to slit Ava's throat.”

Everly gasps at his words, making my eyes dart to her briefly.

“Why are you doing this?”

“I don't know. Why am I doing this? Maybe I’m just a sadistic prick,” he laughs.

“Do as he says, Valen, please,” Everly begs with tears in her eyes, though her rage is evident through the bond.

“Take the deal. I’ll meet him,” Macey growls.

“So the girl, what’s her name?”

“Her name is Macey.”

“Ah, the rogue whore. I heard about her—quite the brute.”

Macey growls, snatching up the phone. She gives Carter her number, and Everly starts calling banks to empty accounts to come up with the money.

It just makes no sense. And who is the mole in my pack? There is only one way for him to know I used the mind-link—one of my men is with him.

“One person follows her, and I kill Ava,” Carter snarls as Macey hands the phone to me.

“Yeah, yeah. I fucking heard you.” I’m about to hang up when he speaks again.

“I’ll hand the little one back; send the rogue to get her. But Ava stays until you stand down and hand the city back over to Valen. And don’t forget my money,” he snarls into the phone before hanging it up.

“He had them all this time,” Everly says, her hands shaking as she rubs her face with them, wiping the tears away. “I have to tell my father” she murmurs, getting to her feet and passing me the phone that she was on the bank with.

I send Officer Derrick to retrieve the cash and bring it here while I have Doc sent over to give Macey a dose of the cure in case Carter tries anything. Then we wait by the phone for it to ring.

John comes over with my father, and the moment the phone rings, he pounces on it and begs to swap places with Ava. According to my father, John had called Carter on the way here, but Carter refused.

This whole scenario is bizarre, and I can't figure it out—none of us can. We thought Carter was a victim in this. That’s how he portrayed himself when his father fled. We found him in a padded room for fuck's sake. Was it all an act?

“Put the girl on,” Carter snarls, obviously getting sick of John's begging. John hands the phone to Macey.

“Get in your car. I will tell you the directions. One person follows and Ava is dead, so don't try anything,” he snarls. Macey swallows and looks at us.

Taylor comes out from up the hall, tears brimming in her eyes. My father instantly tends to her, escorting her off.

“Do as I say and no one gets hurt,” Carter says, and Macey lets out a shaky breath.

Everly goes to pick up the duffle bag, but I take it from her and place it over Macey's shoulder. Officer Derrick stops Macey as she passes him and holds a finger to his lips. He pulls his gun from his holster and turns the safety off and on to show her. She nods before he tucks it down the back of her pants.

Macey's also wearing a tracking device and voice recorder tucked in her bra and the council is already alerted—there is no way he's leaving this city once I stand down. But what's the point of that if he intends to leave? All it would do is sever my ability to mind-link, and I know my people won't bow for any other Alpha. Except, of course, whoever the traitor in my pack is.

It just makes no sense. I watch helplessly as she walks out the doors, knowing he's watching from somewhere outside. I want to go with her, but it isn't worth the risk; I know Ava would be killed. For now, I'll play his game until the council returns.

Then I will kill him.

* * *

Macey

My stomach is in knots.

The gun digs into my lower back as I follow Carter's directions—he has me driving around the city for ages like he's wasting my time.

“Turn at the next roundabout and double back.”

This is the sixth loop of the city. I know he's making sure I'm not followed, but Valen won't risk Ava and Zoe, I know that much. Carter's an idiot if he thinks

Valen won't come after him for this, though. And Marcus will kill whoever hurt Zoe when he wakes. Even the rogues will hunt the bastard down for what he did.

"Pull over by the post office sorting facility."

I do as he says, yet I see no one, not even any cars.

"Get out of the car, walk up the alley, and place the bag by the bin."

"Where is Zoe?" I growl.

"Dump the bag first."

"Not until I have Zoe!" I snarl.

"Little stupid making demands, don't you think? Very well, Zoe is with me."

"And where are you?" I ask.

"Close. Now dump the bag."

"No! Not until I have Zoe!"

Carter snarls. "Foolish woman," he sneers, and Zoe shrieks in the background.

"Okay! Okay!" I yell, shoving the door open. We're close to the old meat factory. This part of town is dead, but I have a sneaky suspicion he's in one of these warehouses

I grab the bag from the back seat, glancing around.

"There is a dumpster and one of my men is up there. Once you hand the bag over, I will tell you where to find your friend."

I growl but do as he says. A man with dark hair smiles and waves as I draw closer.

"That's close enough, drop the bag," he calls.

"Do as he says," Carter adds.

I do. I hear a car pull up behind me and my heart rate picks up.

"Back up, slowly," the man says, leveling his gun at me. I raise my hands in the air, backing up like he asked, the phone clutched in my hand; I'm aware a car has

pulled up down by mine at the end of the alley. The man backs away, before rushing off.

I hear a car door open and hear a grunt behind me and a whimper.

“You can turn around. Tell Valen this is a warning. If he doesn't heed the warning, what happens next is on him,” Carter says and I turn around.

I notice Zoe first, wearing only a man's shirt and covered in blood. I scream, dropping the phone and rushing toward her just as his scent hits me. A man shoves her forward to her knees and I stop in my tracks as I peer at him—no doubt that is Carter. He appears just as shocked and I stagger, my heart nearly stopping.

No! No! Not him! Anyone but him!

Yet, my entire body screams mate!

“Macey!” Zoe screams, pulling us both out of our stunned stand-off. He shakes his head, racing back toward his car while I race toward Zoe. She screams again and the sound tears my soul apart. Her entire body shakes as I fall to my knees to clutch her, grazing them as I fall.

“He still has Ava!” she cries. “You have to help her!”

Three male scents are all over her. Not Carter's, yet he let them do this to her. The stink of the man from the alleyway is all over her, along with another man's, but the third is the most disturbing when I pick up that scent. I know it. I'm about to say the name when she does.

“Micah! Micah is helping Carter!” she chokes out and sobs.

“Micah did this?” I ask and Zoe whimpers. Wait, does Derrick know his son is in on this?

“Where's Marcus? I want Marcus!” She whimpers as I haul her to her feet.

“I'll take you to him. Come, we need to get you to the hospital.”

My stomach turns. How can I be mates to a monster? A monster that hurt Zoe! Hurt my sister! My blood boils in my veins, yet I contain it. He'll get what he deserves, and he absolutely deserves what's coming for him.

“My Casey? Oh my Goddess, Macey, where is Casey?”

Zoe is unbelievable. After whatever she endured, all she cares about is her mate and daughter. Her hands clutch me tightly, and I open the passenger side of my car, then help her in.

“She’s with Everly. She’s safe. But for now, I need to get you out of here and alert Valen about Officer Derrick's son.” I snarl the last word.

ChapterThirty-Four
Everly

Macey calls me as soon as she gets Zoe, and I demand Valen take me to the hospital to meet them. Macey also said to bring Officer Derrick along with us, so we leave the kids with Kalen and my father while we go off to meet them.

My anxiety is through the roof as we wait. We’re sitting in the room with Marcus, who’s coming out of sedation. Valen is trying to calm him down because as soon as his eyes opened he was trying to climb out of bed.

My phone starts ringing; I pull it from my pocket and answer it to find it’s Macey.

“I’m in a room a few doors down from Marcus. Hold off on letting him see her for a second. And come here. He shouldn't see her like this,” she tells me. I glance at Valen, who’s trying to hold Marcus in place. Officer Derrick whips out his handcuffs the moment Valen tells him and cuffs Marcus to the bed.

‘Macey has asked me to go see Zoe. Are you alright with him for a second?’ I mind-link Valen and he nods, looking at officer Derrick, who also nods. Officer Derrick follows me a few doors down and I suck in a breath before opening the door and stepping in. What I could never have expected was the scene in front of me. Zoe is frantically fighting Macey, who’s trying to restrain her and calm her down.

Nurses stand around her and a doctor with a syringe looks like he was about to try to sedate her. I growl at him. He drops the needle, stepping away from her, and Zoe’s eyes snap to me; so does Macey’s, though the snarl that leaves her when officer Derrick walks in behind me is thunderous. The next second, she’s pulled his gun on him.

“Macey!” I hiss in shock, rushing to Zoe, who clutches my arms. Macey refuses to lower the gun, but I’m more focused on Zoe, who won’t let go of me, begging and pleading to be able to see Marcus and Casey.

“Shhh. Breathe, Zoe. Deep breaths. Marcus is fine. You can see him in a minute,” I whisper. Tears burn my eyes at seeing her so frantic. She reeks of multiple wolves’ scents, but I pick up one familiar scent. One that has my head turning toward Officer Derrick

“Out!” Macey snarls, pointing the gun at him. He holds his hands up and does as she asks, stepping out of the room while she follows after him.

‘Valen, get to Derrick before Macey shoots him. She’s in the hall,’ I mind link, turning my attention back to Zoe.

“I just want my baby! I want my Casey!” Zoe sobs, her nails digging into my arms.

My eyes run over her. She’s a mess, covered in blood, and I swallow against the pain in her voice, the desperation. I don’t even think she registered Macey has left—her mind only has one focus, and that is to get to her family.

“Okay. But you don’t want to scare Casey, do you?” I ask her and she appears to be confused. I grip her hands, prying them off my arms where she drew blood with her nails.

“You don’t want to scare Casey, Zoe,” I tell her, holding her hands up in front of her face. She blinks at me before noticing the blood on her hands.

“I promise I will take you to them. But you need to let the nurses check you over and...” I swallow, looking at them. “They need to take some swabs, so we can get those that hurt you. So they don’t hurt anyone else,” I tell her and she blinks, staring at her hands that tremble violently.

“I don’t want to scare Casey,” she murmurs.

“That’s right, we don’t want to scare Casey. I am right here, okay. But I need you to lie down so we can make sure you’re okay.” I feel stupid saying that. I know she isn’t okay.

“I’m right here,” I tell her, nudging her toward the bed before turning to the doctor.

“Get a female doctor. You’re not touching her,” I tell him, and he rushes out.

Casey mutters to herself as she lies down. I can see she’s in shock, and she appears to remain in that state while doctors and nurses clean her up and run their tests. Suddenly, she lurches upright.

“Ava!” she gasps with wide eyes. “They still have Ava! You have to help her!”

Tears prick my eyes at her words, some escaping and slipping down my face.

“I know. But for now, my focus is on you,” I tell her.

Doc comes in. I’m about to tell him to get out because we have the female doctor here and that he isn’t really needed, but Zoe sits up.

“Marcus?” she asks, her voice pleading.

“He is down the hall. I can take you to him. But first, I have some officers who want to take a statement from you,” Doc tells her. He smiles at me sadly.

“No! I want my mate.” she says, shaking her head.

“Can you do this one thing first? Just this one thing and then he’ll take you to Marcus,” I tell her a moment before I hear a howling wail from outside. Zoe, understandably in shock, doesn’t seem to notice it as she lies back down when a female officer comes in. I bite my lip, wondering what’s going on out in the hall when Macey comes in.

I glance at her and she walks over to me.

“Micah was one of them,” she whispers to me, and my stomach drops. He would do that to his daughter’s mother? My blood boils, but it explains his scent and Derrick’s reaction from down the hall.

Zoe gives her statement and we help her out of bed. She’s wearing a hospital gown, and though she’s been cleaned up, the nurses help us shower her to get rid of the scents that still linger on her. She’s jumpy, but she also knows we’re trying to help her—Zoe knows Macey and I would never hurt her. I nod for Doc to get Marcus.

The moment Marcus steps in the room, something snaps within her and she tears out of our grip. Her body crashes against his, sending him backward as he clutches her.

Valen walks in behind him and steps around them. The nurses quickly leave while we stay with the couple, watching all the broken parts of both of them shatter more as Marcus comes to the realization of what happened to her. No one told him, but he knows. That much is obvious when he sniffs her and his eyes go to Valen.

The murderous look on his face is evident. He wants blood. Valen nods to him in a silent message. You will get it.

"You're okay," Marcus whispers to her, tears slipping down his face as he rocks her

"We're gonna be okay," he whispers repeatedly to her, using his mate bond to soothe her as she sobs against him.

'Derrick?' I mind-link Valen.

"Hunting his son."

'He had no idea?' I ask.

'No. I Commanded him—he had no idea. Apparently, Amber left Micah and took another as a mate. He's hardly seen his son since. Said he hasn't been of sound mind.'

I nod, clenching my teeth.

He will pay for what he's done, and so will Carter for allowing it. We know he didn't touch her because his scent wasn't on her, but there were two more. I just pray Ava isn't being subjected to the same thing.

"I need to go. Can you watch Zoe? I'll be back soon," Macey whispers to me. My brows furrow but I nod to her—she probably wants to get changed out of her blood-soaked clothes.

"Are you heading home?" I ask and she nods.

"I just want to change and I need to check on Tatum. He's been blowing up my phone."

I nod, but I can't help feeling something is up with her, too. Or maybe it's the shock of everything. She leans down and touches Zoe's hair where she's sitting on the floor with Marcus.

Zoe looks up at her.

"I'll be back soon, okay," Macey tells her.

"Casey?" Zoe asks.

"I will check on her, okay? You'll see her soon," Macey tells her, and she nods.

Macey leaves when Doc comes in with a medicine cup in his hands and a bottle of water. He silently stands there, reading the room, and his eyes fall on Marcus as he watches for any reaction. Marcus is deadly calm as Doc explains what the tablets are; morning-after pills. Zoe stares at the little cup before she breaks down, putting her head in her hands.

"I can't. It's so wrong," she sobs.

"I will leave these over here for her if she wants them," Doc says, placing them on the little table and walking out.

Marcus talks to her.

I hate this. Zoe reflects my own thoughts of when I found out I was pregnant and my father demanded I get an abortion. However, seeing her struggle puts it into perspective. Our situations are so different. It seems silly that Zoe is worried she would be going against the Goddess; no goddess would condone this—condone someone's will being taken from them.

"If you want to take them, Zoe, no one is judging," Valen tells her.

"But the Goddess," Zoe whimpers.

"The Goddess will understand. The Goddess would give you the right to choose. And no choice is wrong. Everyone's situation is different and no one is judging. This isn't a judgment. You won't be judged for doing what you want to do," I tell

her. Zoe seems unsure, yet I can tell she doesn't want to potentially carry her rapist's child.

“Choice. There is a reason the Goddess grants it. The only ones getting condemnation are those taking another's choice. Your body, your life. No one gets to tell you what you do with it. And no one has a right to judge your choice. They aren't the ones that have to live with it,” I tell her, and Zoe nods.

“I don't want to—... I can't carry—...” She shakes her head.

My judgment and beliefs suddenly shift.

This is one of many circumstances where one should have the right to choose. This is not the work of any goddess, nor would any goddess punish someone for aborting a few cells. Now I understand why she gave us a choice. Why we get to choose. If all our stories were the same, why would our opinions on it be so different? If she wanted us all the same, why would situations be so different? Why are our fates different?

No one chooses this for themselves. Just like no one chooses poverty. Those that can't bear to bring a child into the world due to life circumstances—like poverty or rape—aren't heartless, they want to stop any future child from having to live with the torments or consequences of whatever existence they may face.

Options and choice.

Not all choices are made the same. And no one's choices should be judged when it comes to their own life or a life they would have to bring into the world—especially a life that would only know pain or judgment. No child should be forced into a world this way.

I hold the pills out for her and she looks at Marcus. He adds no input, letting her decide—the decision is her and hers alone.

She chooses.

She chooses to let the suffering end.

There is no right or wrong decision—it's not my life and not my place to judge, though it's the same decision I would have made.

Marcus hugs her tight as she hands the little cup back to me empty. I set it down and she lets out a breath. Marcus rests his head against the wall and Zoe looks at Valen.

"Micah is helping Carter," she whispers and Marcus growls. Valen crouches down next to her.

"I know. We'll get him," he promises her and she nods, wiping a stray tear before she looks at me just as Doc walks in. He nods his head, tossing the small cup in the bin.

"Can you tell us anything about where you were kept?" Valen asks her. She sniffles but answers.

"The old tunnels under the city. He was talking about getting vengeance for—" She looks at me. "He wants revenge on your father. I overheard him. He wants Valen to stand down as Alpha," she shakes her head like she's trying to remember something.

"He needs Valen to leave the city, so he can get—" Her eyes widen and she looks at me. "To kill you and Valarian! To get revenge on your father, he... I can't remember," she rubs her temples and Valen growls.

"The council will be here by tomorrow, but I bet Carter has moved. He wouldn't have stayed there after handing Zoe back," he says, looking at me.

I'm still stuck on what this had to do with my father. "My father? That's who said he wants to get revenge on?"

Zoe nods.

"So not Valen and me? But my father?" I ask. Hadn't Carter's father caused my family enough pain?

"Might have something to do with Rachel?" Doc says. I turn to look at him and so does Valen.

"Why does that name ring a bell for me?" Valen mutters.

"Nixon's first wife, the one Carter's mother killed. Rachel was close with your mother, Alpha," Doc says with a shrug.

"But what's that got to do with my father? She turned forsaken," I told him.

"No idea. But there was a lot of speculation around that time."

"What do you mean?"

"I knew Leah, I was her doctor when she was pregnant with her twins—I was sworn to keep quiet. So many conspiracies around that time and everything was swept under the rug, but even I heard about the rumors when Leah disappeared."

"No. She left," Valen says.

"That's what everyone thinks, but rumors still went around that your father banished Leah from the city. Though I can't be sure they were just rumors," Doc tells me.

"Wait. Why would my father banish her?"

"Because she was Nixon's mate and was from the Shadow pack. She was one of your father's pack members," Doc answers. "They are just rumors, of course. I suppose the only people who really know what happened are Nixon and Leah," he shrugs.

"But Nixon admitted to abandoning her and forcing her forsaken."

"Doesn't mean it is the truth," Doc says. "I knew Leah and there was no way she would have left Carter. And Nixon loved her. He was forced to marry Rachel for the pack alliance."

"Pack Alliance?"

"I'm not sure, but maybe you should ask your fathers; that was their time ruling. Or maybe check the council files. There has to be some record of what happened. It's no secret that the Alphas have a way of covering their tracks, yet that doesn't stop the rumors."ChapterThirty-Five

Ava

Carter had me moved, and I appear to be in some basement. I must have been asleep for a few hours when I finally hear the door open and the man I hadn't recognized in my dazed state comes down the stairs. He has a blue cap on his head and a handkerchief tied around his face like last time. But his scent is

familiar, not just from the last time I saw him, and I can't figure out why at first. Yet as my sense of smell and taste returns, my eyes widen when I finally recognize the scent—a scent I used to smell around Amber.

Micah!

He walks over to me where I sit in the corner with my wrist handcuffed to a drainpipe. He produces a needle and stabs it into my thigh, and I yank on my restraints. Snarling at him as he simply turns and walks back toward the stairs. My eyes begin to blur again, yet I fight to keep them open.

"Micah," I try to call. My voice is barely a murmur, yet it's enough to make him freeze on the bottom step, his entire body tense as he grips the handrail. Slowly, he turns and his eyes roam over me, and I know undoubtedly it's him. Something shrivels inside me and dies as it dawns on me that he raped the mother of his child.

"When they kill you, I hope it's slow," I growl at him, though the words are hard to get out.

He growls and stalks back toward me. "They will never know, and you won't be alive to tell them," he sneers, gripping the back of my hair. I glare at him.

"No woman forgets the face of the man who fathered her child, just like they never forget the face of their rapist," I sneer at him, and he shoves me back. My head bangs on the pipe and he rips his hat off, clutches his hair, and screams in frustration.

"Fuck!" he curses, kicking a wooden chair. "I had no fucking choice. Do you think I could just stand there and watch? They would have fucking killed me!"

"You deserve far worse for what you did, and I can't wait for Marcus to give it to you," I spit at him through clenched teeth.

"She won't remember. They drugged her," he says, shaking his head. I don't know if he's trying to convince himself of that or me. Either way, he's wrong. Zoe was out of it, but she wasn't that far gone. She wouldn't have missed a scent she was accustomed to through her daughter.

My head spins and throbs where I hit it. Micah scratches his chin, then snarls and starts wandering around the basement, looking at the shelves before snatching a piece of timber.

"I am not going to jail because of you," he sneers, tapping the timber on the palm of his hand. My eyes open frantically as he stalks toward me and I yank on the cuffs in a last-ditch effort to free myself.

"They don't need to know, and Carter was planning on killing you anyway," he says slowly, trying to convince himself this would work. He lifts the piece of timber, and I gasp when he swings it, clenching my eyes shut in preparation for the hit, only I hear a crash instead. My eyes open and I sag against the wall in a huffed wheeze when I see Carter shove him. I didn't even hear him come in.

"WHAT THE FUCK DO YOU THINKG YOU'RE DOING?" Carter bellows, gripping the front of his shirt. Micah is on his back, hands up in surrender. Carter snarls at him before shoving him. Yet, the tension rolling off Carter is palpable; his Alpha aura is menacing as he straightens his suit, picks up the knocked-over wooden chair, places it upright, and takes a seat with his head in his hands.

"Zoe?" I murmur. My lip quivers. Carter's head lifts and his eyes go to me before flicking away.

"Your friend is alive. The rogue girl, Macey, got her," he says, staring off blankly at the concrete wall behind me. He mutters, but my ears can't pick up the sound, and I let out a breath of relief. At least Zoe is alright. Micah sits up and tries to get to his feet.

Carter watches him, and his lips press in a line when the two thugs from before come down the stairs. My muscles start to go numb and tears burn my eyes when they move toward me.

"Don't touch her," Carter snaps at them, and they pause, looking at him. "No one touches her," Carter repeats, looking at each of them.

"But you said—" the dark-haired man begins.

"I said no one touches her."

"Geez, bro, what crawled up your ass?"

“Nothing, I just need to think,” Carter says, rubbing his temples before running his fingers through his thick, blonde hair. The two thugs look at each other before looking at me. Micah also appears confused as he glances between the three men.

Carter's phone rings. He looks at the screen, and a silly smile splits his face before he looks up, noticing everyone watching him. Quickly rejecting the call, he looks back at his men before his eyes fall on Micah briefly. He nods to the other two, who instantly snarl and start stalking Micah while he backs up.

“Wait, what's the meaning of this? Carter, we had a deal,” Micah says.

“Deal changed because now my plans have changed. Throw him in the trunk while I figure out what to do next,” Carter says. Micah fights but is no match for the two men, who quickly overpower him.

“Wait, why have our plans changed? I thought we were killing the bitch and kid?” the blonde-haired man asks while holding a struggling Micah.

“I need to think of something else first. Something has come up.”

“So, what do you want us to do?”

Carter ponders for a second and bites his lip, looking at the ceiling.

“We hand over a peace offering. And get me everything you have on that rogue girl, Macey,” he says, and the men look at each other, confused; my brows furrow.

The dark-haired man licks his lips. “The feisty bitch? I wouldn't mind taking a bite out of h—”

His words cut off when Carter launches out of the chair and punches him. The man staggers back and Micah uses that chance to escape up the steps. The blonde man gives chase, yet I can't tear my eyes from Carter. His face is barely recognizable and he's pummeling his man bloody before he stomps his head into the ground, spilling blood and brain matter everywhere as he kills the man right in front of me. Horrified at the display of violence, I remain quiet and still.

The blonde man returns, stomping down the steps, but stops when he sees his dead friend. When Carter stands upright, he shrugs his suit jacket off and tosses it

on the broken chair before slowly undoing the buttons on what was a white shirt, now stained red. I watch the blonde man's Adam's Apple bob in his throat as he swallows.

"Find Brendan, clean this piece of shit up, and get me another shirt," Carter snaps at him without so much as a stutter, like killing his pack member means nothing to him.

"Uh, Boss, Micah—"

"Fuck Micah! He can get himself out of his shit. I have bigger issues. Now get me everything on that Macey girl and get this place cleaned up. And fucking feed her, and get her a drink," he says, pointing to me. The man nods swiftly, rushing off up the steps to do his bidding.

Carter removes his shirt and moves to a rusty sink basin in the far corner, washing his bloody hands before drying them on a rag. When he's finished, he pulls his phone from his pocket, types in a message, and smiles to himself.

I watch him—his entire demeanor changes when his phone rings. He answers it.

"Hello, little mate," Carter purrs and a gasp leaves me. Who is he speaking to?ChapterThirty-Six

Macey

My head is swimming. I can't bring myself to tell them about Carter being my mate. I want nothing to do with the vile man that would allow the woman I consider to be my sister to be violated the way she was. Shame courses through me.

I feel like I don't deserve to be around her after what my mate has done to her. Am I cursed when it comes to men? Am I a bad omen for my girls? I'm seriously considering it. My mate ruined Zoe's life and kidnapped Everly's sister, and his father is responsible for killing Everly's mother.

Carter being my mate leaves multiple additional issues because unless Tatum marks me, I'm as good as dead once I reject Carter—and I will be rejecting him. But then what will happen to Taylor? Who will look after her and love her the way

I do? My Mom is getting old, plus she has my brother and his mate living with her, and as much as I love my brother, he isn't exactly a good role model.

After showering and checking in with Kalen and the kids, I head over to see Tatum. At the moment, he's the only good thing in my life other than Taylor. Everything feels like it's falling into tatters, and I have no idea how to come back from this. I saw the hell Everly went through without Valen—saw how Kalen's rejection killed Valarie—so what will me rejecting Carter do? What will be the consequence of that?

Walking down the corridor to his ward, I stop and speak with his physical therapist. Her name is Tracey and she's the one helping us get him back on his feet. She warns me he's in a mood before I leave her to head to find his room. I know something is wrong before I even open the door. I can hear him cursing and hear glass break as he tosses something.

Pushing the door open, I find Tatum on the ground, his crutches by the bed.

"Stupid fucking leg!" he curses with a growl. Immediately, I rush to his side, gripping under his arms to help pull him.

"Why didn't you use the crutches?" I ask him when he pushes me away, forcing me to drop him. He grunts, and I move to help him again when he snarls at me.

"Just fucking leave me, Macey! Stop fucking mothering me!" he snaps. I roll my eyes. I've put up with his pity parties before, only this time, I ignore him and retrieve the wheelchair, pushing it beside him. He growls angrily at me and punches it.

"Just fuck off! For once in your Goddess damn life, Macey, stop trying to fix everything!" he snaps. I start to reply when he holds up a hand, cutting me off.

"Don't! I am fucking sick of it! I am useless! And I don't want you feeling sorry for me."

"I don't feel sorry for you. You'll be fine. Tracey said you did great today. It's only a matter of time, and soon you'll be walking around," I tell him, trying to lift his mood. "Want the crutches instead?" I ask him, moving to retrieve them.

"Get out!" Tatum snarls at me, and I freeze, glancing at him over my shoulder.

“Pardon?”

“You just can't help yourself. Always gotta try to fix everything. My leg is fucked, Macey. It ain't getting any better, and I am sick of you telling me it will! So just get out! This isn't going to work,” he says, turning to look away.

“Tatum? You're just having a bad day, you'll see. I can help you shower, then how about we go outside?” I tell him, leaning down and offering him my hand. He slaps it away.

“I said leave! I don't want you here! Are you fucking deaf?” he snaps, yet his words piss me off and before I realize it, I've slapped him.

“You dare speak to me like this after everything? Where the fuck is your family? Huh? Who has been here every fucking day? You don't get to speak to me that way. You think you're the only one having a shitty day?” I snap at him while he rubs his cheek. I know he's upset about his leg and needing help and relying on people, but that is no reason to take it out on me.

“I am fucking useless, don't you see that? I couldn't even help you today to get Zoe back. I had to hear about it through the damn mind-link!” Tatum yells.

“No one expected your help, Tatum. We had it handled. And I am not here to visit your damn fucking leg. I am here because for once, I need you,” I tell him.

“Well, I don't want you here. I am sick of you babying me, so just leave.”

I growl that he's trying to kick me out and click my tongue. Fine, Tracey can deal with his stupid ass and I'll see him tomorrow.

“I get you're upset, so I'll just leave you and come see you tomorrow,” I tell him, heading toward the door before I end up beating him senselessly or breaking his other damn leg. I so do not need this drama right now. I just wanted to spend time with him, maybe get a hug, so I could pretend for a few moments everything is okay.

As I grip the door handle, Tatum speaks, making me stop.

“Macey?” he says, and I look at him just as he pulls himself up to sit on the edge of the bed.

“Don't come back tomorrow. I've been thinking about it all day, and I can see it isn't going to work. So please don't make this harder than it needs to be for once. Just do as I ask.”

I swallow, my throat suddenly clogged, and my eyes burn with the urge to break down. He's seriously going to break up with me? Over a leg? Or is he using it as an excuse since I can't give him a kid? I start to ask, needing to know, when he shakes his head.

“Just go, Macey. We're done,” he says, and my eyebrows raise.

I really am cursed. Suddenly, I find myself speechless. I don't know how to answer, so I just nod my head before walking out.

Yet another thing was just taken from me. I just needed to pretend, if only briefly, that I would find a solution where there was none. I needed to pretend someone other than a monster would want me. Clearly, I'm not even allowed that moment's grace.

I can't stop the tears when I climb back into the car. Everything is so fucked up! It feels stupid crying—pointless, and a waste of time—yet I can't seem to stop as I head toward the hotel. I can't go back to Everly and Zoe like this. They have enough stress at the moment, so instead, I go to work. I need the distraction.

When I pull up, I see the project manager out front talking to someone in a suit before realizing it's Everly's lawyer. He must be here to drop off the new deeds to the place. Getting out of my car, I learn that is precisely what he's here for.

He hands me the paperwork and goes over it with me on the hood of my car. When he's done, he bids me farewell. I watch him walk back to his car when I call out to him.

“Uh, Joseph? I don't suppose I can ask for your help with something?”

He stops. “Of course. What is it you need?” he asks.

“Everything I tell you is confidential, right?” I ask him.

“Yes. If you are my client, it is. Why do you ask?”

“Because I need to do something, but I don't want Everly and Zoe finding out.”

His brows furrow. "May I ask what it is?"

"Last will and testament, and also some custody documents."

"A will and guardian for Taylor, I assume?"

I nod.

"Well, the first step is the guardian must agree. You can't just leave her to a family member, though that is usually where they are placed."

I sigh. I thought he would say that.

"How about I draw up some documents for you to look over and I can have them set for you to go over at the end of the week?"

I shake my head.

"Can you have them done by, say," I pull my phone out, checking the time. "8:00 p.m. tonight?"

He glances at his watch and scratches his neck but nods. "I assume all assets, like your share of this place, go to Taylor?"

I nod.

"And Taylor?"

"I want to leave her in the care of Everly or Zoe, or both?"

He nods. "I will see you at 8 o'clock tonight. If you could meet me at my office at that time?" Joseph says.

I nod my head and let him leave, feeling like I accomplished at least something.

Now I just have to hope Everly and Zoe don't question me wanting to sign guardianship to them if I die, because one thing I know is, once I reject Carter, I'm as good as dead.

Getting in my car, I pull out my phone and message Carter, asking if I can see him. The phone rings a few minutes later.

"Hello, little mate," he purrs and tears burn my eyes.

"We need to talk," I tell him.

“Correct. And I have a proposition for you,” he says. I pause. Can I use this to get Ava home?

“I’m listening,” I tell him.

“You need me.”

“Definitely not.”

“Hmm, that is what you think, but I have a peace offering. Tell Officer Derrick to check the mine entrance tunnels. I hear he has been looking for his son, Micah?” Carter tells me.

“A peace offering? You had my best friend raped!” I snapped at him.

“No. She fought back; she wasn’t part of the plan. But I give you Micah as payment for that.”

“Payment? She isn’t a fucking whore!”

“I am trying here, Macey. I offered to barter, and—”

“I want Ava back,” I tell him

“And I want my mate,” he growls. “Wouldn’t want anything to happen to little Taylor, would you? Or Tatum? I hear he is in a bad way. I doubt he would put up much of a fight. And seeing as I have eyes on Kalen and eyes in the hospital, I don’t think it would be too hard to get to them,” Carter says, and I swallow.

“What do you propose, then?” I ask him. Fuck, how many traitors do we have among us? I don’t doubt his words, though. I’ve seen firsthand what this man’s father is capable of, and clearly, the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.

“I want immunity to leave with you. I have my money. My pack will handle John. I wanted to handle Everly and Valarian myself, but seeing as you have come into the picture, I am willing to renegotiate.”

“What is this bullshit vendetta you have against the Shadow pack's Alpha?” I demand, and Carter laughs.

“John started it when he tossed my mother from the city and told my father she left.”

“No, your mother left because of your father’s infidelity. Everly told me this story before.”

“Wrong. That is what everyone was told. John forced my mother forsaken for killing Rachel.”

“And this has something to do with Everly, how? Because of who fathered her?” I scoff. It sounds ridiculous.

“Her family started it, I am just finishing it,” Carter states.

“STARTED WHAT?” I scream at him.

“Rachel was Claire Summer’s cousin. She tried to kill my mother, and my mother killed her in self-defense. And now he will know what it’s like to lose everything, just like my mother did.”

I glance around nervously, looking out the windows.

“Now, I will give you a chance to deal with whatever you were speaking with good old Joseph about, and take Micah as proof my word is good,” Carter says, and I say nothing, though he confirmed my suspicions that he has more people working for him.

“Think about it, Macey. You have until tomorrow to decide—or I kill Ava, Everly, and everyone you love and hold dear. Their fates now rest on your decision, so choose wisely, Love. Because either way, you will be mine.”

“And if I agree, you leave them alone?” I ask him, cogs starting to turn in my head as I navigate this new proposition.

“You have my word,” Carter says, and I chew the inside of my lip.

“We will speak soon,” I tell him, hanging up before he can say anything else.

ChapterThirty-Seven
Valen

Relief floods me when I finally get Everly home. She didn't want to leave Zoe, and I even had to get Doc Darnel in to tell her to go home. She’s supposed to be on bed rest, but I knew she wouldn't rest at all until she saw with her own eyes that Zoe is alive. Everly has been quiet most of the trip, and I know she’s worried

about Ava. We had people scour the entire city, including the tunnels, but found nothing. My hands rub over Everly's huge bump.

"Any news yet?" she asks as I lean down to kiss her belly. I shake my head, and she pushes my face away, trying to tug the shirt she's wearing down.

I growl at her and she sighs, but I can tell she's too tired to argue with me. She hates her body. She believes she looks stretched out and ugly, but I love the stretch marks lining her skin. I love each one, love that she's the vessel that currently carries thirty little fingers, thirty little toes, and three extra beating hearts—hearts that are mine to protect and love. Yet to me, none are more important than hers, the one that beats so they can.

"We'll find them. The council—" My words cut off as my phone starts ringing and I reach for it. I told everyone to not use the mind-link; Everly doesn't need the extra stress, and I know she'll find no rest with everyone chatting away in our heads. Plus, now I have no idea whom to trust.

Macey's name pops up on the screen and I glance at Everly as she rolls to reach for her water bottle. Sitting up, I grab it and hand it to her before kissing her head and walking out, just in case it's about Zoe.

"Hey, everything okay?"

"Uh, yeah, it's fine, but can you send someone out to the old mine road?" she asks. I pull the phone from my ear to make sure it's her. It's an odd request, and she sounds strange through the phone.

"Why?"

"I just drove past the hotel and reserve and saw a suspicious car head out that way. Just seemed odd."

"Okay, I'll send Derrick out that way with Dion. He's filling in tonight," I tell her.

"Where are you anyway? Everly was expecting you back by now."

"Just sorting a few things out at work. I'll grab Chinese on the way home for everyone. Saves your dads from cooking," Macey says.

"Okay, can you—"

“Yes, I’ll make sure to remember to get the dumplings that the kids love,” Macey laughs.

“Great, see you soon,” I tell her. We have a whole houseful at the moment—both our fathers are with us, as well as Macey and Taylor, plus Casey, and probably Zoe and Marcus soon, depending on how comfortable they are with going home. I text Derrick and Dion, who say they’ll head out now, then wander into the kitchen where my father is preparing food for dinner.

“Macey is grabbing Chinese,” I tell him, and he sighs.

“Thank the Goddess! I was trying to think of what to make and was about to send John grocery shopping.”

I try to picture that. I’m sure he’s shopped before, but to shop for this many would be a nightmare.

“What's up? Everly okay?”

“Yeah, just tired. I've been thinking of moving everyone to the main packhouse. It’s been sitting empty for months and it has more space than here,” I tell him.

“If it’s too much, I can take John, Macey, and Taylor with me.”

“No, it’s fine. I think Everly likes everyone in one place at the moment, and I know she’s worried about her father, even though she won't admit it.”

“Yeah, he feels guilty about Claire, Ava, and Zoe,” Dad tells me.

“Where is he anyway?”

“I think he’s doing puzzles with the kids,” Dad says with a shrug. “I know you don't like him, but he’s her father, and we’ve all done some shit that we wish we could take back, son.”

“I know, and I don't hate him. I'm just worried that if something happens to him it might be Everly's tipping point.”

“Ah,” he murmurs, turning the kettle on.

“Anyway, I was talking to John. He confessed something to me earlier,” Dad tells me, and I raise an eyebrow, leaning on the counter.

“John banished Carter's mother from the city. She didn't leave because of Nixon.”

“What?”

Dad nods. “Yeah. Claire threatened to leave him if he didn't because they were close; Rachel was her cousin. So he banished Leah, but when he banished her and ordered her out, she had Nixon's daughter with her. John let Nixon believe she ran off with his daughter, but she didn't. He said he felt guilty about it, but he couldn't find her once she was gone. He and Nixon had a rocky relationship as it was, with business dealings falling through, so he didn't tell him,” my father tells me.

So Doc was right, there was more to the story.

“Anything else?”

“No, that's all,” he says when my phone rings. I pull it from my pocket and see it's Derrick.

I answer it quickly, turning and leaning against the counter. Except, it's Dion's voice that comes through the other end.

“We got him.”

“Got who?”

“Micah,” Dion tells me just as I hear a crash in the background.

“I'll be down soon,” I tell him, getting ready to hang up.

“Hold on, Derrick wants to speak to you,” Dion says, and I wait for Derrick to beg for his son as I hear the phone exchange hands.

“Pick up Marcus on the way,” Derrick says before hanging up.

That wasn't what I was expecting. “I need to go.”

“I heard. I'll keep an eye on Everly,” Dad says, and I nod my head.

As I walk down the hall, I stick my head into one of the rooms to see the kids playing with John.

“Can you come with me?” I ask him, and he nods, getting up from where he's sitting on the floor.

“Everything okay?” he whispers, following me down the hall.

“Yeah. I need you to sit with Zoe. I need to take Marcus somewhere, and I know he won't leave her with anyone she doesn't know.”

John nods and doesn't ask questions. He knows there's only one reason I would be pulling Marcus away from Zoe's side.

I stop by the hospital on the way to find Zoe asleep and Marcus sitting in a chair, staring at her. As I step inside the room, I motion to him and he gets up from his seat to join me in the hall.

He looks exhausted. Huge bags hang under his eyes and his hair looks like he's been running his fingers through it. John steps past him into the room.

“What's going on?”

“I need you to come with me. John will wait with Zoe in case she wakes up,” I tell him, and he glances into the room at his mate and John, who has taken his seat by her bed

“Is it Casey?” he asks worriedly. I shake my head.

“Come on,” I tell him.

Marcus sighs and runs a hand down his face. “Valen, I'm not—”

“We found Micah,” I whisper to him.

The look on his face turns to pure feral rage. His eyes flicker and he looks back in the room at John, who nods.

“She wakes, tell her I went to take a shower,” Marcus tells him before pushing past me.

We leave the hospital and head to the police station. As soon as we're buzzed in, I can hear arguing and fighting in the back before we even step into where the cells are. The crashing of furniture comes from one of the interrogation rooms; on the screen on the wall, I can see Derrick pummeling the living shit out of his son, who's bloody and trying to block his father's punches.

Dion hits the intercom and it buzzes inside, making Derrick rise. Micah is sobbing uncontrollably, and blood coats his swollen face. Marcus tries to rip the door

open as soon as he notices the viewing screen. Dion and I have to grab him—his entire body is trembling with the urge to shift.

The door opens and Officer Derrick grabs the front of his son's shirt, tossing Micah out the door. Micah sprawls onto the floor in the center of the room. Tears trek down Officer Derrick's face, and his lips quiver.

“Dad, please,” Micah pleads. Marcus slams against me, wanting to get to the boy.

“You are not my son; I didn't raise a rapist,” Derrick spits at him before looking at Marcus.

“He's all yours,” Derrick says to Marcus before walking out. I nod to Dion to check on Derrick as he leaves through the doors. As soon as they're out of earshot, I let Marcus go. Micah backs up in terror, trying to scramble away as Marcus strips his shirt off, stalking toward him.

“You can't kill me! I'm Casey's father!” Micah cries desperately.

“No, Casey is mine,” Marcus snarles. There's a crazed look on his face before he shifts, and a growl grows in his throat, the noise so feral it makes the forsaken seem tame.

Marcus attacks.

I step back, sitting quietly on the edge of the desk while Marcus rips the man apart limb by limb, coating the police station with his blood and filling every ear with his dying screams.

Chapter Thirty-Eight
Everly

When Macey returns home, she brings dinner with her, and tucked inside her handbag is a folder of documents. She sets the Chinese containers on the counter and I pull down some plates and start serving, only to be scolded by Kalen.

“Everly, you are supposed to be in bed. Do you not know what bed rest is?” he says, clicking his tongue.

“I've been sitting in bed all afternoon, Kal. I'm fine.”

He shakes his head, helping me to serve dinner to the kids, who are perched in their chairs around the table.

Zoe is getting released from the hospital tomorrow. She video-called earlier, and thankfully the nurse had given her some makeup, so she didn't freak Casey out. My father has been waiting with her until Marcus returned, but I wasn't willing to tell her where it was that Marcus went and why. Though I think she knows because there's only one reason that would make Marcus leave her side, and that's revenge.

"Are you okay?" I ask Macey, touching her arm, but she pulls away from me, smiling the fakest smile I have ever seen on her face. I narrow my eyes at her and she sighs.

"Sorry, I'm on edge. All this rogue stuff, the hotel, Zoe."

I swallow nodding and turning to flick the kettle on.

"Tea only, Everly," Kalen scolds. Geez, now I know where Valen gets it from.

"Yes, Dad!" Macey and I say simultaneously, and he chuckles.

"I'll eat in the room with you. I need to speak to you about something anyway. Something not for kids' ears," she says, and I nod just as Kalen chimes in.

"Great idea! You girls get settled, and I will bring some trays in and make your tea!" he says, looking at me before pushing us out of the kitchen.

"Hold on—"

"No. Shoo, shoo! Make her sit down. I caught her trying to bleach the damn bathroom! Watch her," Kalen scolds.

"She's nesting, leave her. Besides, she cleans when she's nervous," Macey defends me. Besides, this sitting around nonsense is annoying, and I don't like how everyone fusses. I get they're concerned, but I'm damn near going insane from it.

"Not with my three grandbabies, she doesn't. She is supposed to be on bed rest. We want them babies to stay in as long as possible," Kalen tells Macey.

"Fine. Just let me get some Tylenol, these cramps have been the worst. Stupid monthlies!" she curses, and I blink at her in confusion.

"Wait. You still get your period?" I ask her.

“Uh, yeah. I am a female,” Macey says. “What did you think? The hysterectomy turned me into a man?” she curses, shaking her head.

Kalen looks at her funny, and I look at him. Macey retrieves her Tylenol from above the stove and downs two pills with a glass of water. As she turns, she notices us staring at her.

“What?” she asks.

“You said you had a full hysterectomy?”

“No, a partial. They took all the baby carrying bits out,” Macey says as if she’s tired of this conversation already.

“But you have ovaries?” I ask.

“Well, duh! I get a period, so I assume so,” she shrugs.

“Then you're not infertile,” Kalen says. She pops her hip and puts her hand on her waist.

“What part of ‘I haven't got the baby carrying bits’ did you not understand?” she says sarcastically. Kalen says one word.

“Surrogate!”

She seems taken aback. “Because someone would want to carry my baby? Yeah, right. Besides, I kind of need a man to fertilize the egg and all. Unless your old dust sperm is volunteering?” she says.

Kalen pulls a face. “Pass! I am too old for babies! But this news will make Tatum happy.”

“Wouldhave made him happy. He dumped me,” she says, rubbing her temples.

“We’re werewolves—we all know how impossible it would be to find a surrogate. Can't have a human carry them, and we’re pack animals; it doesn't matter if it's not a blood child, you know what that would do to a she-wolf.”

She does have a point. I’ve never heard of someone becoming a surrogate. I would do it if I wasn't already pregnant, though Valen probably wouldn't let me. And Zoe is in no state to be asked, though I’m pretty sure she and Marcus were trying before all this happened.

“Now, come on, I want to ask you something,” Macey says, grabbing her handbag and tugging me toward my room. I get comfortable on my bed, propping myself up with pillows and settling under the blankets. Kalen comes in a few minutes later with dinner trays for us. Once he’s left, she retrieves the documents from her bag.

“Are you okay?” I ask her.

“Yeah, why wouldn't I be?”

I let out a breath. “I'm talking about Tatum.”

“It is what it is,” she says, trying to deflect the conversation as she sets some papers on my legs.

“Last will and testament?” I ask, looking at her.

“I just— In case something happens to me, I want to ensure Taylor will have a place to go,” she says.

“And you want to do this now?” I ask her. She shrugs.

“Just, with all the rogue stuff, I just want to be sure. So I wanted to ask if you and Valen would be willing to take her. You know, cuz I can't leave her to Mom or my brother,” she says.

“That isn't even a question. I would move heaven and hell to keep her. You know that.”

She nods. “I know, and you and Zoe are the only ones I would trust my baby with. The only ones I know love her just as much as I do.”

I sign the document, and when Kalen comes in, I ask him to sign the witness part. He quickly does, though he gives Macey the same odd look I gave her.

“Planning on going somewhere?” he asks.

“What? No! Of course not! I just want to ensure Zoe's future, is all.”

He looks at me and I shrug. It’s the first time she’s ever brought anything like this up. But she does have a point; we all should have it. I’ll have to speak to Valen about it later. Though I have a will, and everything goes to Valarian, I never even

thought of what would happen to him if something were to happen to Valen and me. It gives me much

We eat our dinner, and Macey goes to help Kalen shower and bathe the kids while I get ready for bed before we tuck them in. When Valen calls, I answer my phone quickly.

“Hey, when will you be home?”

“I am home. Where are the kids?”

“In their beds, why?”

“Make sure they don't come out of their rooms,” he says.

With a groan, I climb back out of bed, shuffling over to the door and up the hall. I stand between their doors, but they're all asleep.

“Yeah, they're fine,” I tell him when I hear the door click open. I glance toward it, hearing movement. When Valen appears down the hall, I gasp, glancing back at the kids' rooms to ensure they're asleep.

Valen is drenched in blood from head to toe. Not a patch of skin isn't coated in the coppery substance.

He rushes into our room and I hear the shower turn on in the ensuite. Following him slowly back to the room, I close and lock the door in time to see Valen step into the shower. I scoop up his clothes, tossing them in the hamper—they're soaking wet. The shower water turns red as it swirls down the drain.

“Micah?” I whisper, recognizing the scent, and he nods, turning to face me and rinsing the blood off his face. He says nothing, just reaches for the soap.

“Marcus?”

“Wants the other two.”

“I thought you were leaving Micah to Marcus?”

“Marcus revived him and wanted my help. He's my best friend. And Goddess help them when we get our hands on the other two,” he says, his eyes darkening, and a growl escapes him. I swallow before having to leave the bathroom from the pungent smell.

When he finally comes out, he's clean and retrieves his pajamas. "My father?"

"Went to the bar. Don't worry, I sent Dad to get him. And... that would be them," Valen says, and I nod, hearing the front door open and my father muttering down the hall. The smell of vodka reaches my nose from under the gap in the door and makes it wrinkle. Dad is drinking far too much, not that I expected anything else. His daughter is missing and his mate is dead. I wouldn't want to live either if our circumstances were reversed.

"Any news from Carter or any sight of them?"

Valen shakes his head when there's a knock on the door. He tugs his shirt on before opening it. It's Macey.

She tells us about the link she found between Rachel and my father. So that's what she was doing all afternoon. Kalen leans against the door, listening but adding nothing. It suddenly makes sense why Carter is so hellbent on ruining us.

"How do you know all this?" Kalen asks her, and her brows furrow.

"I went to the council chambers and dug through the old archives," Macey says, though something is off about her.

"I sent men there and found nothing," Valen says.

"I also checked myself and couldn't find the link on the online records," Kalen adds, and I look at Macey.

"There were some files buried. They were in the wrong box," Macey says.

"What box?" Kalen asks. I don't understand the look on his face as he scrutinizes everything she says, wanting to know how she knows.

"Some old newspaper clipping box, buried right up the back," she says dismissively.

"Thanks. Well, I'll call Officer Derrick and let him know, and also the council."

"The council is still here?" Macey asks.

"Yeah, they aren't leaving until we catch him," Valen says, and she nods.

“At least for once, they’ve stepped in. But just be careful what you tell them, I feel like Micah isn't the only mole we have.”

“What makes you think that?” Kalen asks.

“Dad, leave her be. She’s tired,” Valen defends Macey.

Kalen puts his hands up in mock surrender, yet doesn't take his eyes off Macey, who’s chewing her fingernail.

“Well, I’m off to bed. I’m beat. Wake me if anything happens, anything at all,” Macey says, making a quick escape. I watch her leave, and Kalen follows after her.
ChapterThirty-Nine

Carter

The bastard is cocky, and it’s pissing me off that he thinks he’s calling the shots. I watch as John's Beta slinks around his office as we review the plans. Little does he know...

“I'm changing the plans,” I tell him.

He rocks back on his heels as he passes me my drink where I sit in the armchair.

“Excuse me?”

“Are you hard of hearing, Beta? I said I am changing the plans.”

“We can't. It's too late. I already have everything set in motion,” Clarke says. I raise an eyebrow at his words, watching him over my glass as I take a sip of the cheap whiskey.

“Plans change, Beta. You will heed my demands. Comply and you still get your revenge. If not, you will find yourself disposable,” I tell him, watching as the idiot swallows. I would have thought John's Beta would have been more loyal. Turns out he was a snake, just like his daughter—jumped at the opportunity when my father offered to take down John. His price is the pack, and he can have it.

“These new plans you speak of?” he asks, leaning on the edge of his desk.

“Everything is set in motion. Did you speak to your brother? Is he keeping the council away?” I ask him. Clarke nods when Amber waltzes into the room and pecks her father on the cheek; the girl has her father wrapped around her finger.

Clarke didn't take too kindly to Everly and Ava calling her out when Everly challenged her father, even if what they spoke was true—and it was true, Amber was willing to bed anyone to remain high on the totem pole. It damaged her and her family's minuscule reputation, yet appearances are everything to these bastards. Fools. Though I'll use it if it helps me to keep gaining the advantage.

"Amber, out; we're discussing business," her father says, and she pouts, batting her lashes at him.

"Can I go see my mate?"

Clarke waves his daughter off. Amber escapes quickly, sending me a wink as she sashays out of the room.

"So, what has changed?"

"Nothing for you. You will have your pack once Everly and John are dead—my father will grant the pack to you upon his return. As for me, I have found my mate, so I will bargain Ava in exchange for her and leave the city," I tell him.

"So I don't have to do anything?"

"No, just stick to the plans as originally said, and I am leaving you in charge of making sure my father gets back into the city to challenge Valen once the council leaves."

"Your father wants to challenge Valen?"

"Yes, because if I go through with my original plans, my mate won't submit to me—unfortunately, she is close to them. I promised I would back down for her."

"And you intend to?" he asks incredulously.

"She is my mate," I tell him simply.

"But what of John?"

"The evidence the council has for the forsaken facility, and all records, are in his name. So as long as your brother keeps up his part of the deal, John will be executed either way by the council when they realize it was Claire's DNA that my father used to morph the forsaken. Rest assured, this has been in the planning for

nearly a decade now. I know what I am doing. They will have no doubts my father was forced, especially when handed the information about my mother.”

“So we frame John, you leave with your rogue mate, where does that leave me? Valen will kill me,” Clarke growls.

“Not if my father kills him first.”

“He’s the blood Alpha,” Clarke states, as if I didn’t know that already.

“My father only has to get close enough. One bite and it’s all over for him. Valen will kill his own family once he turns rabid. Then the city is yours and my father’s to do what you wish with. And I will be far away from here with my mate and her daughter,” I tell him.

“You’re keeping the brat too?”

“Mind your tongue, Beta! I can easily change the plans again and cut out you and that whore daughter you have, too. I wonder how your rep will fare if I release the footage of the gang bang she was involved in?”

Clarke growls. “And you’ll hand that footage over when it’s all said and done?”

I nod to him. We have a deal. He just needs to help my father get back into the city.

After finishing our little meeting, I head home—well, what I’m calling home for the moment. Pulling up outside, I see Amber’s little hatchback and groan. I can’t stand the bitch. If she wasn’t mated to one of my men now, I would tell her to fuck off. The first thing I do after walking inside is check if Ava is okay. She’s still tied up and gagged.

“Got that information you wanted, boss?”

I hold my hand out for the folder, and he places it in my hand.

“I sent some men to kill the kid for you. They plan on taking her out during the drive to school.”

“You what!” I bellow, spinning on him. He flinches, taking a step back.

“I thought that’s what you wanted,” he stammers. I growl, stalking toward him.

“Did I ask you to do that?” I snarl. He shakes his head as Amber comes in, and I sneer at her.

“Call it off, now!” I snap at him. He nods his head, quickly ripping his phone from his pocket and nudging Amber out of the room.

“She stays!”

“I'm sorry, boss, I'll sort it out. I thought—”

“You thought wrong! You dare make decisions on my behalf? Now you'll know what it feels like.”

“Amber!” I growl, pointing to my feet. He has to learn there are consequences for not obeying me—and he will learn. Amber, the whore, is all too willing to comply. Porter quickly dials.

“I'll take care of it,” he gushes.

Amber looks up at me as I look down at her. The woman disgusts me. She really is a whore—willing to do anything to remain at the top, even with her mate watching behind her.

Porter makes the call, and I nod to Amber as Ava moves back to her spot near the wall. “Sit!” I tell her and she does, rolling her eyes before cuffing herself, knowing I would send Porter over to do it if she didn't anyway. I nod to Amber, who fumbles with my belt before pulling my cock out.

Porter whimpers, clutching his stomach, and I focus on the wall. Vile thing—she's like a leech. If she wasn't the Beta's daughter, I would have killed her by now.

No matter how much she sucks my dick, it will never go hard for her. But this is merely a punishment for her mate, who eventually begs for me to stop, and I'm glad once he does. Shoving her away, I tuck myself back in, and she wipes her mouth before I grip her face.

My phone starts ringing in my pocket, and I know it will be Macey. She definitely would have felt that, which only angers me more, and I grip Amber's face harder.

“Disgusting whore! And you're not even good at it!” I sneer, shoving her away.

“Fuck you, Carter!” Amber snarls.

"Been there, done that. You were even worse at that than you are sucking cock, Amber. Now, get out of my face. Both of you!" I tell them, pulling the phone from my pocket.

"YOU FUCKING PRICK!" Macey shrieks at me the moment I answer. Chapter Forty
Macey

Leaving Everly and Valen, I escape to the roof, slipping through the doors and up the stairwell. I can't afford to be overheard as I make the call to Carter.

I'm furious. It's bad enough I have to bargain with him for Ava.

"YOU FUCKING PRICK!" I scream at him the moment he answers.

"Well, hello to you too," he purrs.

"You think I can't feel your infidelity, you asshole? And you expect me to run off into the sunset with you!" I snarl through the phone.

"I was teaching one of my men a lesson. The whore means nothing. And don't pretend you haven't got up to mischief today, love. I know you visited your internet boyfriend," he says.

I scrub a hand down my face and stare at the night sky, chewing my lip.

"Macey, are you there?" he asks, almost sounding concerned.

"Yes, I'm still here."

"Good. So, have you thought about what I said? Have you gotten all your ducks in a row and are ready to leave with me?"

"How do I know you'll stick to your end of the deal? I don't trust you."

"I gave Micah back, didn't I? Don't doubt my love now. But for insurance purposes, we can leave her at the borders before we head to the cabin."

"A cabin? I'm supposed to leave my daughter, my life behind for a cabin?" I chuckle

"No, you can bring Taylor," he says.

Yeah, definitely not! I would never allow her near this monster. Though, he would be suspicious if I left her behind.

"No. Not until I know you stick to your word. I'm leaving Taylor here. I want to ensure you're safe first."

"I would never harm your daughter, Macey. Why do you think I was punishing one of my men? He wanted to have your daughter killed. I stopped it and made him watch as his whore of a mate sucked my dick. Vile woman!" he says.

"Where is Ava?" I ask, ignoring his words.

"Beside me, safe and sound. And she will remain that way as long as you abide by the plans," Carter tells me.

"And no harm will come to anyone here?" I ask him.

"None, you have my word. I just want you."

I chew my lip, leaning on the wall and looking over at the city.

"Fine, we have a deal. Send me the details," I tell him before hanging up on him. I don't want to talk to him more than I need to. I sigh heavily.

I can do this! I just hope the bond doesn't get in the way when it's time to kill him. He will die for what he did! I'm about to head back inside when I spot John sitting in one of the fold-up chairs.

"Interesting conversation you just had, Macey," he says quietly, drawing back on his cigarette.

"Yes, indeed, it was. So I assume you have a plan and reason for keeping this from my son?" Kalen murmurs as he comes to stand by John.

"And my daughter?" John adds.

How I was stupid enough not to realize I was being followed and that John was up here the entire time is beyond me. I let my anger get the better of me and became solely focused on Carter's infidelity that I wasn't paying attention to my surroundings.

"You lied to Everly and me earlier, though I knew it was a lie. You don't get periods after a hysterectomy," Kalen says. I admit, I panicked when put on the spot. But it wasn't actually a lie; I still get cramps.

"Technically, I still get the occasional cycle, and monthly cramps, though they're more of a dull ache."

"So you did only have a partial hysterectomy?" he asks, and I nod.

"Yes, I still have ovaries. The way Doc explained it is that besides eventually going into early menopause, my body will still have a form of a cycle, though the body absorbs any egg."

"But you still lied?"

"Do you think I want to? How would Zoe feel knowing the man responsible for letting what happened to her is my mate? Carter needs to die and they won't risk my life by killing my mate, so I have no choice."

Kalen and John look at each other.

"So Carter is your mate? You're certain?" John asks.

I nod and bite the inside of my cheek. "You can't tell them. I know the girls and they won't risk my life. Killing Carter is the only way!"

"And you could really kill your mate?" Kalen asks.

"I have no choice. Besides, if I do as Carter says, he'll give me Ava back. It's a trade."

John leans forward, clasping his hands together. "And you're the trade?"

"Let us help you. I get why you don't want to tell the girls, but you don't have to do this alone. Let us help," Kalen says.

"It can only be you, no one else. Carter has people on the inside helping. He knows things he shouldn't know," I tell them.

"Okay. Say we let you go along with his demands, you ambush and kill him, so then what, you die? You have a daughter, Macey. You and Tatum split. What happens to her then?" Kalen asks.

I've thought of it plenty, which is exactly why I had Everly sign those papers. My baby will be safe.

"I have plans for her in place. Everly and Zoe will take her," I tell them, and John looks at Kalen.

"I'll talk to Tatum after we sort out this mess. Killing your mate—we have no idea what effect that will have. It's different from Valarie and me, and you're rogue," Kalen points out.

I know exactly what will happen; I'll deteriorate faster. It's one thing breaking a bond, and quite another slaughtering it.

"No, Tatum was clear. We're over. I don't want to be pity marked." I growl at the thought. No one wants a sympathy mark.

John and Kalen seem to think before John sits back in his chair and gazes at me.

"Okay, what about—and don't take this the wrong way—what if Kalen or I mark you? You, not us, just to keep you alive?"

I gape at him. "Dude, you're old enough to be my father! Ew! Gross!"

"Not like that! Just—"

"Nope! The bond will still have effects, grandpa! Keep your wrinkly, dusty old balls to yourself! I'll let you help, but neither of you is marking me!" I shriek and pull a face. Yeah, I have no desire to be Valen or Everly's stepmother by default.

"Okay, we'll figure out that bridge as we cross it," Kalen says.

"No! I will figure out that bridge. Neither of you is taking a bite out of me. I would rather die than be attracted to your old asses!"

"I am not that old! What is it with this generation thinking we're old? I have plenty left in the tank! Not that I would—... You're not the only one grossed out by the idea, okay? But at least we have one!" Kalen snaps.

"Did you have a black-and-white TV? You're fucking old then!"

He curses.

“Damn stubborn woman! Fine! But tell us the plan and let's work something out,” Kalen says, reaching over and snatching John's smokes. He puts one in his mouth.

“Since when do you smoke?” John asks him.

“When I am anxious. So shut up and hand me a lighter!” Kalen snaps, clicking his fingers at John. John offers me the packet and I take it, leaning against the wall.

“So, what is this plan?” John asks, lighting his own smoke before passing me the lighter.

“We kill Carter and take back the city. But first, I need to get close enough to him and get Ava out,” I shrug.

“And the plan?” Kalen asks.

“Uh, that's all I got so far,” I admit and Kalen curses.