

Awakening Following Fate by L. T. Marshall Chapter 131

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It feels like time stands still and I watch in disbelief as both Sierra and Radar try to regain composure, confusion etching the face of both and even I have no clue how this just happened. Sierra clutches the point above her left breast as though suddenly inflicted with pain and looks down, gasping in surprise. Her hand sliding away to reveal where her mate mark from her union with Juan is, something that can never be removed. Yet, before my very eyes it begins to heal and fade away into nothingness as though it never was. The one mark in life that a wolf can never erase or heal from and yet hers is washing away like dust on a smooth surface when hit with a gentle breeze.

I gawp in surreal stillness, filtering into my head what this could possibly mean. Radar too fixes his focus on her mark as it disperses and the two of them seem to pause, stuck in a time freeze for a few seconds as all this slowly drips into reality. Expressions unreadable and the air suddenly seems to tingle with an undefined energy.

“We?” Sierra is the first to disrupt the pause, her voice barely a whisper above the noise of the chaos around us and Radar only nods. Hearing her loud and clear. His face pale from being wounded and yet the disbelief and wide-eyed shock can't be missed. He's stunned, his head working at a million miles an hour trying to process if this is real. Even though we are in the center of a bloody hurricane it feels like they are the only noise, and this is the only detail I'm zoned into. My brain trying to register what this means.

“You imprinted...your mate mark is gone..... that means.” I stammer it out, voice wavering with a sudden need to cry, emotion hitting hard.

“Juan isn't bonded to you anymore. Your life now belongs to Radar.” Leyanne's voice comes from behind me, and I jump in fright at the sudden intrusion of a welcome figure. Relief at her sudden appearance and yet my face falls when I see she isn't standing alone. Pushing between my guards, who easily give way to her, there is a large black cloaked figure standing behind, an intimidating presence that I can't miss. I guess wherever she was, it involved finding this ghoul.

My eyes are drawn to the solid, tall, figure; mysterious in their shroud of fabric which conceals all shape, a hood pulled up and over so not even a face is on show. An air of death lingering around them and I shudder and pull my eyes back to Leyanne. Dismissing this detail and more interested in what just happened before my very eyes.

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“How can this be...how could we?” Sierra breaks into my train of thought, stammering with a shake to her voice, and I turn back to them. Just in time to see her reach out and trace Radar's features so lovingly it makes my heart ache. The touch of true love, and his eyes are fixated on hers, but he holds himself in check

knowing this isn't the time or place to maul his new mate. A sudden private moment between them, a flicker of nonverbal communication, and I look away, instantly shy and feeling like they need a moment.

"Leyanne, where did you go? How can you be sure this has broken the bond?" I cut in, so many questions but most importantly, her whereabouts. Giving Sierra space and pulling the focus to other things.

"This means if Juan dies, then Sierra will be safe? The bond is dissolved? She's really mine?" Radar's gravelly voice takes over and he pushes himself up onto his haunches before awkwardly moving towards Sierra so he closes that last gap, taking her hand and tugging her. She's still half sitting, half laid on her back from the sheer intensity of the imprint and he hauls her to him in a flash. All inhibition gone now that they have just had the purest form of bonding known to our kind. His shyness evaporated in knowing she's his now and he no longer has a reason to hold back. He cradles her head against his neck in a flash pull against him, and despite all the craziness around us, I feel a sheer elation of joy. Seeing them wrap around one another as if it's as natural as breathing, something deep inside of me finally feels a sense of contentment for them. This is what I always hoped for her.

"I have it on good authority that imprinting with a wolf can only happen when the fates intend it to be so. Anything previous, becomes null and void. Juan is your distant memory; the mate bond is broken. I'm guessing your fated mate was always here in front of you and was biding their time to step up. Your fates always like an out to tie up their loose ends it seems." Leyanne takes on that air of smug she is so good at and yet the figure looming close can't be ignored, even in this happy moment. It keeps drawing my focus, a familiarity about his presence pulling me to him.

"Oh my god" Sierra blurts out, tears hitting hard, and yet sense brings us all back to the seriousness of where we are. We can't get swept up in this, even though it's a huge deal, while our world is still crumbling around us.

"Who is he?" I cut in like a knife, pointing sharply at the stranger, focus pulling back as that dark shadow moves closer to our inner circle of safety within my guards. I can't ignore him if he insists on coming nearer and all my defensive senses spike up.

"Don't recognize your own brother?" Jasper's husky voice comes at me from under his fabric shield and he slides it back slowly, revealing amber eyes glowing in his human form. That handsome face, those wide shoulders, and yet there's not a single hint of sibling adoration in his eyes.

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"Jasper! Why are you here?" I blanch, torn between elation and yet sudden anxiety given our last interaction. His whole aura is different from before, and I know that he came here with the mindset that he had the last time we meet.

"Your father sent me to bring you to him. You paged him after all." He pulls back the cloak enough to reveal his tall and strong physique, dressed in tailored black clothing, and air of superiority on him now I see him like this. He doesn't scream

wolf anymore, in his posture, his manner, or his fashion sense. He's spent too many years with the likes of Darrius, and it's rubbed off in all the wrong ways. He's as cold as one of them and that joy of finding me last time, has evaporated.

"He can stop this mess before I go to him. Call off his demons first!" I spring to my feet, suddenly enraged that he thinks he can click his fingers to summon me, even though I was the one who put out the call. I am not about to run off into his fold of demons with a brother I don't trust anymore.

"The quicker you see him, the faster this battle will stop." Jasper sneers at me, anger tinging his words at my refusal, and he clenches his jaw in agitation at my own disdain seeping through. I can feel his anger simmering below the surface and I know just being here probably has stirred up a million pains in his heart. Memories he doesn't want to relive.

"You know he has no intention of stopping this don't you? This is just a ploy to move me out of the battle zone..... because I'm important to him!" I retort, not sure that it's true but just unwilling.

"You're important to me too. You don't need to be here, am*** this. Come with me and see him, in a safe space. No one will touch you by my side." Jasper steps to me and I move back in perfect sync, so our distance remains constant. His flash of furrowed brow showing his displeasure at my evasion and he grits his teeth that I'm being headstrong in this matter.

"Stop it now. Alora go with him, you're no use here and I give you my word, your father will be waiting. The only way to end this is to find a middle ground. You know what he wants." Leyanne lays a hand on my shoulder as though to coax me but I shrug it away. She brought Jasper to me, so no way in hell is she on my side in this.

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"I want my pack to be safe. I'm going nowhere until everything stops. If he wants to see me then he calls his creatures of right now!!! NOW, JASPER!" I erupt at him; tears bite my eyes and desperation seeps out. I won't abandon them to swan off until I know nothing else will happen while I'm gone.

There's a moment of silence as we stare at one another in a battle of wills. Tension sparking between us and that good old Whytte stubbornness shines through. Leyanne drops behind me and moves back to the still hugging pair of wolves who are lost in their own world right now. The mate bond pulling them out of reality.

"Fine..... if he calls a temporary halt, then you come with me. I won't let anyone touch you." Jasper relents, exasperation evident as he tenses, yet it doesn't fill me with any sense of trust.

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"He can come here. I'm not his dog. I have what he wants right here, the person responsible. He can come if he wants to talk to the child he claims to care for. Otherwise, I'll happily fight to the end against him." I shrug, showing my petty side, but I don't care.

"Why are you so stubborn and headstrong?" Jasper yells at me, a flash of his temper breaking through and very much like the brother who would lose his cool with me when I was being willful. It only riles me all the more.

"Same reason you are, you stupid a**hole. Why the hell are you so dumb, so sure the only answer is death to the Santo pack? Why can't you see past the hatred in your heart and realize there's a better way than this." I snap at him, moving forward so we hit almost nose to nose, squaring up to his taller height with a new fierce building inside of me.

"The only way to avenge our parents is to see this pack fall! What don't you understand?"

"I'm this pack...so if they fall, then I do too. What is it that you don't understand huh? Your own g***** mate will fall too, and if she does, you're dead jasper. The girl you rejected is still going to be your downfall. All of us will perish here today....is that what you want?"

Jasper snorts and then chuckles in a weird out of place way. His whole manner becoming hostile and he shakes his head as though I'm a naïve child and he's slightly amused.

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"You think I planned on life after this? My last ten years have been building to the moment I can bring down those who took our family. Once that's done, I have no reason to keep breathing. If my death is hers, then so long to another Santo."

"You're an idiot" I fly for him, slapping him in the left peck so hard it sings my hand, and then punching his shoulder hard. Letting out all the pain in my heart he's causing me. "I'm your family! Carmen is your family....this pack could be your family too, if you just let them. You have so much more than revenge to live for. Why can't you let it go and listen to me? We can fix this without the death of an entire pack." My emotions break and instead of fury, I begin to sob in desperation. So overwhelmed that my brothers own hatred will be the one thing that can destroy him, us. There's no solution if my brother won't let this go. I need him to be on my side, like he always sued to be.

"My family died on a battlefield and my sister....." he snorts again, a sadness taking over his expression and his eyes glaze over as the amber dims away "Isn't

who she used to be. So in reality, you already died too. I have nothing left to fight for after this." His words are softer, almost pitiful and even though I know it's said in anger, it wounds me to the core.

"Screw you. You're not the brother I remember and love either. You're a fool. Do you really think mum and dad would want this for us? Do you think they would make us sacrifice our all to even a score on a pack who don't deserve it? Juan is the problem, and his loyal.....the rest of the wolves are as innocent as the Whyte pack was.... These wolves raised me in your absence, and they have paid for their wrongs against me in the last year. They stand here ready to die for me.... how can you condemn them for that?"

"They did nothing when it mattered!!!" Jasper erupts at me, all rage and fury directed as his eyes glow with fire and his teeth elongate from sheer emotion. His pain on show, and despite his sheer anger, tears fill his eyes and his mouth trembles. A tell that underneath, his heart is in chaos.

"How do you know what they did or didn't do? You weren't there.... Sierra sacrificed herself to protect me or else I would be dead too. Santo wolves died alongside Whyte wolves when Juan made the truth disappear about what happened to us. They have been manipulated and oppressed by him for a decade and yet here they stand, willing to die in a war that isn't theirs, protecting me, their luna, while he hides am*** them like a coward and uses them as pawns."

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"Enough! I canny listen to another minute of this. You two are clearly siblings with that same thick skull and ability to open your mouth to let nonsense spew out." Leyanne shoves my brother back away from me, bringing herself to the side of us so she snaps all focus to her. Agitated with our squabbling. "Alora's right. This is about Juan, not the Santo's. Tell your master to cease fire and his daughter will freely see him. After all, this is what this is all about, right? You know it's the right way to do things, you're not stupid." Leyanne brushes down the side of Jaspers cloak in a weirdly maternal way and pats him on the shoulder. Somehow soothing his fire without doing too much and I can't miss the slight hue of yellow mist where her touch hits him. He seems to deflate a little, some of that fierce dying at her words and he shakes his head and looks away. I wonder what kind of magic she has that can diffuse someone like Jasper with only a touch.

"Fine. I'll link Darrius and have him call a truce for now. Your wolves better not try anything.... Varro won't be lenient if you piss him off." Jasper's unfriendliness shines through, only less venomous, and it breaks my heart a little inside. He no longer considers himself a wolf, he's just one of them now and his loyalty is with Varro. Leyanne may have cooled his jets but his will remains unbudged.

"I'm staying right here; he can come to me." I reinforce my stance, my words biting with my own stubbornness. I refuse to back down and chase after this man who thinks I owe him anything just because we share DNA. He came to ruin my people; I won't run along after him.

“Whatever. Just call back your dogs and have them sit and stay like good little mutts.” Jasper turns on his heel, his cloak almost slapping me across the legs with the speed he marches away, and within seconds I realize the humdrum of cries and noise around me seem to drop off to an almost eerie silence. It’s sudden, like the jump from light to dark with the flick of a switch.

I look around in the darkness, lit only by the full moon and adding to the spookiness, and see creatures pulling back. Slinking out of the shadows, peeling away in fluid motion back to where they came from, and some diving upwards into the air with huge bat like wings. The sky full of giant creatures scurrying away to god knows where.

“We can’t link how do we call our own off?” Sierra’s voice brings me back to reality, my brain getting that snap back and I turn and shake my head, a new problem rising, and I have no answer. The weapon is still disabling some of our gifts and standing here, even I feel weaker while exposed. Carmen still hasn’t managed to do anything about it.

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“Word of mouth.... we are still wolves after all.” Radar jumps to his feet, suddenly renewed with energy and strength, as he shifts in the blink of an eyes, throwing back his huge furry head and let’s out a long blood curling howl. Loud and proud, the depth of his howl vibrates around us and spreads through the air. An echoing call and message to our kin, one they will understand, and within seconds distance howls join as they pa** the message along the ranks to wherever my mate must be.

Stand down, wait for orders. Stop fighting.

It’s as clear as day and almost like magic, everything around me starts to separate as vampires and Lychan push away from one another and stumble backwards to tend to their own wounds. From harsh screams, tearing, and gnashing of teeth, comes the weird and sudden pause that let’s the noise of the rustling trees sound louder than I have ever heard them. From chaos to calm, form blood lust to stillness.

The quiet of a battlefield in a temporary lull and yet I only feel fear intensify and nausea rises that this is far from over and only the calm before the typhoon rips though. Everything relies on me now and whatever I say to convince Varro that the only death needs to be Juan’s.

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The dark swirls around me like an oppressive, heavy cloak and I stand motionless, aware of bodies close behind me as we wait in the unearthly still. The sound of labored breathing, suppressed snarls, and growls, as my flank of wolves grows to stand in a uniformed ma** of protection.

"Lorey." The familiar voice, followed by a swoop and gentle thud as my mate lands beside me in perfect poise. Appearing as if by magic. His hand skimming the back of my hair with gentle precision as a show of affection, and he takes a second to focus everything on me with a pause as he checks me over. Appearing from beyond the veil of shadows and trees and I'm instantly calmer, relieved at his presence. Less afraid when he's by my side.

"Where have you been?" I whisper at him under my breath, not giving him a second to talk or question me; eyes still fixed on the emptiness as I await Jasper's reappearance. The vampires have all fallen back, leaving us out here as though standing on a stage and waiting on the curtain to rise. It's a freakish still in the storm and a feeling that has me on edge, drowning in senses as my ability to feel the vampires overpowers me. They're still close enough to make me antsy. My heart's pounding through my chest with the heaviness of my own anxiety, trying not to fidget as we wait for the appearance of the man who can end this tonight.

"Fighting, trying to keep the valley wolves alive. There are so many of them and so few of us." He shifts around me, eyes all over my body as he checks for anything untoward once more, not satisfied with his first appraisal. Always protective, always caring, and then places his palm on the small of my back and pulls me to his side so our bodies touch.

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I throw a look up at him and can already tell by his scr**s and mud slick body that he's been having a rough time in the valley. His wounds are slow to heal due to the frequency, so he's covered in marks and grazes. His hair is messy, his eyes still glowing amber while in human form and I can feel the adrenaline pumping through him like hot lava.

"Have we lost many?" I try and keep my tone inaudible to the nearby wolves as my mate casts a quick glance back at them, instantly uncomfortable and shifts on his feet. His reluctance to answer is obvious.

"Hmmm" it's a short and empty reply, but it speaks volumes to me. He knows it will ruin the morale of the ones closest and word would spread fast that many have died already. I don't want to know how many are gone either; I don't think I can handle seeing Varro if I know just how many lives have been pointlessly lost tonight. I would hate him before I can even talk to him and it would color everything that came out of my mouth. I push it away as best I can and try to focus on the here and now.

"Where's Meadow and the subs?" I change the topic and scan the dark again, yet the only faces I see are those who were already here, patiently waiting, and in the back of my mind I wonder where Juan is. He merged into the mess after the imprinting and he's nowhere to be seen. Not that I care, as he has nowhere to run, and I am quietly confident that once Varro decides to pinpoint him, then he will be caught quickly. We no longer need to protect him, so everything has changed. Juan can try and escape this night, but fate brought us all together for this reason.

“Split up, spread thin. They are some of our best, so they went where needed. Without being able to link, I can’t be sure.”

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My gut sinks and flips and I’m suddenly deflated and even more scared with that fact we have no contact with our most trusted. This is a mess. Our pack is disorganized without our ability to link and judging by Colton’s labored breathing, his gifts and strength are fading the longer we are out here. Objectively I know that if we keep going with this fight, we will lose. We never imagined it could even get this way.

“Carmen?” Colton flicks his glance to my side, devoid of her and only flanked by my guards. She swore to him to protect me and yet his furrowed brow and icy glare tell me he isn’t pleased she’s absent.

“Busy trying to disarm the sound for us, where I told her to go.” I nod towards the house and yet Colton’s head stops as he scans the faces to my left. His eyes suddenly coming to rest on something of interest that sparks a facial response; they open in shock and then something warmer as his muscles relax and I spot a hint of a smile.

I turn around and catch sight of Sierra propping Radar up on her shoulder, her fingers tracing his face to make sure he’s recovering, and the look of utter adoration cannot be missed. Radar has his arm around her shoulder possessively, in a way that screams ‘mine’ and Colton isn’t slow on the uptake. He nods in their direction, looking for clarification, but I can only shake my head for now and cast him a look that means ‘later’. I don’t want to recount that story or talk; I am barely keeping my body in check as nerves eat away at me. Colton falls back into line with me, sighing with agreement, and fixes his eyes back on the empty space before us.

My palms are clammy, my heart rate elevating and my legs turning to Jell-O the longer we wait here. It’s a form of torture to wait on the unknown to play out. Knowing I am going to face off the father I never knew and attempt to salvage what is left of the Santo pack, it’s a huge deal and my emotions are all over the place.

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Leyanne disappeared with Jasper to go summon Varro and left us standing here in this deafening anticipation. I know word would have travelled to surrounding wolves’ mouth to mouth that I was waiting here to meet with him, so I know that’s why Colton appeared. He would have questioned the sudden retreat of those foul creatures and heard I was standing alone awaiting him. True to his nature, he came to me in a flash.

"You're okay though? No harm, no one touched you? You aren't tired, dizzy, needing to lay down?" Colton brings his attention back to me, scanning me with that quick eye and I nod at him, completely distracted. I know he knew the answer to that the second he landed beside me, but he still has to ask. His eyes and emotion sensors all over me because he knows emotionally I am all over the place concerning Varro. He's trying to fill the silence in the only way he knows how.

"Hmmm..... I'm just sick of waiting. It's been fifteen minutes, where are they?"

"Right here!" The husky and powerful voice jolts me with the unexpectedness of it and I flinch, caught in Colton's arm as he pushes me slightly behind him and faces the direction in which it came. It's not Jasper, or any voice I have ever heard and my blood runs cold at the sheer sound. Strange yet there's something familiar in it. Like a forgotten feeling.

I clench my fists and try to cool the instant booming rapid thuds of my heart, legs finally losing all sense of solid as my entire body turns weirdly cold and light. Fear gripping my stomach in both wariness and yet anticipation. I take a deep breath and remind myself this is what I am here for.

The tall and terrifying figure seems to fluidly move from the darkness towards me, only the horrifying glow of dark red eyes visible at first and locked on my face as he seems to grow larger with his progress towards me. I am rooted to the spot, held captive by that eerie gaze and even Colton stiffens and bristles with this intimidating aura. It's obvious this is not a normal vampire, and we can taste his power sparking the air around us.

"Varro?" I ask with a timid shake to my voice, sounding feeble because he caught me off guard, but I inhale slowly to cool my nerves. Knowing I should show him no weakness. I am the Luna, I need to remember that.

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"Father might be a more appropriate t**le.... given that's what I am to you." His smooth and low voice is like honey on warm cake and despite myself, there's something almost comforting about it when he adds that little tiny inch of charm. I push it down and remind myself of the decades of carnage at his hands, even if his reason is tangled up with me.

"I have never known you as such, and as you're currently killing my family, I am a little reluctant to acknowledge it." I bristle. Mood accelerating from fear to anger in a flash.

"No further. Stay there if you want to talk." Colton cuts in, moving fully between us as the gap closes and I am shielded with a strong arm behind his back, catching my wrist and holding me still. He starts to shift as claws elongate and his body bulks a little, fighting his own wolf to stay in control.

"You think I'll hurt her?" Varro fully comes into the moonlight glow in the center of the clearing, exposing a slender yet handsome face that could be mistaken for

human. If it were not for his elongated and pronounced teeth and those devil eyes that match mine so effortlessly.

"I don't know what you want, but I'm taking no chances. She's my mate.... you won't get anywhere near her without my say so." Colton is fired up and ready to battle but Varro just smiles, a disarming and smooth change to his face, softening his angular features enough to take that hint of demon away. His teeth recede enough to stay within his lips, but those eyes glow brighter.

"She's my child... one I thought I lost and yet now stands before me. I want a chance to know her..... to see if her mother left anything of herself within her. I came here to find a resolution to our issues." Effortless suave and oozing charm and I finally understand why the old books told us that Vampires could dazzle humans with their charisma. It's the first time I have seen a hint of it. It doesn't work on other supernatural's though. Especially not ones who are half-bloods like me.

"Colton, I'm okay." This is going nowhere fast and with my mate standing between us with all hackles up, then this isn't going to be resolved anytime soon. "He won't hurt me." I gently prod him in between the shoulder blades to stand down as my security guard.

"You have a bone to pick with our pack, and we get it, we do. This isn't the way to resolve your feelings. Alora doesn't want this, and it won't bring you any kind of peace. Fighting here, killing each other, it won't get you what you want." Colton is still adamant he won't back down, so instead of arguing, I slide myself in front of him and hold his arm instead. Making it clear I want to do this myself. I love his need to lead, but in this my voice is what's needed.

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"Who says it won't? Who says that taking down an entire bloodline in revenge won't satisfy some of us?" Jasper's voice filters through from behind Varro and he appears at his side in the blink of an eye. Eyes ambering out as his inner wolf grows restless. His stance is hostile, his eyes gleaming bright with rage and I can taste so much pain pulsating this way from my brother. It's almost like an overwhelming downpour coming at me from above.

"Jasper.... Do you really think this will bring mom and dad back? Do they all need to die to fix that scar in your heart? What about me? Do you not care what it does to me?" I know this is futile but I'm not ready to give up on my brother just yet. There's enough conflict inside of him to make me believe I still have a chance to help him through this darkness. I know his heart, who he was. He was never bad, never a killer, and all of this is pain and loneliness that's eaten away at him for a decade. He needs to heal.

"I know nothing but pain and misery from their loss. Dad would want me to avenge our family. Mom would never lay down and let it go, she was a warrior. How can I just forget them?" He turns away, eyes glistening as tears make a show and despite his angry words, my emotions are hit with an agonizing sad pang. My brother is in agony and now we're here ready to do what he's wanted for a decade; his heart is wavering. I can feel his confusion even if his words contradict

that. He wants so badly to do something for their memory, even if deep down he knows they wouldn't want this for us.

"Enough... I didn't come to listen to bickering. I was offered a solution and I want to hear it." Varro impatiently snaps, bringing my brother to heel with his tone. He snaps all our attention back to him and I have to let go of my brother's emotions for now.

"I want this to end, tonight. The root of all of this is Juan Santo. He's here, am*** us. You want someone to blame, then it's him and his greed. We won't stop you. His thirst for power over a pack and his acts of murder, his actions that kept me a prisoner for a decade. I have as much reason to hate him as you do, so please, don't see this as some sort of weak compromise. This is as much for me as it is for you." I let go of my mate and bring myself up tall and proud matching Varro's stance. Words finding their strength and reminding myself that I can do this. My hatred for Juan is as strong as theirs, I need them to understand that.

"He didn't act alone. There were other Santo wolves who helped slaughter your entire bloodline." Varro raises a brow at me, seemingly dissecting my words and acting like he's considering them.

"His men are mostly gone. The few remaining are slinking around in the shadows trying not to be caught. You are welcome to all of them. As a pack, we won't stop you. As Luna, I encourage you to help free us from their burden. All we ask is that you don't touch anyone else. That this fight ends here tonight. Place blame where blame is due and not on the innocent around them. These are my people and they raised me, protected me.... I'm alive because of Santo wolves. Their own Luna for a start. Reward that.... Don't punish it." My chest swells at my own words as Sierra flits across my mind and it just strengthens my resolve.

"It's not that easy to let go of twenty years of heartbreak. This anger didn't just build itself up overnight." Varro is acting reasonable, even civilized and I wonder if this is an act or if he really is the kind to compromise and listen to logic. His actions of the past say no, but this being in front of me, he seems almost sane. I guess there had to be some qualities in him that drew my mother to one of their kind and I wonder if I am seeing glimpses of it now I've peeled away the reasons for his war on wolves. My mother was a good person, she would never have loved a monster.

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"Then look at me and put it aside. What is it you want? A relationship? Fine.... I'll do whatever it takes to end this. I'm not scared of you. If you do this, I'll get to know you, take the time to learn who you are."

"My dear sweet child, I'm not asking for a sacrificial lamb. I never asked for you to be afraid of me either. I want my child to come to me willingly because she wants to know her father. The plan was to wipe the slate clean, free the world of these bothersome wolves and take you home with me for a better life. Where you belong."

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I snort and half laugh half cough at his ridiculous idea. It's not what I expected to hear but then I guess, delusional plans had to be part of the bigger picture. Did he just imagine I would up and follow him home because of who he is.

"Not a chance. You kill the pack, you kill me. You know how mate bonds work and my mate won't stand back and let you do anything to our pack. Neither will I. I am not going off to live in some vampire land with you. Get real. I'm still half wolf." My place is with my pack and nowhere else.

"So stubborn, just like your mother. Can't you be more like your brother... so deep in longing for revenge he will do whatever it takes, even if it kills him. He has managed to stay alive am*** my kind for a decade, and that was no easy task." He seems amused at my words, and pats Jasper on the shoulder in a weirdly affectionate way. A hint of pride that my brother somehow didn't die all these years and I squint at him. My emotions bubbling away as I try to stay on top of the chaos I feel inside.

"My mother would hate you for all of this. You never knew her if you think any different. At the last moments of her life, she was still fighting for her pack. Think about that. She lost her life while still trying to protect them. She died for these wolves, for her child. She went to war to fight against you...don't you see that?"

Jasper shifts on his feet, drawing my attention as he turns away and I catch the glimmer of a tear rolling down his cheek. He walks off, his posture stiff but his emotions are caving as my truths sink home. My words have struck a chord and he can't bear to listen anymore. Varro on the other hand looks smug, mildly annoyed but he stays calm and unmoved in posture.

"You're clever. You have her fire. Her insane logic and way with words. So what's the compromise then? You hand me your father-in-law and his men and skip off happily into your forest to live out your life, oblivious to what you are? Is that what you're offering?" He smirks, a tooth peeking out to remind me I'm dealing with the devil himself.

"I hand you them, you do whatever you want with them but no, I don't skip off into the sunset. We came here to make a deal and if getting to know me is part of your wish, then I won't say no. You want a bond with me, then you'll get one."

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"Lorey!" Colton warns with a stern whisper, catches my wrist, attempting to pull me back to his side, his sudden spike of fear and protectiveness kicking in. I know he doesn't want me to have anything to do with Varro after this, but I've been denying our link for too long. Hate these creatures or not, this man is my father. I need to stop focusing on the venom that was ingrained into us all these years for

these creatures and recognize his motive behind all of this. He did it for love. He did it because of loss. I have been taught to fear and despise them and I've let that rule all decisions these past months. I never stopped to really think or feel from Varro's point of view.

"You are willing to come with me, back to my home?" Varro seems to visibly relax, his posture smoothing from standing stiff and proper, to more of a casual lounge as he places one finger on his bottom lip and crosses his arms to support his own elbow. It's odd, to see him relax as though he thinks he has this all worked out and in the bag. It disarms me a little.

"No. I said I would get to know you, but this will be on my terms. I say when, where. I need to be more careful, take care of myself from here on in." I subconsciously splay one hand over my abdomen, that inner fierce in me needing to protect these two lives above all.

"Why?" Jasper's voice comes strong from behind and he's back faster than I can blink. Sudden concern for me out of nowhere and he hone sin on where I have placed my palm. His eyes widening and then his brows furrow to a sus***ious frown.

Colton bristles and moves right up behind me, so his body heat encapsulates me and that low growl tells me he's getting impatient with this whole thing. He's wary of Japers move towards me and his mate need to protect is getting rebellious. The vampire hybrids are still lurking around the perimeter and the pack is getting restless too, everything feeling tense and heavy as the seconds tick by.

"I'm pregnant with twins." There's no point hiding it. It's something that may sway the whole tone and they would find out soon enough, should we survive tonight.

"What?" Varro and Jasper snap in unison, the shock pretty obvious that they never expected that at all. A sudden change in both their demeanors and Jaspers eyes widen once more before he chokes on his own saliva then coughs. He seems to sag, his mind ticking over the fact he just gained more family, became an uncle in a blink.

"She's pregnant. Our children are growing in her belly...so she's going nowhere with you, ever. She shouldn't even be here, doing this, but she had no choice. Is this how you protect your daughter and grandchildren?" Colton again with an equally snappy tone, biting words, anger obvious, and I sigh and push him back. His emotions are getting the better of him and he's a bit like rocket fuel on a fire sometimes.

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"You're going to be a grandfather, Varro. Do you really want to waste tonight standing here and arguing about the future of my pack? I won't raise my babies away from them, and I won't be bringing them to your people either. These are my children so don't make me do what my mother did. She ran because she knew her child only stood a chance am*** wolves. I want you to leave them alone and

secure your grandkids future in a loving and nurturing pack, in a peaceful environment. That's what I want."

There's strained silence as his eyes eat me up, boring into my skull before travelling down to my abdomen and back up. The air prickly with tension and static as it sinks in that he has more than me to care about now. He takes what feels like an age to think through and then rests back on his heels in a weirdly comfortable way. That smirk fades and I get hints of a real smile which drastically transforms his face.

"I want to know you, and them..... I want to be a part of their future. Those are my blood too. SO you have some logic in your requests and I'm not against this compromise. I get more out of it than killing everyone, I guess." His request is quieter, somehow sincere in its deliverance and the glow of his eyes dull a little as he says it with hushed tones. For the first time I get some sort of feeling from this strange being and sense nothing malicious in the intent. His brain is working fast and he's calculating a future with three more to his bloodline.

"You stop this tonight? Call off your hybrids and send them home." I stand firm and cast a quick glance at my now silent brother, who's staring at my stomach and immersed in his own head. Eyes no longer amber and he looks completely lost. His emotions are unreadable now as they are chaotic, and I can see his internal struggle as he tries to figure out how to feel.

"I want those responsible. I will do to them what I see fit. You get no say whether they live or die." Varro won't budge on that, yet I don't care. We always knew if we could find a way we would sacrifice Juan and his loyal. The fates have made it all happen.

"Deal." Colton answers in my place, a quiver in his voice because at the root of this is his father's life. I know, despite everything, his heart is in pain even if he knows this is what must happen. He's loves him, even if it's undeserved and this is killing his soul. I can't imagine the turmoil or his heart in this moment.

"You can never wage war against my people again, for as long as my children and I live. We bind us together. No weapons, no invasions, no more fear of being attacked." I stand firm, pushing my chin up to meet his unbreaking gaze and he nods. My fire growing strong now an end is within my grasp and elation starts to grow from a tiny ember in my stomach.

"I have no reason to play with mutts if the intent is gone. They make excellent guard dogs now I have three lives to protect. I give you my vow, that once Juan is delivered to me, and his loyal...this is over. We have a future to discuss at a more pleasant time and venue. I'm bored with war and m***rels. I have a nice castle waiting for me back home." He can't even admit this is a decision he's made from the heart. For a moment I actually find him amusing.

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I stand and inhale slowly for a moment, my brain whirring with everything he's saying. It feels too easy and I can't believe it really is this simple. That he's willing to end it all right now, and everything we hoped for is happening. My gut says

though, this isn't a dream and I shouldn't question it. My worthless persona of many moons ago ingrained this idea into me that I was never going to be enough for anyone.... This just proved it all wrong.

"I want my brother left with me." I add in afterthought, grasping quickly at one extra detail that means everything, seeing Jasper sudden spring back to life at my request. He looks confused and then resistant.

"No. I won't live with these....." he blurts out, his voice husky with emotion.

"Deal!" Varro cuts him off without hesitation, shutting him down with that non nonsense booming command and Jasper spins on him in a flare of anger.

"What the fu.....?" It's obvious this is the last thing he wants.

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"Be quiet. You don't belong am*** my kind, you never have, and it's become tiresome to protect you against others. You can be of more use with my daughter and her babies than constantly watching your back and shadowing Darrius. I believe it's where fate always intended to put you. To protect my blood in place of me." Varro turns to him and heavily places a hand on his shoulder, his aura emanating sheer authority. It's clear he doesn't like to be questioned.

"You want me to live am*** those that took everything from me?" Jasper almost spits it at him and winces at the pressure applied on his shoulder as punishment. I get the vibe you don't question or disobey this one at all.

My heart aches for my brother though, knowing that at the root of his resistance is an inability to let go of his own pain. With good reason. Being all alone am*** their kind for a decade with only Varro as his source of comfort. To have someone spurring on your sadness with their own. Torn from his own kind for survival and left to fester and forget what it is to be part of a pack. Both so focused on revenge and he knows nothing else. I get it, I understand, but it doesn't make it any easier to deal with. My soul still hurts at his venomous words.

"No, he doesn't. because those who took it all will leave with him. The rest of the pack has nothing to do with this, they didn't know.... Carmen has nothing to do with this. The fates would never have linked her to you if they wanted it like this." I point out, reaching for my brother's hand in a bid to draw him to me but he pulls it away to avoid me. Another cold glare and a show of amber eyes.

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"You need to come back to living as a wolf to be able to move on and heal. Jasper, the pack you knew back then isn't the pack you're hating now. So much has happened and changed. Just give us a chance. Take time to see for yourself that

it's not the same as it was." Colton moves close behind me to try and reinforce my sentiment. His genuine need to bring him back into the fold and accept a pack member who has gone astray. The alpha in him will always fight to bring our kind home.

"Whether you agree or not, I am ordering you to stay by your sister's side until I see fit. Protect my child.... Be my eyes and presence. Refusal is pointless." Varro interjects. "This war ends tonight and no one but you will be left to stand and fight if you don't give a little. My goal was always revenge, but before me stands a reason to stop all of it. A future beyond this battle. I can't win if I lose my daughter to satisfy my need for revenge."

His words make me falter within myself, a sudden thump to my chest as I blink at Varro, suddenly seeing something else in him with just the briefest of words. I have pushed down and tried to ignore any feelings I might harbor for this stranger, because it's a can of worms I don't want to examine. Yet here in a blink of an eye, the fact he is my father is staring me in the face and I'm too afraid to really let those emotions break the surface. I don't know how to process them when I really have never gotten to grips with the fact the dad I knew, was never my bio dad at all. Caged feelings, swirling thoughts, all swallowed as quickly as they surface so I can ignore them until I feel able to really explore all of it. My heart says it's a betrayal to my dad to have affection for Varro in his place right now and I'm so confused with what I'm experiencing.

A weird buzzing noise running through us, like loud static, suddenly hits us from behind and sways all thoughts from that point. It ripples through in a dramatic fashion, making my skin goosebump and my hackles rise. Pulling all focus away from conversations and one another as we all stop, spin our heads, to see what and where it came from. It's a sensation like standing on a metal floor when lightning hits a building outside, the after vibrations of intense electricity tickling my skin.

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"What was that?" I utter breathlessly, turning to see that our pack wolves have been affected too and are looking around with the same confused curiosity. It wasn't painful, just something we all felt, and it seems to have moved like a wave across the sea of figures.

"The weapon.... It's disabled. I can feel a difference. My ability to link is back." Colton touches my shoulder and we both glance at the manor, in the direction of Carmen as a smile spreads across my face. Instant elation. I know that the Colton immediately jumps to link the subpack to bring them up to speed.

"Yay, Carmen!! I knew she could do it. I mean, we maybe don't need it now, but still my girl has skills." I can't conceal my pride in my sister and suddenly become aware of Jaspers eyes eating into the back of my skull and his emotion changing with the mention of her name. It's a loaded and heavy feeling, swirling confusion and pain, and for a second, a pang in my heart tells me Jasper is already pining for the mate he refused. He's fighting himself and I know from experience how much worse every pa**ing day gets when your mate is separated

from you by choice. His own stupid, stubborn, hate, is stopping him from opening his heart. It's eating at him with just the sound of her name.

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"I give my word that the vampires will not use our weapon against wolves as long as I rule my coven from this moment on. My oath is unbreakable, I swear on it. There is no need for your countermeasures after tonight. The weapon can be turned off." Varro's statement is clear and strong, and my gut says it's truth. I falter in my response, take a breath, and decide for one to trust my gut and believe the words. He's very to the point.

"So, I guess all that's left now is for us to deliver Juan, right?" I point out, pushing away every other detail and focusing on making this end to our fight a done deal. I can finally see light at the end of the tunnel, even if this all feels surreal. Just get the details in order and we can all go home. Take the steps, ignore all the emotional issues.

"Right. Maybe Jasper will more appeased if he personally hunts down that problem, and his men. Would that kill some of this hatred in you?" Colton steps towards him and is met with the instant glow of ambering eyes, telling him to back off out of his space. Jasper's bristling for a fight, even if it's misdirected at my mate.

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"You underestimate what is needed to curb my hatred of Santo. Maybe if you and I ..." Jasper snarls and I step between them in haste. I know where that tone is heading and Colton is evenly matched in fiery temper and willingness to fight when coerced.

"Enough!" I push Colton back, knowing he's the less volatile of the two and the one I trust not to react to my force in any kind of anger. He obeys with a step back but places a hand on the small of my back and grasps my waistband. It's his way of saying he'll haul my a** out of the way should he dislike Jasper's attitude towards me. "Jasper, please. Just go do whatever. Expend some of that energy and anger in finding the real enemy. We don't have the energy for this." It's almost a pleading request.

"I agree. Jasper, take several with you and go find every last one of those m**rels. Juan Santo and the loyal that will be cowering with him wherever they are hiding. I'm bored and want to wrap this up and enjoy my evening in a more sociable manner." Varro sighs as though to emphasize the point, and I find it a little amusing, in a weird way.

"I'm going too!" Sierra's unexpected voice rings clear in the night air and disrupts our circle. Her bold march pushing us apart naturally as she invades the space and she furiously glares me brother down so that he's the one to actually step back

and lower his chin, avoiding her direct gaze. It dawns on me that this was once his Luna, and he fought in war alongside her.

He may be consumed with feelings of the negative against many wolves here, but in the face of a femme he respected, protected, and knew as his mother's best friend, everything shifts around us. "You!...." Sierra points right up at his nose, a tone much like our mom's when she was mad at us, a look of fierce and a tone that is one hundred percent momma wolf in battle mode. "Your mom would be so mad at you right now, you know that, huh? Don't even get me started, young man. You're going to come with me and find that son of a b****, and then you're going to put that damn tail between your legs and take a time out to reflect on yourself and everything muddled in that thick skull. You need a time out in the solitude chair, to get things in order!" Sierra taps him on the temple with a little aggression that startles him, and my mouth drops open at this unexpected interaction. The solitude chair was our kindergarten time out for when we misbehaved. Varro smirks and turns away as though making it clear he has no issue with his pet wolf being scolded in this manner and I have to swallow a snort of laughter at Sierra reverting to the woman who used to visit us and read stories to wayward pups.

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"Luna...I ..." Jasper completely caves, almost like that little wolf who hated being told off. Submission flowing from him at alarming speed, and he hunches his shoulders further as his nose almost touches his chest. That ingrained part of a wolf when faced with the hierarchy he grew up following. I never thought Sierra could have this kind of effect on him.

"Luna, nothing! I understand. Your pain, your heartbreak, and your anger. Look at me..... Alora and I, we both understand the level of betrayal and hurt. We know what the heartbreak does to your soul. You're not alone in that. You have become so accustomed to holding onto it to fill your emptiness, away from your kind and your family. No direction, cut off, cast out, which is pure hell for a Lychan. Your loneliness is infused through you in the worst kind of ways and it's seeping from every pore so that I can feel it. Come home to us, Jasper. Where you belong. You don't need to forget, or let it go right now, you just need to take the first small step towards us and know that I won't let you be hurt ever again. I failed you... I failed her; I failed my promise to keep her little ones safe. If you want to blame anyone then blame me for not being strong enough..... hate Juan, blame his greed, but don't blame those who love you and are offering you a way back. You won't heal without us, don't throw away the chance of a future that can be happy again, for one day of bloodshed and regret. "

There's heavy silence as she reaches up and traces a single symbolic tear that escapes his eye and rolls down his cheek. He coughs to try and cover it, tries to pull back that hardened glare to shield the emotion she tugged from him. I see it all so clearly. That teen boy I knew, the loving brother, the shy awkward wolf who protected me so fiercely; he's still in there and battling so many internal conflicts. She dries it away with a gentle touch, a slight blue glow leaving a faint shadow as her finger moves and it seeps into his soul. Her healing touch, her balm, infused with her careful words. I know how powerful that combination can be in times of major distress.

Colton shifts restlessly behind me, unsure what's happening and pulls me against his chest. Varro raises a brow and c***s his head to the side as Jasper lifts his chin slightly and dares to look Sierra in the eye for the first time. Probably the first time in his life, given when she was Luna we were never allowed.

"I know it's hard. I know there's a fire inside of you that's all consuming, and a war that's twisting it all around. Trust me, I know how it feels. I know the loss, take my hand and let me help you find your way out of your own hell. It doesn't have to feel like it does now." Sierra slides her palm to his shoulder, down his arm and glides her hand in his to grasp it tightly. This is where she always excelled as Luna, in her ability to be what we needed and find the right way of getting in.

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A mother's touch, a protective gesture, and Jasper swallows hard and seems to crumble slightly, no letting go of that small hand in his.

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I know this isn't all words. I can see the glow, know the effects of Sierra's subtle magic and know she's diffusing him, filling him with that aura of warm feeling and security she has used on tearful pups in the past. It's like giving him a couple of shots of liquor and improving his mood for a temporary relief. It's instilling hope that she holds the secret to being free of his own agony.

"Take her offer. Go find the wolf and his loyal. End this tonight." Varro is curt and to the point. Shaking Jasper out of his odd quiet stance and he seems to visibly straighten himself up as he pulls his hand out of Sierra's. Surprised at his filial behavior. He casts her an odd look, somewhat torn and confused and then blinks at me as the steels returns a little. I can see the battle in his eyes.

"Fine... but you stay here. Pregnant? There's no place for you here in that condition." It's a hint of brotherly love, and I'll take what I can of it. Even if it's delivered in such a frosty tone. It's a ray of hope.

Jasper wastes no time in polite chat anymore, turns on his heel and with a click of his fingers to lurking shadows who instantly materialize. I shudder as several creatures materialize in thin air and take off after him, that wreaking smell and vulgar show of pale skin and long fangs. Sierra is hot on his heels without hesitation, turning to wolf, and Radar and two of the Luna's guard immediately follow close on her heels without a word being spoken. I know Colton is in all of their heads, directing, giving orders and I relax knowing we have our abilities back.

"Shall we retire to your..... abode?" Varro breaks in, looks up at the darkened manor which seems shabby and deserted compared to how it used to look so many months ago. His sarcasm is obvious, and I catch that little flex in Colton's body as he curbs his reaction to someone dissing his childhood home.

"Shall we?" I answer instead and push Colton off, motioning him ahead of me as we turn about, telling him to get moving. He does so after a second of stubborn stillness. His eyes cast around to take in the scene before us and he grips my hand in his and tugs me close to his side. Always ready to shield me.

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Our wolves are all standing ready, a huge semi-circle which has grown since Varro appeared and I catch sight of Meadow in the lineup, eyes ablaze, poised for the kill at a command. I smile her way softly, so glad to see her again, to tell her it's okay and impulsively scan the faces for the rest of the subs. They are all here now, watching, waiting, eyes amber and standing in battle mode for the briefest of signs. My family all present once more.

The Luna's guard follow close behind us and Varro seems completely unphased to be a lone Vampire walking towards this arc of the enemy without any accompaniment. It says a lot about his faith in his own abilities.

"Lord." A dark figure swoops down in front of us and lands with a gentle thud in our path, startling me with the almost ninja like intrusion. Tall, dressed in black tailoring, with undeniable red glowing eyes coming at me from the darkness. Darrius. I guess he was never far away. He's unmistakable even sheathed in shadow.

He steps forward and bends a knee before fluidly moving into a kneel, and lowers his head, lifting one arm so his wrist touches his forehead in a sign of respect for his master. It's obvious that despite his arrogant and cold manner, Darrius is a loyal servant to my father and seems he knows how to be submissive in front of the right creatures. He still has that noble air of command, yet I sense no aggression or anything negative coming from him at all. Complete obedience.

"Stay here, I have no need for your men anymore. Watch for Jasper in case he needs assistance in rounding up his charge." Varro clicks his fingers and motions for me to walk around him. I falter and then do as I'm told and arc away from Darrius and around while she stays in that bowing position, unmoved at all.

"As you command, Lord." That low husky voice that sends the fear of god through me. Even as a Lychan, Darrius scares me. He's nothing like Varro. I thank my lucky stars Darrius and any like him didn't interject in battle as I really feel our kind are no match for the ones like him. There's something so dark and terrifying about him, that's not even present in Varro at all. You can feel it in the air around him, that he's the true definition of a creature of the night.

Darrius stays unmoved when even Varro walks past him and I glance back to see him motionless like a statue when we progress all the way to the gate of the Manor. As soon as we are at a distance he stands up and takes on the stance of a guard, facing away and doesn't follow. His weird energy is still ebbing around me though and I shudder in a bid to shake it off. If I had to hazard a guess, I would say it's what death feels like.

"What is he?" Colton is the one to break the tension, aiming his question at me because he is obviously feeling it too, and I lean in close knowing fine well that

Varro can hear me even if I whisper. Somehow, talking about Darrius though, should be done in whispers.

"They said he's a Shadow Knight. Some sort of stealth a**a**in soldier."

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"A what?" Colton blanches and throws back a wary look over his shoulder at the formidable figure of that creepy man. A look of disbelief and yet a frown.

"A Shadow Knight.... A rare being. Darrius is the commander of my elite force of very special, hard to find, brothers. A born a**a**in from an almost obsolete bloodline. He's the shadow in every nightmare, the eyes in the dark that scare you to death. Even for our kind, he's special. A warrior to the core with little to no empathy for any kind of life, but a strong sense of obligation and a good moral code for a cold-blooded killer. He has his uses, as do his men. Darrius alone could take on fifty of your kind and not even get a scratch. I'm rather proud to have him." You can't mistake Varro's pride in his tone, as though discussing his prized collection of priceless artifacts. It's odd.

"Leyanne said, that if Shadow Knights fought the war against us twenty years ago, there would be no Lychans today at all." I point out, shivering at the thought and gaining a new respect and fear for that figure we are leaving behind. He's mysterious and yet leaves a lasting impression.

"And she's right. That witch isn't one to lie or exaggerate. Meddlesome creature, that she is. You can thank the fates though that only two dozen of them exist nowadays in all the lands. I command most of them."

Now that's a terrifying thought. Two dozen Darrius's. No thank you.

Talking of which...or witch. I have no idea why she goes AWOL at the most important times and then seems to appear right when we truly need her. She's weird, in a good way but altogether infuriating that she just takes off and goes to do her own thing. Where the hell is she now?

The words don't make it out of my mouth as we're met by carmen at the main door, a look of fear on her face as she scans those coming towards her, then relief at seeing me and Colton. Her eyes move past us, to Varro, no shock at seeing him, and then off into the darkness behind him and it's no guessing who she's looking for. Her mate bond will be telling her he's close and feeling him in all kinds of ways.

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"I expected something a little less run down, grander. Do you wolves not believe in modern conveniences, like electricity and running water?" Varro mocks as he

scans the large hall of the manor, scoffing at its dark and drab appearance. I can't blame him, as since we've been gone, this place has fallen into some urban war disarray that I never imagined could possibly happen to this place. It feels and looks abandoned, dust and dirt on every available surface from neglect. I have no idea what happened and why Juan returned the valley to the dark ages.

"Funny." Colton dismisses him with the dry tone he reserves for people liked Deacon, a wolf who once stood against him.

"We could try find the generators and power them up." Meadow followed us in here when we moved and cuts in with a snappy tone, also peeved at having her home turf mocked. The other subs are here too, those who didn't follow Jasper in pursuit of Juan and I give her a smile and nod in answer.

"They are running and powering the security system outside. It seems the main electric is cut off though." Carmen is still hovering by the door, eyeing up the stranger in our midst with an air of sus***ion and watching him like a hawk. Colton isn't too relaxed either, but weirdly, I feel like the danger isn't in here with us, even with Varro beside me. He has a presence for sure, of darkness and power, but yet there's also a sense of calm and security about him. He's weirdly vibed.

"Juan lost interest in maintaining the valley as somewhere to live comfortably. It became an army base and all home comforts were sacrificed as unimportant while he was busy ruining what was left of the pack." The bitter tone of a stray wolf who was lurking in the shadows where we left him. One of those we first encountered when getting in here.

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"We can figure something out. Come on Chica, me and you and our boys here." Meadow clicks her tongue at Carmen, nodding to the subs and takes off at speed to light this place up. Reading the room and thinking maybe Varro, Colton and I need to be alone. I think she's right. The atmosphere is somewhat strained and Colton is tense as hell now we're in here with my bio father.

"Cozy." Varro raises a brow, oozing sarcasm once more.

"Remind you of home, huh?" Colton bites back impulsively and I eyeroll at his obvious show of testosterone. Colton is in alpha mode and high on adrenaline. Right now he sees Varro as a male encroaching his territory, rather than someone needing to be negotiated with. I sigh it out and ignore the obvious sparks between them.

"So..... we're here, alone. You wanted to talk, let's do that." I have no patience for this and the babies in my belly are fast s***ing what energy I have. It's the middle of the night and I'm tired and hungry. I need solutions soon so I can lead my people back out of here and see how many we lost. Then I can eat, sleep and recover this hellish night."

"I didn't expect our first real meeting to be under these circ**stances, and honestly, I am not sure how to make this a little more pleasant. Getting to know one another is something I want, and I realize tonight there are too many strong emotions and a lot of mistrust lingering in the air." Varro strolls about, running a pointer finger over a nearby mantle and tutting at the debris that dirties his hand.

"I'm not in the frame of mind to be talking about a father and daughter bond. My people are hurt, god knows how many dead. Tonight is a complicated mess and they come first. If this is an end, then let us go do what we need to do on the promise that this is truly over. Jasper will bring Juan and then I want you to leave." I stand my ground, irritated by my own discomfort and fatigue. My head's a mess and tonight I can only think of going home.

"A treaty. We meet to sign one, formally, in a few days. My own kind will want this in writing, and I a**ume so would yours. I know it's a little old fashioned, but you are dealing with an ancient species with a flair for the dramatic."

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"Whatever. I just want this to be over. We have lost many, and I'm sick of the bloodshed and fear. I want a future where my children will feel safe and we can stop always hiding in the homestead, fearing the world outside our own door. If a piece of paper does that, then we can meet up and sign it."

"It was always about my loss. I hope you can believe that and trust that this is truly over. You are alive, and my bloodline is about to be further spread with your offspring." Varro seems genuine and yet so much is swirling inside of me while standing in this dirty and dark mess, that I can't begin to unravel my feelings.

"If you go back on your word, and your hybrids rise up again...." Colton interjects, his biting tone clear.

"They won't. As of tonight, their existence is surplus and they won't be an issue in a few days."

"Meaning?" Colton grinds his teeth, already knowing the answer. To him it's vile to create your own kind and then ma**acre them when not needed. As wolves who value pack above all, its not something we can begin to understand.

"Do you want specifics? We create them for use, and we return them to dust when they are no longer required. Hybrids will disappear from around you. I have no need for them. And without purpose, they are rabid nuisances that create havoc for the human world." Varro has given up surveying the dust and is now examining his overly long and pointy fingernails on his left hand. Like stiletto shaped daggers which I am sure have a purpose.

"Your kind are cold and heartless." He snorts and turns away, unable to hide his feelings on the matter, his face a picture of disgust, but Varro just shrugs.

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"My kind can't understand yours either. Living as you do. I guess that's the beauty of our separate species. Neither can stand in the shoes of the other or begin to understand them."

I don't really want a debate on Lychan versus Vampire while I'm standing here with one foot in both rivers. It'll only end in argument knowing how pig headed my mate can be, and Varro doesn't seem like a push over either.

"You were serious about my brother? You'll leave him with me? Even if he refuses?" I break into their conversation and try to steer the attention back to me. Determined to know for sure that I can take my brother home.

"Yes. He's had to live a very low-key life am*** my kind. Being one of our mortal enemies. Darrius protects him well but now he has a place to go and a purpose, I want him here, watching over my child and my grandchildren. It will be a relief to no longer shield him."

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"She has me to do that. If Jasper causes issue...." Colton bristles up, instant defensiveness and spins around to face us once more. His mood rocketing.

"Colton! Please. Jasper needs time and patience. We can bring him home and back to the pack, don't be so hasty to dismiss him. He's no threat to us."

"Alora is right. As much as I will miss the boy after a decade of his company, he belongs by his sister's side. He belongs am*** wolves. He has become so used to our community that I fear he maybe forgets what he is and might need some kind of rehabilitation. To remember how to be a dog!" Varro smirks and Colton's eyes amber ever so slightly, a scowl on one corner of that normally very pretty mouth.

"We'll take care of him, you don't need to worry about that. He's my family." I cut in to dampen the mood and slide in between the two of them as Colton and Varro both seem to move forwards into the clearing in the center of the room and face each other off wordlessly.

"Well then. I guess once my package is delivered, all that is needed is a time and place for our reunion. Treaty in hand of course, and maybe some prettier surroundings. I am partial to a fine dining room with rich cuisine. Somewhere clean.... with less dust. I'm not allergic to a little light either."

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"Seriously?" Colton snorts again, showing his severe dislike of Varro, hating his every word, and I eyeroll. I know it's going to take time for a born and bred vampire slaying warrior to warm to what was ingrained as an enemy, but he needs to chill a little.

"That can be done at the homestead, as long as you leave your hybrids behind. You and Darrius come alone." Stern and to the point, I know the only way to deal with these two is to take charge.

"No way, Lory. Imagine the uproar if two vampires walk into the homestead. The pack will go crazy."

"Colton, things have to change and he's my biological father. The agreement was that he will have a relationship with me and bring peace. The sooner the pack get used to seeing them, the better." I reach out and lay my palm on Colton's forearm, feeling his tension bristling under the surface as he turns and paces. A sign he's itching inside for action instead of words. He hasn't come down from his battle fueled adrenalin high yet.

"She has a point. You better condition your mutts to be more accepting, especially if you are bringing more hybrid vampires into their home. Who knows how your children will turn out. It's not always a given that the wolf gene reigns supreme. One of them might look a lot like me." Varro winks at me, and all I can do is elicit another heavy sigh. This isn't what Colton needs to hear tonight.

"Doubtful. Or else Alora would have more than a set of red eyes."

"You can never tell. My DNA is strong, and well, this is the first tri-brid mix that I have ever heard of in my lifetime. Maybe Alora was just unlucky to pop out as a Lychan."

I open my mouth to answer but the sudden blink blink and then blinding brightness of instant illumination makes me flinch instead. Covering my eyes as I adjust to new light and then look around in dismay at how badly run down this place is now we can see it fully. It's so much worse when it can be seen clearly.

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"You have your work cut out here if you wish to bring this place back to what I a**ume was its former glory" Varro points out and I frown at him in stupefaction for a moment.

"What?" I never even thought of the fact that Colton might want us to come back here, but it's the only solution if Juan is out of the picture. The fractured pack need to be brought back together and the homestead just isn't big enough for all of us. It hits me so suddenly with just a simple word from him, that this is where our future lies. I'm not sure how I feel about coming back here after everything that's happened.

"Wolves are good at rebuilding. We know how to start over and thrive. I'm not worried about it." Colton just can't seem to drop his defensive att**ude, but I don't blame him, even distracted by my own thoughts. An entire lifetime of being conditioned to hate the vampires and in one night he's being asked to accept one as his father-in-law and be on good terms.

"The main breakers were pulled, and the fuses ripped out. An easy fix once we found them." Meadow appears, seemingly jovial at their accomplishments and Cesar is hot on her heels. Neither fazed at all and at least they don't seem as hostile and combative towards Varro as my mate is.

"The others are outside, turning on floodlights and restoring power to nearby buildings. Everyone is waiting to find out what's next." Cesar drops a hint, meaning they too want to know what's going on now we're all in here and the fighting has stopped. It feels surreal and not like a bloody battle was raging outside not so long ago.

"Allow me... I suppose being clear on one thing will help your pack disperse back to their homes for now. Juan can only hide if there are crowds outside." Varro rubs his temple for a second, his blood red eyes seeming to glow a bit bright and then he gives me a crooked smile when he catches me staring at him. "Sending them off. No need for them anymore; Darrius informs me that they have Juan and are heading our way. Sadly, his minions didn't survive. So, it's a solo prisoner I have to take."

My heart sinks knowing that with the fall of his loyal, their mates too have perished, even though they were completely innocent in this. More lives lost because of that man and yet it was unavoidable no matter the outcome. Those wolves had to pay for their crimes and their family is seen as collateral damage. It breaks my heart knowing we just lost more souls in this night, and it was no fault of theirs. At least now I know Sierra will be spared if Juan disappears for good.

"Disperse the wolves once the hybrids go. Send the valley pack back to their homes, and most of ours back to the stead. We need to find out who we lost and make arrangements for the dead. Keep only our best sub packs here to carry out the orders tonight." Colton is commanding Meadow, pacing towards them and setting things in motion as I adjust to my overly bright surroundings. I'm lightheaded and exhausted and don't know how long I can hold on. I need rest.

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"What about his dead? Are we left to clean that crap up too?" Cesar snarls at Varro and joins Colton in that aggressive wolf glare he has going on. My heart sinks at the sight of it, knowing it was too good to be true to have Cesar seemingly fine with our guest. I know the entire pack are going to be worse than this in the new light of day.

"If you want me to have mine drag away the remains then so be it. It makes no difference to me. They can work to clean up if that's what you want, Alora." Varro shrugs as if I am merely asking him to pick up his used dinnerware after a meal.

"You're kidding right? By sunup they will turn to ash and no longer dirty our valley. Make the living ones leave and give my pack some piece of mind. The last thing we need is your vermin crawling all over our fallen brothers and sisters." Colton snorts, his eyes staying amber as the thought of how many we lost lingers in his heart. His whole aura changing to that of regret and heartbreak.

“Cole, Radar is incoming with...” Cesar cuts in, obviously linked to his buddy on a one to one, and Colton stiffens all over. His mood nosediving and I sense the instant hesitation in him. Despite everything that’s happened I always knew this would be the hardest moment for him. They are bringing his father to us, to be handed over to the person who will oversee his death. Whether now or in ten years, this will be the last time Colton ever lays eyes on him.

“Tell him to bring him here.” Colton’s voice deflates and his tone is huskier than normal. The emotion hitting him hard as he too knows this will be a goodbye, no matter what is going to happen to Juan. I suddenly feel sick and hurt for him. Knowing how confused he must feel inside.