

Third time is not a charm

Trigger warning : this chapter contains graphic depictions of violence

Chapter one - Third time is not a charm

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When it happened the first time, it was called a tragic accident. That's what everyone said. I felt my life shatter right in front of me when Paul died.

We were not in love, but we were getting there. Paul was a goofy guy, the kind who made you laugh effortlessly. He was quite tall, with not much muscle mass on his body, but he was a skilled pack warrior. He adored the pack, and the pack adored him in return. He was like a bright light that illuminated every room he entered.

Our mating ceremony had been planned. Invitations were sent out, and gifts were delivered to congratulate us on our mating. However, the ceremony never took place. The day before the ceremony, Paul was found dead near the pack boundary by one of the pack warriors during a routine survey shift. His body was pale blue and lifeless. There were no visible injuries, no blood—nothing. Paul was simply dead.

What should have been a day of happiness turned into a day of sorrow. The pack members pitied me, but no one was in more pain than Paul's parents, Janet and Fred. He was their only son, and suddenly he was gone.

Paul's death could never be explained. The pack doctor, Sally, ruled it as inconclusive. She attributed it to a stroke of bad luck. She tried to console me by saying that the moon goddess had called him home, but it didn't make anything feel better. Instead, it felt worse. Why would the moon goddess take such a good person when there were bad people who deserved to be called home? While we may not have been madly in love with each other, we cared for each other. I cared enough to accept his proposal when he asked me to become his chosen mate, and it has become one of my greatest regrets. I should not have accepted his proposal.

I remember the day he proposed. It was on my birthday, and he single-handedly planned the entire thing while ensuring everyone kept the secret with him. The proposal took place in the pack house. He had pulled me out from work that day, claiming that my sister, Talia, needed urgent help. I remember feeling panicked as we drove to the pack house, but he reassured me that everything would be fine once we arrived.

I recall storming into the pack house the moment his car came to a stop, shouting Talia's name at the top of my lungs. To my surprise, I was greeted with a big surprise from everyone, as they simultaneously wished me a happy birthday. I was overjoyed. Paul walked up to me, planted a kiss on my lips, and then got down on one knee, just like humans do, to propose. My family and the other pack members chanted for me to say yes, and with a big smile on my face, I did. I said yes.

Paul may have been a stroke of bad luck, but what about Tyler? I was certain that I loved Tyler. He was the complete opposite of Paul. He wasn't that tall, but he was very fit. He wasn't as funny, but he had a charming personality and always wore a gorgeous smile. It had been almost two years since Paul's demise, and I was starting to find happiness again. I was giving myself a chance for love and companionship. However, everything came crashing down once more when Tyler also passed away, just a week before the mating ceremony.

Tyler's death was even more tragic than Paul's. He had been dismembered in a werewolf night club. Some said he got into a fight and was kicked out of the club. That was the end of Tyler. His lifeless body was found in an alley near the night club. Tyler didn't have any family members. In fact, he was a new member of our pack. He had joined us six months after Paul's death, and we had become entangled. I never really wanted to get involved with another male shifter, but my mother insisted that I move on with my life, and eventually, I did.

When the news of Tyler's death reached me, I was devastated. I was the last person he had spoken to, and I discovered that he had already saved my name as "my mate" in his contacts. It was heartbreaking to learn that. It was even more heartbreaking when I had to identify his body, or rather, what was left of it, just to be sure. I held onto the hope that they had made a mistake, but when I arrived at the morgue and his scent, even mixed with blood, filled my nostrils, I knew it was him. Sally confirmed it after running a DNA test using a hair sample I had taken from his comb in his bathroom.

I remember spending days crying in Tyler's bedroom. It was meant to be our shared space. He had saved up to get a better place within the pack grounds, believing it wouldn't be appropriate for us to stay in the pack house as newlyweds. It was me who had to pack up his belongings and donate them to charity after accepting his death.

Paul's death was an accident, Tyler's was a coincidence, and the third time was supposed to be different, but it wasn't. Justin didn't make it to the mating ceremony either. He died on the very same day in his dressing room. This time, it was a gunshot wound with a bullet laced with wolfsbane. It was ruled as a suicide. Justin left a note, but I never got to read it. I couldn't bring myself to do it because deep down, I knew it wouldn't change anything. Justin wasn't coming back.

At this point, I realized something was terribly wrong. I felt cursed, and I knew I wasn't the only one who thought that way. The pack members who once looked at me with pity now gazed at me with eyes filled with disdain, fear, and guilt. They all silently agreed that I was cursed, although no one had spoken those words to my face.

Well, until...

I will never forget the look on Paul's mother, Janet's face when she marched over to my parents' house three days after Justin's death. Her eyes glimmered with hatred as she continuously accused me of killing her son. I stood there frozen, taking in all the insults. My mother tried to defend me, but it was futile. Their heated exchange attracted a crowd, and even if they didn't say anything, I knew they supported Janet. She continued her tirade until Justin's mother, Faith, finally voiced her support.

Even to this day, I have nightmares about that day.

It was hellish to stand there, unable to do anything. Not because I had a hand in their deaths, but I somehow felt guilty for their misfortune. I was willing to endure the insults if it would somehow make them feel better. Pathetic.

It took Alpha Eric, our pack Alpha, to diffuse the situation. He managed to calm both Janet and Faith and disperse the crowd that had gathered in front of my parents' house. My father, Sam, was just as helpless as my mother, although he was a renowned pack warrior and the third in command. It seemed like my situation had tarnished my parents' reputation and, unfortunately, our family's standing. Though, my sisters, Talia and Leah never complained, but I knew it weighed on their minds. I had possibly ruined their chances of finding mates.

Life in the Blue Moon pack was never the same again. I was pulled out of the educational center where I taught the pack children. They didn't want my bad luck to rub off on the kids. My friends were forced to stay away from me for similar reasons.

I was conned indoors, spending most of my time in my room. The only occasions I went out were to run errands or when my mother compelled me to visit various pack shamans in an attempt to understand why my fate had turned sour. Unsurprisingly, none of them had any answers.

Even running errands became difficult. I had become a pariah, and most people avoided selling anything to me. Those who did scrutinized me with suspicious eyes, as if I would cast a spell or something.

I don't blame them. People fear what they don't understand, and that's what I had become. Janet and Faith had managed to tarnish my name, and I had earned a nickname: the mate killer.

There were times when I wanted to scream, to let go, but I couldn't. It seemed like tears had forsaken my eyes. My body was still processing all that had happened, still grappling with how my life had crumbled into ruins over four years. It had become nothing more than a piece of trash.

Countless "what ifs" consumed my mind every day.

What if I hadn't accepted Paul's proposal?

What if I hadn't gotten involved with Tyler after Paul?

What if I hadn't gotten involved with Justin after Tyler?

What if I had chosen not to mate with anyone after Paul?

Yes, I would have still had a life, albeit a single one. But the pack wouldn't have treated me like a curse or a plague.

I could ask a million "what ifs," but it wouldn't change anything. It wouldn't fix my life or make the pack members see me as they used to. It wouldn't restore my job, alleviate my parents' worries, bring back normality to my family, or ease the dread my sisters felt about their own fate. It wouldn't lessen the pain that Janet, her family, Faith, and her family experienced. And above all, it wouldn't make me happy again.