

## Talia's Anger Part One

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I had to wait near my house for a while to calm myself down before I could think of going in. I knew I would look horrible in the state I was in, and I already felt horrible on the inside. It didn't help that I was also an ugly crier. I didn't think I would be able to face my family in this state. They had already been through a lot because of me, and I had no intention of causing more harm.

I don't know how many minutes had gone by, but when I felt a bit better, I nally walked into the house. My father was in the living room, uncomfortably lying on one of the couches, fast asleep with a beer bottle by his side. The TV was also turned on, and a soccer match was going on. I was quite surprised he was asleep in the rst place since my father had always been a huge football fan. I wanted to wake him up, but I didn't want him to notice that something was wrong with me. He had always been a good observer.

As I was about to make my way up the stairs, I heard my mother call my name from the kitchen. I froze immediately.

"Sahel, is that you? What took you so long? Did you run into some trouble?" she yelled from across the kitchen.

I was thankful that she didn't make any move to see me physically. I just needed to make it to my room, wash my face, and go to bed. Maybe cry some more before I go to bed, but I knew that no one would nd out.

"Yes, it's me, Mom! There were more customers at the store. Everything went ne," I lied effortlessly. She didn't need to know what had happened. It would devastate her. She already felt bad that she couldn't help me get my life back. How could I possibly tell her that I was banned from the last store that had been graciously accommodating me for months, and my former best friend talked to me after a year and somehow embarrassed me? I couldn't.

"Okay, that is good, honey," she yelled back.

"Yeah. Good night, Mom!"

"Good night, dear."

I nally made my way to my bedroom and plopped down on my bed. Tonight was unexpected, tragic but still unexpected. I never imagined Laura talking to me again. I heard on to hope after a month passed and we had not spoken, then two months, and by the third month, I had already given up. Laura was different now, happy. A part of me had wondered how we lived in the same pack, yet she managed to avoid me effortlessly and live her own life. While I had been barely existing, she had been living her best life.

I expected the mating ceremony. Surely, one day she was bound to get mated. But what I had not expected was Leila. Justin never told me he was involved with her, but Leila's claims pointed to the fact that they had been close and maybe romantically involved. If he liked her, why did he choose me? He could have gone for her and not killed himself. Leila surely had a distasteful character, but she was pretty, and a lot of people seemed to tolerate and like her, even Laura. They... they might have been good together.

I exhaled deeply.

I continued to stare at my ceiling, and I didn't realize the time until my eyes became heavy, and sleep enveloped me.

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Justin haunted my sleep in the form of nightmares. I kept seeing him at his desk in his bedroom, writing his suicide note and shooting himself repeatedly. I desperately tried to stop him, but I couldn't. I tried to wake up, but I couldn't. The cycle continued, and it felt like I was losing my mind. Eventually, my brain forced me awake, and I found myself drenched in sweat, gasping for air.

It felt so real—I could feel him, but he couldn't see or hear me. This was the rst time something like this had happened, and I knew it was triggered by the events of last night. I used to dream about Justin, Tyler, and Paul, but those dreams were usually peaceful, lled with memories of the moments we shared. I would wake up with tears in my eyes, missing them.

I got out of bed and peeled off the hoodie and sweatpants I had worn last night. It was around six in the morning, the break of dawn, and the sun had not yet risen. I made my way to the bathroom and washed my face, seeking some comfort, before taking off my bra and panties and stepping into the shower.

After showering and brushing my teeth, I threw on the rst pair of shorts and top I found in my wardrobe. I put my black, frizzy hair up in a high bun and headed to the kitchen. Since I couldn't go back to sleep, I might as well start breakfast.

I had nished preparing the eggs and toast when my youngest sister, Leah, entered the kitchen. She still seemed half-asleep.

"Hey Leah!" I greeted her with a simple smile.

"Hey Sahel, good morning," she replied, waving back before taking a seat on one of the kitchen stools.

I prepared a plate for her and handed it over. She mouthed a thank you. "How was your night?" I asked, curious.

She sighed heavily. "I had to work late on a school project. It wasn't easy at all. And things are already rough at school," she said, speaking the last sentence quietly. I froze.

"What do you mean school is rough?" I asked, my fear growing. Was Leah facing problems at school because of me?

"It's nothing, Sahel. I can handle it," she shrugged, munching on her fried eggs.

I narrowed my eyes. "Are people bothering you because of me?"

She didn't respond.

"Leah, please tell me," I pleaded.

She opened her mouth to speak but got cut off when we heard a loud slam of the front door. We immediately rushed to see what was happening.

Talia was pacing around the living room, fuming. She was still wearing the same clothes as yesterday when she stormed out of the house. Our parents had also come downstairs, awakened by the noise.

"Talia, hey! What's going on? Did you just come in? Did you sleep out last night?" I asked, questioning her.

Talia stopped and glared at me intensely. I had never seen her look at me like that before.

"Talia, honey, is everything alright?" our mother asked, concerned.

"How can everything be alright? Sahel has practically ruined all our lives!" she exclaimed in frustration.

"Talia!" our father warned.

"What is it, Dad? You all act like Sahel's curse hasn't affected us. It has and it still is!" Talia spoke out, and my mother gasped.

A single tear slipped from my eyes. I knew my situation was affecting them all, but hearing those words from Talia broke my heart. It was the bitter truth.

"I'm sorry," I choked on my tears.

She stared at me. "What are you really sorry for, Sahel? It would have been better if you hadn't killed those men who tried to mate with me. Then Haden wouldn't have broken up with me!"

"You and Haden broke up?" I muttered. Haden was Talia's boyfriend, and they had been together for three years. It had all ended because of me.

"Are you deaf, Sahel? He broke up with me. We were intimate all night, and then he decided to end things because he thinks I'll kill him, just like you killed those men!" she shouted, her voice piercing through the room.

My parents' eyes widened. I couldn't tell which part surprised them the most—the fact that Talia was sexually active, the offensive language she used, her blame on me, or the revelation that Talia and Haden were no longer in a relationship. I suspected it was all of the above.

"Your sister has nothing to do with those deaths. She's been unfairly accused," my father spoke up, regaining his composure.

"Really, Dad? Really? Whether she killed them with her own hands or not, she's somehow involved. Three men died, and they were all connected to her. She's the problem!" Talia ranted.

My mother was already in tears by this point.

"I'm so sorry, Talia. I can talk to Haden. We can try to x this mess," I pleaded, walking up to her. But she took a few steps back, creating distance between us.

"Stop saying that, Sahel. You can't x this unless you can bring those men back to life.

Maybe then Haden will take me back, or Leah will stop getting bullied at school just because she's your sister," she said.

My head snapped in Leah's direction. Her eyes twinkled with sadness. That's what Talia's statement meant—Leah was being bullied because of me, and I had no idea. She was suffering because of me.

"Leah, you're getting bullied? When did this start?" our dad asked, concern evident in his voice. Our mother was already hugging Leah by her side.

Talia glared at me one last time before making her way up the stairs, leaving the rest of us behind.

I felt suffocated. The room suddenly felt small, and I quickly rushed to my room, collapsing onto my bed as tears streamed down my face.