

Chapter Thirty-Eight: Echos Of The Past, Whispers Of The Future

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Phera POV:

I woke up to the shrill sound of my phone ringing on the nightstand next to the infirmary bed. My body ached as I reached for it, wincing at the residual pain from the wolfsbane-soaked dagger. The display read "Josh," and a complicated set of emotions unfurled within me.

"Hello?" I answered, my voice raspy from sleep and exhaustion.

"Phera, hey. I heard about the attack. Are you alright?"

It was Josh, my ex-boyfriend and a complex piece in the jigsaw of my life. He had his issues but had been my best friend before we crossed that line—a line we had both agreed to step back from. The concern in his voice was genuine, but something was off, a subtle change in his tone that I couldn't ignore.

"I've been better, Josh. How did you hear about the attack?"

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"Word travels fast, even between packs. Is it true? The wolfsbane?"

"Yes, it's true. My body is doing its best to heal. They say I should be back on my feet by tonight," I replied cautiously.

"That's good to hear. I was worried, Phera."

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"I appreciate the concern, really," I paused, letting the words hang in the air before I continued. "But you didn't just call to check on my health, did you?"

He hesitated, and the silence seemed to stretch between us like a taut string. Finally, he broke it.

"How are things with the triplets?"

The shift in his tone was more noticeable now, edged with something I couldn't quite put my finger on.

"What's it to you, Josh?"

"I'm your friend, aren't I? I have a right to be concerned."

"Friends don't pry, Josh. Friends trust."

"Fine, fine. But answer me this, are you happy with them?"

"Happy is a big word, but I'm getting there. We're taking baby steps. And before you ask, yes, I'm considering accepting the mate bond fully," I said, laying my cards on the table.

There was another long pause on the other end of the line.

"Well, as long as you're sure they're the ones who can give you the life you deserve."

"Why does it sound like you doubt that?" I pressed, growing increasingly irritated.

"I don't doubt it. I just want you to be cautious, that's all. I still care about you, Phera. Always will."

"And I appreciate that, Josh, I really do. But my relationship with Damon, Axel, and Zane is my business. We're figuring things out, in our own time, in our own way."

"Fair enough," he replied, but there was a heaviness to his words, a weighted silence that loomed over us.

"Is there anything else you wanted to talk about?" I asked, sensing that he was holding something back.

"No," he sighed, "just take care of yourself, Phera."

Despite the distance and time that had separated us and despite my newfound resolve with the triplets, talking to Josh had stirred old emotions and questions—questions that had no easy answers. But for now, I had more immediate matters to deal with.

As I lay back down, staring at the ceiling, I couldn't shake the feeling that both my past and future were colliding in ways I couldn't yet understand. And as comforting as it was to know people cared about me, I realized that ultimately, the decisions about my life and love rested squarely on my shoulders.

"Is there anything else you wanted to talk about?" I asked, sensing that he was holding something back.

For a moment, there was silence, making the atmosphere on the line thick with unsaid words. Then, Josh cleared his throat.

"Actually, yes," he finally spoke, the tone of his voice changing yet again, becoming softer, more tentative. "I was thinking of visiting, of coming to see you."

My heart skipped a beat.

"Visit? Why now?"

"Just to catch up, you know? It's been a while, Phera, and I've missed our friendship."

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"Is it just the friendship you've missed, Josh?" I couldn't keep the skepticism out of my voice.

"Isn't that allowed?" He replied, a trace of defensiveness creeping in.

"It is," I said cautiously, "but a visit would complicate things, Josh. Especially now, with everything going on—the attack, the triplets."

"Ah, yes, the triplets," he murmured, the words tinged with something unreadable. "How do they feel about me visiting?"

"They don't know, and I'm not sure how they would feel about it."

"So you're not going to tell them?"

"I didn't say that. If you visit, I'll tell them. Full transparency, remember?"

He chuckled, but it sounded hollow.

"I guess some things never change."

"And some things do," I countered. "We changed, Josh."

"Yeah," he sighed, the heaviness back in his voice. "We did."

"Does it bother you? Me being with them?"

"Should it?"

"That's not an answer."

"No, it doesn't... not in the way you think. I just don't want you hurt again."

"I appreciate that, but the only one who can make decisions for my wellbeing is me."

"And you're doing a bang-up job so far, aren't you?" The edge in his voice returned.

"Josh, don't."

"Fine. Look, if now's not a good time for a visit, I understand. Just promise me you'll take care, okay? That you won't run headlong into another dangerous situation."

"I can't promise that, you know how life is. But I can promise to be careful."

Another pause, shorter this time.

"Alright, Phera. Be careful, then."

"I will be. Take care, Josh."

Just as I was about to hit the 'end call' button, he added softly,

"I'll always care about you, you know. No matter what happens."

"Me too, Josh," I replied, my voice softening despite myself. "Me too."

Finally, I ended the call. The screen went dark, and I was left staring at my own reflection, wondering how a single conversation could make me question so many things I thought I had figured out.

Lying back down, I realized I was at the crossroads of my past and my future. It was disconcerting, the power those from our past have to unsettle our present. But as I lay there, I found some semblance of clarity. The triplets, my

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pack, my responsibilities—they were my present, perhaps my future. Josh was a part of my past, a chapter that had closed.

Or so I thought, until the door swung open. It was Nate, his face a mask of concern and urgency.

"We need to talk," he said, his eyes meeting mine. "We found something."

My heart sank, the weight of his words pulling me back to the harsh reality. For better or worse, it seemed like my past and future were still entangled, their threads weaving an intricate tapestry that I was yet to fully understand. And for the first time, I wondered if I ever would.

"Where are the triplets? And why do I sense so much anger from them?" I asked

Nate's eyes met mine, filled with a gravity that instantly told me this wasn't going to be easy listening.

"Phera, are you certain you want the detailed version? Because, trust me, it involves the kind of carnage that would make a seasoned warrior's stomach churn."

"Stop beating around the bush, Nate. Tell me where they are and what's happening," I insisted, my voice strained with urgency.

He sighed, as if coming to a difficult resolution.

"Fine. They're in the Council's chamber. You know as well as I do that it's only for the most grave and serious matters. They're meeting with the pack elders, hashing out details and debating security protocols."

I felt a chill crawl up my spine. The Council's chamber

was a place of last resort, where dire issues were sorted out—life-altering decisions made.

"Why would they leave me here to attend a Council meeting? What's so important?"

Nate seemed to hesitate, and then, as if ripping off a Band-Aid, he let it out.

"Phera, the attack was orchestrated with a very specific target in mind. And that target was you. They intended to either severely injure or kill you, to send the pack into a state of chaos."

The air in the room thickened, each word from Nate landing like a stone in my stomach.

"They were after me? Why would someone want to do that? Who would want to do that?"

"We're not certain yet," Nate admitted, his eyes darkening. "But this attack was calculated, down to the last detail. It was a deliberate effort to destabilize the pack from the inside. You have to understand, the moment you were injured, the pack's entire emotional state fluctuated. The bonds were stressed, and not just because of the triplets. You're crucial to the pack's unity, and our enemies know it."

"So, I was the pawn in this sadistic game," I muttered, my voice tinged with disbelief and burgeoning fear.

"Incorrect," Nate interjected sharply. "You're not a pawn; you're more like the queen on a chessboard, incredibly powerful and pivotal to winning the game. They tried to take you off the board, but they've only succeeded in uniting us in ways they never anticipated. If anything, they've unleashed a storm."

For a moment, I was at a loss for words, grappling with the heavy, uncomfortable truth of what he was saying. I was the target. My well-being affected not just my family and the triplets but the entire pack. The burden felt immense, almost too much to bear.

"And Phera," Nate's voice took on an even graver tone, breaking through my contemplative silence. "We found something at the site where the rogues attacked. A kind of... message."

"A message?" My curiosity piqued despite the dread swirling in my gut.

"It was encrypted, complex, but the part we could make out... It had instructions. Instructions that centered around incapacitating you."

As he spoke, he unfolded a piece of paper, heavily creased and marred with splotches of dirt and blood. My eyes scanned the visible words, and what little I could read tightened the knot of tension in my stomach into an agonizing cramp.

"Recognize this handwriting?" he asked.

"No I don't." I said

And before I could press him for more details, he left the room, leaving me mired in a sea of questions, suspicions, and most disturbingly, doubts.