

Alpha's Rejected 101

Chapter 101 - The Alpha's Rejected and Broken Mate

Clarissa POV

I came back down the hallway and stopped in my tracks, hearing the murmuring of voices. I don't know what made me do it, but I pressed myself against the hallway and eavesdropped unabashedly.

"Mother, father" I heard Darius say quietly "I went to go find Amber for another reason. One that I know is going to make you angry and annoyed with me." I put my hand to my mouth, knowing there was only one other reason that Darius would have gone searching for Amber and feeling sick to my stomach. Although I couldn't prove it, I suspected he had something to do with Sophie's death and I had tried hunting for clues to no avail.

"Well, why did you go then? I mean, what was so important that you had to go looking for that undesirable?" snarled Luna Marian as I flinched. She had never liked Amber and one of the reasons was because she was an undesirable, a shifter without a wolf.

"I went to go and find Amber because she's carrying my unborn child," Darius told them. An awkward silence filled the room. I struggled to breathe, wanting nothing more than to go inside the room and wring his neck for everything he was telling them.

"Unborn child" muttered Alpha John sounding quite displeased. "Since when has Amber been pregnant and why is this the first time we're hearing about this?"

I swallowed hard.

"She got pregnant before I married Sophie" Darius supplied slowly, as I gritted my teeth in dismay.

"Why was nothing said?" barked Alpha John, his voice loud enough to echo in the corridor "it would have changed what happened between the two of you."

I flinched. I knew instinctively what Darius was about to say and knew that I was about to be sold out. "Clarissa and Mathew told Amber not to say anything to me or you both. They wanted it kept a secret so that I would still marry Sophie" Darius explained tiredly.

Alpha John looked saddened as I glanced into the room, careful to avoid them seeing me. "It's because she was an undesirable, wasn't it? They wanted Amber gone and they knew we would want the child she was carrying."

Luna Marian's eyes were flashing now "as if I would have let you marry that slut" she hissed "Sophie was perfect for you, do you understand that? She would have made a perfect Luna in the future if she hadn't died."

"Amber would have been perfect, if you had just been willing to see her," Darius told his mother firmly, sitting upright and staring directly into her eyes which were flashing daggers at him.

"There is no way I would have let you marry an undesirable" Luna Marian said heatedly.

I sighed. The irony was that Amber was no longer considered an undesirable, not since she had gotten a rare and unique wolf. Not that Luna Marian knew that. I'd been careful to keep that a secret and I was glad I had.

"She has her wolf now mother," Darius said quietly.

Luna Marian looked stricken. I silently groaned. Now the cat was out of the bag.

"She does" she stammered "but how is that possible?"

Darius shrugged. "I don't know but she does. Besides, I thought you would care that she's having your grandchild" he pointed out, watching his mother's lips flatten as she glanced over at her husband.

"I think that we might be needing to get our lawyers involved," Luna Marian said with a large exhale and grimace "that is if you want custody of the baby, Darius? I'm assuming you do because I want that grandchild to be in our lives and I want her away from Amber."

So Luna Marian wanted to put her hands on the grandchild that my daughter was carrying but wanted nothing to do with Amber whatsoever. Why was I not surprised? My hands clenched into fists. My daughter was worth ten of Darius, I wanted to scream, and so was Sophie, while your son is nothing but a murderer!

"Mother, I plan on marrying Amber," Darius said quietly but with determination, his tone of voice brooking no arguments "you took her away from me once, but I don't intend for you to do that again."

"Marry her," his mother said incredulously. "You cannot be serious Darius!" she stormed.

Alpha John looked thoughtful. "It would be far easier to have Darius marry her if she's willing that is than to have a long drawn-out legal battle over custody," he said wisely.

Over my dead body, I thought to myself. It would be a cold day in hell before I let Darius lay a finger on Amber.

Luna Marian glowered at him. "I would rather the legal battle," she said sharply "we have the best lawyers. No one would be able to win against us. Not unless she was hooking up with the werewolf king or something and we both know" she laughed "that that would never happen."

"I want to marry Amber" Darius cut in.

"Don't forget Darius" she said, glancing nervously towards the doorway as I ducked behind the door again, "that you have just lost a wife and child. You're meant to be in mourning, not thinking about marriage to the sister of the wife you have lost!"

"Screw being in mourning" he hissed "Amber should have been mine in the first place. You should never have interfered in my relationship with her and I won't allow you to do it again."

"I'll contact the lawyers just in case," Luna Marian said quietly, "in case your plan doesn't exactly come to fruition."

His father nodded "do that but just in preparation. I believe in giving Darius a chance to persuade Amber to marry him. It is what would be best for the child."

My heart was thumping wildly in my chest by now and I couldn't stand to be there a minute longer. I scrambled, rushing down the hallway and turning left, hoping desperately they hadn't seen me. I had overheard everything and I snuck out the front entrance. With luck, Luna Marian and Alpha John would forget all about my presence as they started to implement their horrid plan to get their hands on my grandchild. Yes mine, because I was determined to warn Amber about what they wanted with her. The question was, where was she? There was only one way for me to find out.

I got in the car and started the engine, careful to drive out slowly, and headed towards the main road. I knew where Rowan's pack was, of course, having already spent some time there and the patrol recognized me immediately. Laurence, the sweetheart, was there and he mind-linked Rowan, recognizing I was there due to an emergency.

"Go straight to the pack house Clarissa, he's in the study waiting for you."

"Thank you Laurence" I breathed, feeling my heart rate return to normal. I wasn't afraid of the monstrous Alpha, not like others seemed to be. The man I had met, was a gentleman, with honor, and I knew that he would treat me well, provided I wasn't there to provoke or anger him in any way shape, or form.

I parked the car and practically ran to the study, startling poor Rowan who leaped up from his seat. "Clarissa" he exclaimed, eyeing me warily "what's going on? Why are you here?" he asked worriedly "is it about Amber?"

I sighed and he motioned for me to sit. I sat politely, crossing my ankles and regarding him silently for a moment. He looked a bit of a mess, his mouth flat in annoyance or anger, his hair disheveled, and stubble growing on his chin. I knew he was searching for Stacey, who had been the prisoner, I suspected, having heard the rumors she had spelled him and caused him to lose the ability to want Amber. She had messed with the mate bond in layman's terms and Rowan had not been pleased.

"Rowan, where is Amber?" I asked him softly.

He stiffened and regarded me a little hopelessly "I've told you before Clarissa, that I don't know. When she rejected me she went deep into the forest and ran away from my trackers, thanks to her wolf. She was faster than my patrol was that night."

I exhaled and sat back in the chair. "I need to find her Rowan," I told him urgently "it's imperative that I find her."

He frowned at me. "I understand you want to find your daughter" he commented but I shook my head and interrupted him.

"It's not just that" I protested "yes I want to find Amber but only because I'm afraid for her."

Rowan stilled. "You're afraid for her," he said a little stunned, leaning forward, his eyes searching mine "why? Clarissa what has happened? Is she in danger?" he said in a rush.

I had him, I thought triumphantly. He still gave a damn about Amber, even if he tried not to show it. "I think Darius killed Sophie," I told him.

He gave a shocked gasp. "Sophie's dead?" he asked and I nodded.

"She was poisoned," I told him heavily "by a woman that we suspect might have been Stacey. According to the omega that was knocked unconscious, a woman with long raven black hair and dark eyes did it. It was someone she wasn't familiar with and happened around the time the prisoner was released from your dungeon."

"I knew it" muttered Rowan "I knew that little bastard Darius had let her out. But why kill Sophie?" he asked me.

I glanced at him and then stared down at the floor. "Because he's still in love with Amber," I said miserably "I just overheard them Rowan and he wants to marry her."

He scoffed at me. "As if Amber would marry someone like him," he said with a chuckle "she's not in love with him."

I glowered at him. "But he is in love with her and she's carrying his child. He wants his child Rowan and so does his parents. They just lost a grandchild, Sophie was pregnant and now they're looking to replace it with Amber's."

Rowan gripped the edges of the desk, his fingernails digging into it "do you think he might try to force her to marry him?" he said with gritted teeth.

I nodded adamantly. "Darius isn't used to not getting what he wanted. When he married Sophie he pretended to be the loving caring husband and he had all of us fooled, Sophie too. It's not taken long for him to go back to his old ways. I know he had something to do with her death, I just can't prove it. I would hate to think how far he might go if she refuses to marry him. He might even go so far as to harm the unborn child if she tells him no."

Rowan looked disgusted. "Only a coward would do something like that. I should have killed him while I had the chance" he growled.

I was a little sorry he hadn't killed Darius as well, to be honest. The little bastard had more than deserved it, but it hadn't surprised me that Rowan had chosen to show mercy. He was too nice to kill someone in cold blood, even if they did deserve to meet their maker.

"We need to find her Rowan" I reiterated "you owe her that much considering what you did to her. I know you were under a spell, but you treated her poorly" I said, slamming my hands on the desk and towering over him as I stood up. He blanched from the accusatory look in my eyes.

"Alright," he growled finally, Laurence coming into the room. "Laurence you're in charge until we get back."

Laurence looked nonchalant and I had the feeling he'd been listening in on the whole conversation.

"Where are we going?" I asked him suspiciously.

Rowan gave a grin. "to hunt down your daughter. Even if we have to go pack by pack until we find her. I know of an excellent vampire tracker if we get stuck, who will be more than happy to assist me, for the right price of course."

"Oh yeah?" I said cautiously, moving to the doorway, to stand in front of the man "and where might said vampire tracker be located?"

Rowan winked at me, gently pushing me to the side and starting down the hallway. "The Vampire King's Castle of course" he called over his shoulder "now are you coming with me or not?"

Chapter 102 - The Alpha's Rejected and Broken Mate

Amber POV

I put the dangly earrings into my ears and then smiled at my reflection with satisfaction in my eyes. I looked perfect, clad in a little black dress and matching heels, the slight swollen bump of my belly hidden beneath the dress. I wore a simple pearl necklace, courtesy of Stefan, and a matching bracelet. We weren't doing anything special, just having dinner together in the kitchen, but I wanted to dress up for his sake and show him how much I was looking forward to this.

"You look gorgeous Amber," said his voice as I turned around and looked at him.

He looked just as gorgeous in a black tuxedo, his tie undone, and his hair slightly disheveled. I licked my lips and almost purred at how stunning he looked. Lilac was practically prancing around in my head and drooling at the sight of our mate.

"I could say the same about you" I answered lightly, stepping closer to him and smiling widely.

His hand shot out and gripped me around the waist, pulling me closer to him, his dark eyes twinkling with good humor. He bent his head down and then claimed my lips with his, his hand possessively holding me in place. He was rough, possessive, almost primal in the way he took me and I eagerly gave back as good as I got, loving the taste of his lips and the feel of them on mine. I moaned into his mouth and he groaned, before reluctantly stopping and pressing his forehead to mine.

"Damn, any more and I'm going to end up ravishing you" he murmured in my ear.

I shivered in response. We hadn't quite made it that far in our relationship yet, but every time he touched me, I fought the urge to jump him. He wasn't the only one who wanted to ravish the other.

"Sorry" I breathed, not apologetic in the slightest.

He just chuckled in response and then glanced down at his watch. "Are you ready?" he asked, "the girls in the kitchen have prepared quite a feast" he added.

My stomach growled in response, making both of us laugh. I took hold of his hand and let him gently tug me toward the stairs. We walked down silently, walking into the kitchen where the table had been set up with fancy dinnerware and china.

"You didn't have to go to so much trouble" I exclaimed, marveling at the flowers that had been placed in the Centre of the table.

Stefan shrugged in response. "You're worth the trouble," he said, pulling out a seat and pushing me in.

He joined me but to my shock, and utter disgust, as he sat down, Elaine took it upon herself to enter the kitchen and sit down opposite us. I glowered at her. Could she not see that Stefan and I were trying to have a romantic dinner?

"Stefan" she greeted him with a wide smile. She was dressed to kill in a bright red dress and matching heels, her makeup heavily applied. She'd gone all out and I felt drab in comparison, even though I knew I looked good. What on earth was she doing here? I glanced at Stefan to see that he too, looked displeased.

"In case you haven't noticed," Stefan said tightly "we're having a romantic dinner. Do you mind?" he hissed.

She looked at the table with a raised eyebrow. "But I thought we were having dinner together? After all, it's not like you've made dear Amber your queen yet" she taunted "and the council still wants you to marry me" she said with a shrug.

"I've made my position on that perfectly clear," Stefan said drily "and the council don't make the decisions, I do."

Elaine continued to sit there, grabbing a bread roll and beginning to rip it to shreds. "Surely you don't mind if I join you? I could get to know more about Amber" she said teasingly.

The nerve of this girl! I opened my mouth to give her a blast of my mind, but Stefan grabbed hold of my hand and squeezed it, halting me in my tracks.

"She's a guest of the castle and I can't be rude. Not to mention her father is Elder Mathias" he muttered in a low voice so that only I could hear him.

Great, so I couldn't even give the girl what for, I thought sourly, so much for a dinner between just the two of us. Elaine seemed determined to ruin our romantic interlude.

"By all means join us," said Stefan quietly, shooting me an apologetic look.

I sighed. This better be a damn good dinner, because I needed something to look forward to. I heard the scurry of servant girls coming to the dining table. Teresa was one of them and she gave me a friendly wink. She also rolled her eyes in Elaine's direction and gave a huff, sharing in my displeasure.

I hid a smile and merely shrugged at her. There wasn't much I could do without rocking the boat so to speak.

I saw Elaine give Stefan a low seductive smile, leaning over and caressing his hand as he flinched. "Do you remember the time we spent all weekend locked up inside that cabin?" she asked him with a knowing smile.

He flushed and glanced at me uncertainly. The first dish was served and Elaine reluctantly let go of Stefan's hand.

"That was" coughed Stefan apologetically "a long time ago Elaine. In the past."

She pouted at him. "But it shows just how much chemistry we have together, doesn't it? I mean, we didn't step foot outside for hours on end, we were so busy" she said with a sly little glance at me "and occupied."

Oh, I bet they were busy and occupied. My mouth was opening and closing, my anger rising to the surface. I saw Teresa lean over to pour my drink and stumble. Wine sloshed all over me. I gave a small squeal and Teresa began to apologize profusely.

"I'm so so sorry" she babbled, wiping at my dress as I sat there stunned "something made me a trip," she said.

"Oh please, you were just clumsy" snarled Elaine gesturing towards me "Amber you should really, go and clean up" she purred, her eyes twinkling. I would lay bets that what Teresa stumbled or tripped on, had something to do with Elaine, not that I could prove it. Poor Teresa was blushing bright red now and looking completely miserable.

"I'll just be a minute" I told Stefan sourly, getting up from the table and heading towards the nearest bathroom, a red-faced Teresa right behind me.

"Amber I swear, she tripped me" she began and I held up a hand to halt her in her tracks.

"It's okay Teresa" I sighed "it wouldn't surprise me. I just needed a minute away from her before I lost my temper."

Teresa looked relieved. "Well at least wipe your dress down" she suggested wryly "before the wine stains it completely."

I began to wipe the dress down, and Teresa disappeared into the kitchen to get some seltzer to dab on it. What should have only taken a few minutes began to take a lot longer and I wondered what Stefan was up to in my absence.

"That's as good as it's going to get" I finally said, looking at my reflection. Part of me wanted to facepalm myself in the face. Why didn't I just go and change? It would have been far quicker I thought to myself with a grimace. Instead, I'd left Stefan to Elaine's mercy out there.

"Thanks, Teresa," I said as she winked and ducked back out the door, still needing to perform her duties. She and I would talk later, no doubt gossiping about this afternoon and everything that happened.

I opened the door slowly and walked out, heading towards the dining room when I stopped in my tracks. Elaine was now almost sitting on a very uncomfortable-looking Stefan's lap, winding her arms around his neck, her hair billowing out behind her, her dark eyes serious looking.

"Stefan" she was saying, murmuring it in his ear, "you don't really want that slut Amber for your mate, do you? I mean she's pregnant for heaven's sake with someone else's child. Do you really want to raise a child that's not yours?"

I felt sick. This was one of my biggest fears when it came to Stefan. I knew how unfair it was for him to claim someone else's child as their own but he had never made me feel like it was an issue. Part of me feared that he was just saying what I wanted to hear and I stood in the doorway, watching silently, keeping myself out of sight as I unashamedly eavesdropped. Stefan unwound her arms from his neck and stood up, looking down at a repentant-looking Elaine.

"Listen up, because I'm only going to say this once," he said to her with a hiss "I don't care that Amber is pregnant. She is my mate and I adore her. Her child will be the future heir and I have no compunctions about helping to raise a child that I already think of as mine."

"You can't be serious" protested Elaine.

"I am deadly serious" thundered Stefan "so stop these little games of yours Elaine, I've already marked Amber and claimed her as mine."

Elaine went deadly pale. "You have" she whispered "are you insane? The council will be furious with you" she added quietly, wringing her hands together.

"The council can shove it," Stefan said rather rudely "it was my decision to make. You were never going to be queen Elaine, it's time you understood that."

"What will you do if she rejects you, Stefan? You seem to be pretty confident that she won't" Elaine spat out.

I had heard enough and went striding through the doorway, standing next to Stefan and glowering down at Elaine who was still seated in front of us both. "I have no intentions of rejecting Stefan! Nor does he have any plans to reject me. You might not believe it Elaine, but I adore Stefan. He's shown me nothing but kindness and been nothing but sweet since I've come to this castle. The only one who seems to think we're going to break up is you and this council of yours. Well, guess what" I said with a sneer "I'm not going anywhere."

She seemed flabbergasted, her mouth opening and closing like a fish. An awkward silence filled the room and finally, with a huff she stood up and faced us both.

"You'll be sorry you didn't break up" she hissed "The council will never agree to Amber being queen. She is not suitable for the position."

"Then I'll abdicate the throne," said Stefan and my mouth fell open. Surely he wasn't serious? But judging by the way his eyes were piercing Elaine's he was deadly serious. I couldn't let him do that for me.

"Stefan," I said sharply "I would never let you."

He shrugged nonchalantly "I don't remember asking for your permission. But it won't come down to that, will it Elaine?"

She said nothing, her face as pale as a sheet. "You would abdicate the throne for her" she whispered, in a shaking voice, a hand to her mouth and tears forming in the corners of her eyes.

"I would," Stefan said without hesitation.

"But if it were me, you wouldn't" she continued, tears trailing down her cheeks. She looked stricken. I felt a pang of sympathy for her. Stefan looked immobile.

"No," he said finally "no I wouldn't for you."

Even I blanched at that. She flinched as though she had been physically struck and then sobbing, turned, and ran, her footsteps clacking loudly on the stone-hard castle floor. We watched her go.

"Stefan," I said, turning to him and grabbing hold of his hand. "Are you serious, would you really do that?"

"Yes," he whispered, touching a loose stray of hair and tucking it behind my ear. "Because I have to be honest with you Amber. I'm in love with you."

I'm in love with you. The words repeated themselves over and over in my mind. I couldn't believe my ears. My heart began to thud wildly in my chest and my hands felt clammy and shook as I continued to hold his hand. My body began to tremble. Was what I feeling the same thing? I thought about life and what it would be like without him and the one word came to my mind, unbidden. Empty. My life would be empty without him in it. Stefan was my everything, my whole world. He made me feel things that no one else had. Not even Darius had made me this happy. As for Rowan well, he'd had his chance. I couldn't help it. I took a deep breath and then muttered the words in a low voice, that had him whooping for joy. "I love you too."

Chapter 103 - The Alpha's Rejected and Broken Mate

Stacey POV

Its head was lowered and it was munching on the grass quite happily, apparently unaware that it was being watched. Its antlers stood out in stark contrast to the blueness of the sky, and his hooves thudded loudly on the grass. The young buck was oblivious to his surroundings and I waited for the perfect moment, pouncing when he least expected it, my jaws clamping around its neck and biting down until it

severed its spinal cord and broke its neck. I sniffed in appreciation, smelling the metallic scent of blood in the air, blood coming from my prey.

I was hungry, ravenous. I lowered my head down and began to gingerly taste the buck, taking small tentative bites and then larger ones, ripping off large chunks of meat to down. My claws would shred the smaller bits off the bones and I ate, until my stomach was full to bursting, before I saw fit to stop and finish. I sat on my haunches and looked around, seeing nothing but trees and more trees going on for miles. I was tired of traveling, tired of avoiding shifter packs as I stayed on the run. I needed to find somewhere I could find employment and soon. My stomach was swollen with my pregnancy, and the bump was no longer small but plainly obvious.

There was but one place that I could think of where I might be safe. One place where Alpha Rowan wouldn't look for me. But it was a risk. There was no telling how they might take me, a shifter, searching for sanctuary in their territory. But I couldn't continue to live in my shifter form, going from place to place, having to hunt my food down. The baby needed proper nutrients and more food than even I could provide.

I began to trot towards the southeast, knowing where I was and how close to the territory it was. I ran for miles, my paws thudding loudly on the forest ground, my nose in the air sniffing for telltale signs of rogues, which I had managed to avoid thus far. I was careful not to expend too much energy, knowing I needed to keep some in reserve, should I need to defend myself in a fight. I spent the night in my wolf form, looking up at the moon, and the stars twinkling overhead. It was a beautiful night and I managed to stay warm with my fur protecting me from the elements. When I woke up the next morning, it was several hours before I reached my destination, a backpack in my jaws.

It was huge, massive. The castle was bigger than the biggest pack house I had ever seen. It was gloomy looking as well, but there were tons of vampires milling about, just going about their business. Before I stepped foot on their territory, I shifted back to my human form and hastily dressed in my nicest dress and basic tennis shoes. My clothes were getting tighter, I noticed with a frown, bringing my backpack to my chest and stepping foot inside the boundary line.

Instantly, I was surrounded by vampires. They hissed at me, their eyes glowing a bright red. I cringed but stayed where I was, not daring to shift into my wolf form. I was here for a reason, I reminded myself, my mouth dry in fear. The one in front of me, with glowing red eyes, dark shaggy blonde hair, and a tall slender frame was the first to speak.

"State your business you mangy mutt" he boomed.

I took offense to the mangy mutt comment, after all, I was a beautiful wolf and an even prettier woman, baby bump or no baby bump. I put a protective hand on my stomach and met his eyes head-on.

"I'm here to find work," I said weakly and watched all of them look at each other surprised. I guess not many shifters come to the vampires looking for employment I thought drily.

"You want to work for us?" asked the shaggy blonde vampire, sounding a bit uncertain now.

I wanted to roll my eyes, instead, I adopted a calm and pleasant tone of voice "I want to find employment and was hoping to find it at the castle" I said evenly.

They continued to look at each other, at a complete loss.

"I think mind-linking Melissa might be the best way to go" offered one of the other vampires.

"What about the king? Shouldn't he know?"

"Does she look like a threat to you? She's clearly pregnant and she's obviously been traveling for some time" added another.

"Maybe we should put her in the dungeon?"

"I'm not putting a pregnant woman in the dungeon. Even if she is a shifter."

"Then mind-link Melissa and see if she's got work for this poor girl. Do you honestly think she's come to harm any of us? She can barely stand for Christ's sake."

I was swaying back and forth on my feet. One of the vampires rushed to steady me, lending me his support to keep me upright. "When's the last time you ate?" he asked in concern.

"Yesterday" I answered, "before that, I think it was almost a week."

I really did not enjoy hunting and eating animals, especially raw.

"Geez" whistled the vampire "that's a long time between meals. Don't you shifters need to eat more because of your high metabolisms?"

He wasn't wrong. Shifters did have abnormally high metabolisms and therefore ate lots of meals during the day. I wondered where he had gotten the information from. Maybe his mate was a shifter? I had heard of rare cases of that happening.

"Get her to the kitchen," the shaggy blonde vampire said heatedly "Melissa will meet her in there."

The vampire holding me, began to lightly drag me towards the castle. I let him lead me inside and down several long winding corridors until we came to the huge kitchen and dining room. He sat me down at the table and rushed off, coming back with a huge plate of roast beef and roast vegetables. My stomach growled in response. I was famished. I began to dig in eagerly as he sat down on the chair and watched me with a raised eyebrow.

He was quite handsome, I noted, flushing slightly. He had a face that looked similar to what I imagine a roman god would look like, with a long nose and dark black hair and eyes. He was staring at me with fascination in his eyes and something else, something I couldn't quite put my finger on. Maybe he was amused by my situation or intrigued by shifters? Who knew?

"You can leave now" a voice cut in and I glanced at the doorway to see the rather large woman standing there and leaning against it, her arms folded across her rather large and generous bosom. She wore a maid's uniform which consisted of a black dress, a white apron, and white stockings. She had large spectacles and dark brown, disheveled hair and looked to be in her mid-forties or so. I thought all vampires were meant to be stunning creatures but this woman didn't appear to be a full vampire, but maybe a half one at best. She had to be Melissa, I thought to myself.

The vampire man left without a backward glance and I found myself glancing toward the woman uncertainly.

She surprised me by giving me a large welcoming smile. "My name's Melissa" she barked out "what's yours?"

I stopped eating for a moment. "Stacey" I admitted shyly. I didn't want to lie to her and make up a name, that might come back to bite me in the ass later and would prove they couldn't trust me.

"Well Stacey," she said with a bit of a harrumph "I hear you are looking for work. Am I right?"

I gave her a shy nod and she glanced down at my stomach, which was protruding from my dress. "How far along are you?"

"Twenty-five weeks" I answered, "give or take." I wasn't a hundred percent sure, but I was relatively positive that was the case.

"Hmm," she murmured, coming over and sitting down beside me. She looked lost in thought. "I think that I'll get you to stay in the kitchen and help prepare the dishes. I don't want you doing any heavy lifting and housekeeping will be too much for you I imagine as it's quite taxing."

I looked up at her hopefully, excitement shining in my eyes "you'll hire me then? To work here in the castle?"

She nodded but looked at me grimly "but you're on probation. Which means that until I say otherwise, you behave perfectly and do everything that you are asked."

I was more than happy about that.

"You are also not to approach the king, or his mate" she continued and my interest peaked. I knew a little about the so-called vampire king Stefan but I had heard nothing about him having a mate.

"Who is his mate?" I asked eagerly and she frowned at me. I hung my head and began to continue eating.

"Her name is Amber and you are not to approach her either" she admonished.

My heart began to thud. Amber. The name couldn't be a coincidence, now could it? But what would she be doing in the vampire's castle? There was no way she was mates with a vampire. But the name Amber was quite unusual. I coughed and began to gesture toward the woman when we heard a small commotion.

"He told her he loved her," said a maid's voice as she walked past with a friend "it was so romantic too" she gushed.

"I heard her say it back," her friend told her, in a hushed whisper that nonetheless filled the room "and you should have seen the look on his face."

"Back to work" barked Melissa and there was a mad scramble as the small group of servants went back to their posts.

I finished the plate of food and sat back feeling completely satiated. There was enough food on that plate to feed at least three people. Melissa gave a dry chuckle as she saw the empty plate. "Remember that you're eating for two now," she said with a shake of her head. She stood up and helped me to stand. "Let's show you to your room," she said quietly "you'll be in the servant's wing of course, and most likely be bunking with someone."

I walked behind her, taking in the opulence of the castle and the elegance of it all. There were fancy paintings everywhere and little decorative statues. I was careful not to bump them, as we continued down a long corridor, Melissa stopping at a room on the right. She opened the door and gestured for me to walk inside.

There were two beds in the room. They weren't threadbare but were plain, with basic mattresses and sheets. Two dressers sat in one corner of the room and there were also two armchairs and two bookcases, filled with books. I eyed them with curiosity. I couldn't remember the last time I had read a book, let alone had the time to do so. "The King believes in giving his servants two days off a week," said Melissa helpfully "and each room is supplied with books for you to read at your own leisure. The king loves to read," she said with a sigh.

Another door in the room and I opened it cautiously, to see a very basic and small bathroom, consisting of a toilet, sink, and shower. "For you to refresh yourself in," she said calmly.

I glanced at her and saw her give me a wide smile. I yawned and tried to hide it but nothing got past this woman. "Get some rest," she said quietly "and I'll bring you a maid's uniform tomorrow morning so you can start."

She vanished quickly and I was about to close the door when I saw someone with red hair, someone that looked very familiar. I was right, I marveled to myself. She was here. Now the question was, I thought to myself, climbing into bed and piling the covers over me, was how I could use her presence to my advantage. I had a few ideas in my mind and I drifted off to sleep that night, with a wicked grin on my face. I was going to have fun while I was here, I just knew it.

Chapter 104 - The Alpha's Rejected and Broken Mate

Amber POV

I couldn't shake the feeling that somebody was watching me. It was the most curious feeling and I found myself peering over my shoulder constantly. When I told Stefan about it, he offered me my own personal guard, which I declined, of course. I put it down to nerves and pregnancy hormones. I couldn't believe I was having a little boy. I knew it was silly, but I was already trying to think of a name for the baby.

"How about Gunther" teased Teresa as I threw a pillow at her and she dodged quickly to the side.

I shuddered at the thought of any child being given such a hideous name.

"I don't think so, what about Hunter?" I asked thoughtfully, "I really like that name?"

"Ah," said Teresa, "I love it, but what about Stefan? Is he going to get a say in the child's name?"

"Of course," I said lightly, "it's going to be his child as well, it's only right that he gets to help name him."

We sat down on the bed and I sighed. I missed Stefan. He was at a council meeting, no doubt arguing on my behalf about being queen again. I had offered to join him but he told me and I quote "I don't want you getting stressed out because of the baby."

As if women didn't get stressed while they were pregnant. Geez. He was barking up the wrong tree if he thought pregnancy was all calm and relaxing when it was anything but.

A large woman appeared in the doorway, leaning against it with a friendly smile on her face.

"Melissa", I greeted her with a grin. She was the person in charge of housekeeping and kitchen duties and I realized with a bit of a sinking feeling that I had stolen Teresa away without asking again.

"Your highness," she said, and I shook my head adamantly, feeling like a fraud. I wasn't queen yet and who knew what could happen in the meantime?

"Please," I protested, "just call me Amber."

She sighed. But, acceded to my wishes, "Amber," she said very civilly, "we're a little short-staffed in the kitchen and I was wondering if it was possible to steal Teresa back?"

I felt instantly guilty as Teresa hopped up off the bed. "I'm so sorry Melissa, I didn't realize it" I began, but she held up a hand and halted me in my tracks.

"Nonsense," she said, "I know that you and Teresa are friends and I really don't mind you stealing her," she said, her eyes twinkling "I just happen to need her for a few minutes is all."

"Of course, Melissa," Teresa said hastily, giving me a wink as I fought the urge to laugh. "You could always come help," she said with a chortle.

Melissa gave a gasp of indignation "The King's mate in the kitchen? I don't believe my ears and it's most definitely not happening" she muttered, "the king would be most upset with me."

To be honest, I don't think Stefan would really care. He was the most laid-back and down-to-earth royal I had ever met. I could easily see him helping in the kitchen if needed, but Melissa seemed to be really upset at the idea of it.

"Thank you anyway," I told Teresa, who gave me a nod, "but I think I'll stay here and finish my book. Maybe go for a walk if you want to join me later?"

"The King will most likely want to spend time with you," Teresa said sweetly, "but I'll come to see you tomorrow."

They both vanished out the door, Melissa curtsying as though I was royalty and I rolled my eyes. She wasn't the only one to treat me as though I was already queen though. Omega's, or rather servants I suppose they were more likely to be called, were bowing to me left, right, and center these days.

I picked up the book in question and began to idly flip through it. It was *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, but after reading a few chapters, I gave up and put the book back down in frustration. I was finding it hard to get into, even though I knew it was a good book and it had been highly recommended by Teresa, who had adored it and lent it to me. I was going for a walk, I decided to myself and put my coat on. Perhaps Stefan was finished with his meeting and could join me? But when I went past the throne room, it was still firmly closed against visitors and the guards informed me, rather sadly, that the meeting was still continuing and the King remained occupied. It was no biggie, I thought to myself with a shrug, as I began to walk down the hallways, I could easily go for a walk myself, it was just that I was feeling rather lonely.

Oh well. I made my way outside and breathed in the fresh air. The sky was a beautiful light blue with white fluffy clouds lazing around and birds were chirping happily to each other from their nests and perches in the trees. The grass was soft and lush beneath my feet and the sun was warm, without burning me. It was the perfect day for a walk. I began to meander along the pathways, content to take my time, stopping every so often to smell the flowers and inhale their lovely scents. On occasion, I got goosebumps, as though someone was following me and I would stop and glance around with a frown, but every time I looked there was either no one there, or a vampire walking past and genuinely confused at my glance. It was irritating and I knew that I was making a big thing out of nothing, but it couldn't be helped. Perhaps I would have been less nervous if I had someone to walk with, I thought with a grimace.

I began to make my way to the forest and sighed. I wanted to go for a run more than anything. Lilac was sniffing the fresh air and getting excited and it broke my heart to tell her we still needed to keep a low profile. Especially since both of us wanted to shift and just race into the trees, run as though our lives

depended on it, and drink from the streams. I missed the wilderness, the part of me that needed to be let free instead of confined, as I felt like I was back at the castle. I needed to go wild.

That feeling again. I whipped my head around and, as usual, nothing was there. I began to feel my heart beating loudly in my chest and my hands began to get clammy from feeling nervous. I was certain that someone was following me. I just wasn't sure why. I raised my head and called out "Hello, anyone there?" and waited.

Nothing. Not even the merest whiff of someone's scent, but we were downwind, which could explain why we weren't smelling another vampire or shifter. I steadied myself and called out again. "I know you're out there, so stop hiding and just come out" I growled this time, letting my frustration show.

Silence. I was beginning to feel foolish now and turned back, readying myself to make it back to the grounds when suddenly I saw a flash of raven black hair. I squinted against the light and then suddenly there she was, standing right in front of me and looking nervous as all hell. As she should be. I had no frigging idea what she was doing here and right now all I felt was anger at seeing her there.

"What are you doing here?" I asked with a low growl.

Her dark brown eyes stared at me steadily "I um needed to find somewhere to take me in" she said, fidgeting with her hands.

I raised an eyebrow. I would have thought that Rowan would have taken her in, especially considering I had rejected him. Not to mention they were having a child together, so what had happened in my absence to cause her to go elsewhere and away from Rowan's pack? It didn't make sense/?

I noticed she was wearing a maid's uniform. Melissa must have hired her then, without knowing her connection to me.

"I don't get it, Stacey. Rowan made his choice and it was to be with you. What are you doing out here? In the vampire King's castle no less? Did you follow me here?"

She shook her head, her hair billowing in the wind, biting her lip. "I didn't even know that you were here until after Melissa hired me," she said quietly, "or I would have gone elsewhere."

It wasn't too late for her to disappear. I thought to myself a bit viciously, not liking the girl at all and extremely displeased to have her anywhere near me. She had made my life a living hell the entire time I'd been in Rowan's pack and I was still certain she was the one responsible for my ingesting poison and almost losing my unborn baby.

"Please don't make me leave" she burst out suddenly, going pale as a sheet "I don't have anywhere else to go."

She was heavily pregnant, I realized, seeing the swell of her stomach and grimacing. I couldn't make a pregnant woman leave, no matter how much I disliked her.

"Just stay away from me," I said with a shake of my head. "I don't trust you Stacey, not one bit. I don't know why you even bothered to show yourself around me. "

Her face fell and she looked at me nervously, her hand shooting out to grab hold of my arm when I went to leave.

"Wait" she hissed as I stopped and looked at her, raising an eyebrow "there's something I want to tell you."

I waited, Stacey, letting go of my arm as I folded both of them over my chest and narrowed my eyes. "Well, whatever it is, just spit it out already", I growled.

"It's about Darius," she said, and I stilled. Darius. I hadn't thought about him or Sophie since I'd come to the castle. I had resolved to contact them but then hadn't gone through with it. Still, how did Stacey know about Darius? He'd only ever come to Rowan's pack once when she was there.

"What about Darius?" I asked, my mouth dry. Had something happened to him?

She looked away and sighed. "Darius is still obsessed with you, Amber, and he's planning on coming for you. He wants custody of the baby so that he can have you."

I laughed. I couldn't help it, it sounded so ludicrous to me. After all, Darius was in love with Sophie now and had been for some time. I had initially told him that we would share custody of the child, but I was having second thoughts now.

"You're lying" I accused her, but part of me wondered. Her tone of voice had been sincere and genuine when she spoke to me.

"I'm not," she choked out, waving her arms around and looking a little distraught, "he wants you, Amber, believe me, don't believe me, that's up to you. I can't make you see the truth, all I can do is tell it," she said.

Why would Darius still be obsessed with me? Did he simply want control of the child? Or was he really after me and the unborn baby was his way of getting to me? I frowned and then glowered at Stacey.

"What do you gain from telling me all of this?" I spat out and she cringed, recoiling away from me, her eyes flashing with pain.

"Nothing," she said pitifully, "I just want somewhere safe to hide out and I'm hoping you'll keep my presence here a secret if anyone comes looking for me."

I didn't believe her. I knew there had to be something in it for her, but I couldn't work out what it was. All I knew was that she had given me something to think about and something to worry about. I knew I was going to have to make that phone call and talk to Sophie and Darius, but part of me was hesitant as I knew they would want to discuss custody arrangements and I wasn't ready for that.

"Leave," I told Stacey quietly, "and I'll keep you being here a secret, but I don't trust you" I warned her, "and if I find out you're causing mischief, then I won't hesitate to kill you."

She nodded looking relieved and made a mad dash out of the woods, without a backward glance as I followed more slowly, my mind awhirl with all sorts of thoughts, namely did I tell Stefan about the conversation in the woods or did I keep it secret in case

Stacey was lying to me?

Chapter 105 - The Alpha's Rejected and Broken Mate

Stefan POV

I was missing Amber terribly and getting sick of these so-called Council meetings with a bunch of interfering elders. Why could they not see the beauty in having a shifter for a mate? The doors it could open up for us? The relationships we might be able to forge with another species? Why was it considered so taboo to them? I didn't understand it at all. Just because my parents had been killed by shifters didn't mean we should hate them all and consider them to be the same. That was the very height of foolishness.

Elder Mathias spoke "we are concerned about you having a shifter for a mate, that is the truth. How can we know that we can trust her? What do you know about this woman other than that you are mates?"

I glowered at him. Out of all the elders who seemed to be against the union between Amber and me, elder Mathias was certainly the most vocal. Then again, he was also Elaine's father and was pushing her as the better candidate to be queen.

"I know that Amber would never harm a vampire, no matter what. That she's one of the nicest people you could hope to meet. She's kind, gentle, loving, a real asset to our people if you would just give her a chance."

Elder Thomas was the next to speak and seemed to be choosing his words carefully. "Our people require a ruler, King Stefan, one who will offer aid when we need it and who can prove to be a valuable asset. What do you think of Amber being the queen? Is she up for that position? Being a ruler can be quite stressful, as you well know, and the girl is heavily pregnant on top of that. Do you think she's up for the task?"

"Who cares if she's up for the task" snarled Elder Mathias "our people will never accept a queen that is a shifter. She could be a bloody unicorn and she still wouldn't be accepted."

"That's enough" snapped Alpha Gerald, looking quite annoyed "let him speak. You forget your place, Elder Mathias."

I rolled my eyes. Sometimes dealing with the elders was like dealing with petulant children who were squabbling amongst themselves.

"Well" prodded Elder Thomas "what do you think Stefan? Is she willing to marry you?"

I opened my mouth and then closed it. I couldn't say whether or not Amber was willing to be married to me. She hadn't indicated otherwise and both of us were still getting to know each other. I couldn't very well say she was and then find out she wasn't prepared to marry me at all. That would be embarrassing. Elder Mathias's eyes glinted as he saw me contemplate what to say.

"Amber is up to the task of being queen but as to the marriage situation, I can't quite comment on that yet. We are still in the early stages of our relationship" I argued, crossing my arms over my chest.

"Yet you have a candidate who is willing to marry you and whom you know very well. Why not marry her?" asked Elder Mathias, cutting in.

I gritted my teeth. "Because I don't love your daughter Elder Mathias and I never did. I won't look at anyone besides my mate for the role of queen, regardless of what anyone might think."

There was silence in the room. Thank heavens for that. I was fighting the urge to scream at them all. Instead, my hands clenched into fists and I began to pace slightly, back and forth, listening to the elders mutter amongst themselves and ignoring the urge to shout at them all. Dylan came sauntering into the throne room and I greeted him eagerly.

"How's it going?" he asked me drily, seeing the furious look on my face.

I huffed at him in response. "They're being stubborn jackasses as usual" I sneered "but what else is new?"

Dylan just shook his head. "You've been in here for hours man and poor Amber's been left alone. Thought you should know that she went for a walk in the forest all by her lonesome."

"She did what" I almost exploded. The room went still and then the elders looked at me with raised eyebrows and narrowed eyes at the disruption to their muttering.

"It's dangerous in the forest," I told Dylan anxiously "there are rogue shifters out there. Did you bring her back in?"

He shook his head. "I was going to but she came back on her own, she's back in her room safe and sound" he added with an exclamation, as the elders began to chat amongst themselves again.

I sighed. At least I knew she was safe but what could have possibly possessed her to go into the forest heavily pregnant like she was? I knew she was growing bored of being alone all the time, but I hadn't realized just how bored she might be. I began to feel guilty. Dylan grimaced. "I gotta go, just thought you should know," he said, glowering at the elders and then turning on his heel and walking away.

"Alright, enough already" I exploded on the council who went wide-eyed and silent "I refuse to continually bring this matter up to you. I am the king and if my word isn't good enough or you think that I can no longer do the job anymore, then by all means make me abdicate the throne."

"Now child, there's no need for something like that" began Elder Thomas, glancing at the others nervously.

"Precisely" Elder Gerald agreed.

I sighed in relief, but Elder Mathias looked seriously put out by his comrades as they rushed to support me. I gave him a scorching look and then turned around.

"Where are you going?" spluttered Elder Mathias as I glanced over my shoulder "the meeting isn't over yet?"

"I'm cutting this meeting short" I called back over my shoulder "you know cause I can, being the king and all."

I strode through the throne room doors and slowly made my way upstairs, seeing Amber lying on her bed with her nose buried in a book. I took a minute to study her, the way her red gorgeous hair gleamed beneath the lighting, the way her green eyes twinkled while she read, the relaxing way she was lying there, with a dress on that was crumpled up to her knees. She looked to be at peace, enjoying herself immensely and she looked beautiful. There was no other way to describe her. She was a virtual goddess, at least to me.

"Good book?" I commented, startling her.

She whipped her head around and then relaxed, giving me a small gentle smile. "It is," she said showing me the cover which was pride and prejudice. I shuddered. I had never liked Jane Austen's novels but it was a particular taste and not everyone did. I sat beside Amber on the bed and she rolled over and sat upright, placing the book away on the nightstand.

"I hear you went for a walk today?" I asked her quietly, trying not to convey my displeasure.

She gave a small nod. "Teresa was needed in the kitchen and it was such a beautiful day outside" she gushed "that I couldn't resist. I hope you don't mind" she added with a frown, looking a little nervously at me.

I sighed. Then reached over and took her hand. "I'm not upset just a little worried. It's not safe in the forest, there are rogues out there, and not just the shifter kind. Some of my kind don't take well to shifters and the last thing I need is you hurt."

"I wasn't hurt and Lilac would have informed me if there were shifters or rogues," Amber said hotly "and I can't just sit around and wait for you all the time."

Her voice was pained and it brought a pang of sympathy to my heart. She was lonely, and I hadn't realized it until now. Some mate I was. I had an idea though, one that would hopefully bring us closer in the relationship.

"I don't expect you to wait around for me all the time," I told her gently, squeezing her hand "and I know that it must be tedious that I'm gone all the time."

"It can get rather boring" she admitted, "and I miss you when you're not with me."

I was touched. There were tears in the corner of her eyes. "I miss you too whenever you aren't around. I'm sorry Amber I should have been a bit more in tune with what you want and need."

She shook her head. "I don't need anything, just you," she said as she leaned into me and I wrapped my arms around her shoulders. I inhaled her intoxicating scent. God, she smelt divine. My mouth watered and before I knew it, she had turned her head and pressed her lips gently against mine.

Her lips were soft and gentle as they kissed me and I kissed back, harder, deeper, demanding access to her mouth which she willingly gave. I caressed her tongue, feeling my heart beat fast in my chest. She slowly fell back against the bed and I followed her down, on top of her, my hands grabbing both sides of her face as I continued to kiss her. Sparks flew between us and she moaned into my mouth. Her hair was soft and silky, cascading over the pillows. My hand crept towards her breast and I gently massaged it as she began to pant loudly and writhe slightly on the bed. I smiled to myself. She definitely enjoyed being touched, I noted, and then I began to skim her breast with my hand.

"Oh god," she panted "Stefan."

My hand crept towards the hem of her dress and disappeared underneath it, my fingers lightly trailing up her leg as she wriggled, still continuing to kiss her. She was so smooth, her skin so creamy as I felt her, my hand going beneath her bra and then I cupped her breast fully in one hand.

"Stefan" she moaned and I reveled in her saying my name. It sent a shock to my soul every time she uttered my name.

I gave her breast a gentle squeeze, feeling myself becoming highly aroused. My cock was slowly becoming rock hard, and I wriggled experimentally against her, making her cry out, careful to avoid squishing her stomach.

Then we both felt it and I stopped, halted in my tracks by something wondrous. Amber put a hand against her stomach and looked at me wide-eyed, grabbing hold of my hand and pushing it against her stomach. A kick, and then another one, each more powerful than the last. We could see the baby's foot and we were stunned. "My god" I murmured, "how beautiful."

Amber was sobbing as she held her stomach. She had felt kicks before but never had she been able to share the experience with me until now. Neither of us could speak for a minute, we were that emotional. I couldn't believe this little boy, would be born soon and I would be holding him in my arms, with Amber beside me. I could picture it in my mind and it brought tears to my eyes that I hastily blinked away.

I was missing out on so much I realized and I aimed to rectify that slightly. Ever since she had come to the castle with me, Amber had been situated in her own room. But my arms longed to hold her at night, to feel her body next to mine. I just wanted to be with her at night and not necessarily for sex. I took a deep breath. "Amber?" I asked "would you be willing to sleep in the same room as me? Not for sex" I added hastily as her eyes grew wide "but so I can hold you and feel you next to me."

I waited on tenterhooks for her answer and could have jumped for joy when she finally spoke, her voice barely above a hushed whisper "Yes."

Chapter 106 - The Alpha's Rejected and Broken Mate

Darius POV

She strode in, her hair billowing behind her, her footsteps loud on the floor, a determined expression on her face. I cringed, knowing that she probably wanted to talk about something important, her eyes red and puffy. Ever since Sophie's death my mother has been inconsolable, made worse by the fact that Clarissa had disappeared from the pack and her miserable of an excuse of a husband, or rather ex husband, was still an alcoholic who was continuing to drink and not phased by his daughter's death at all. I was of course, relieved to discover my mother didn't believe I had anything to do with Sophie's death or I would no doubt, be locked away in the dungeon by now.

Oh I knew Clarissa had been suspicious, always poking her nose into my business and asking pointed questions about the lack of security on that day and the so-called prisoner from Rowan's pack that had managed to escape. She had been putting two and two together, I was certain of it, and her disappearance caused me some anxiety. Had she perhaps, gone to Rowan with her concerns? Or had she merely left, unable to bear being in the same pack as the one her daughter had died in? I didn't know, but I was determined to discover where she went.

My mother shut the door to the study and quietly looked over at me with those puffy red eyes of hers. I gave her a shaky smile and she drooped right in front of me. "Darius," she said quietly "how are you holding up?"

I pretended to be blinking back tears. "It's difficult mother, but soon I imagine I might hear back about Amber and her child. That's keeping me going, being able to find my child. I know it's what Sophie would have wanted" I added laying it on thick.

My mother gave a firm nod. "She would want you to be happy" she agreed "but son, don't you think you should still be in mourning? I don't want you to burn yourself out or make yourself miserable."

I shook my head. "I'm not burning myself out and while I miss Sophie" I lied between gritted teeth "I imagine holding my baby in my arms will give me some comfort."

My mother's eyes twinkled. She looked a little happier and a bit more excited at the prospect of having her grandchild in her arms. She had mourned the loss of Sophie and I's baby and now she was beginning to accept the prospect of Amber and I's child instead. She wasn't replacing one with the other, she had assured me, but rather saw it as performing a duty as a grandparent, one she was determined to make my father perform as well.

"I have to say when you told me about Amber I was well and truly shocked" she agreed with me "but now I'm getting used to the idea. I have contacted our lawyers as well son" she paused and cocked her head, listening to footsteps getting nearer and then there was a large and loud knock on the study door.

"Probably your father" she muttered before yelling out in an imperious voice "come in."

My father's bulky frame filled the doorway as he opened the door and came crashing in. "Evening," he said quietly "I was wondering where you two had gotten to."

I indicated the large pile of paperwork I was currently trying to get through. Since Sophie's death, I had been keeping myself busy, pretending to be the grieving husband who needed a distraction. I was also trying to prove to my parents that I was Alpha material.

"I've been busy with pack business," I said to father calmly and he nodded, looking impressed despite himself.

I wondered about my father sometimes. He was quiet, gentle and even mannered compared to my mother. I knew they weren't fated mates but had been boyfriend and girlfriend in their college years, choosing to mate with each other and mark one another instead. It was a conundrum to me how two people, with such different personalities, managed to find each other, let alone love each other enough to get married.

"You are doing an excellent job," my father told me, looking pleased. "I'm proud of you for that son."

I basked in his approval. It wasn't often my father praised me for anything, let alone told me I had done a worthy job. My mother looked just as pleased as I was by the comment.

My father sat down in the armchair, looking awkward as he squeezed his giant frame into the small chair, and leaned forward, his eyes focused on mine, a deadly serious look on his face.

"Your mother and I have been talking" he began as I cocked my head and listened intently, wondering what they had been discussing together "and you've shown us just how mature you can be in regards to running the pack. Even with Sophie's death" here he paused and looked away, his jaw clenching tightly together and his eyes turning black for a moment "you've shown great fortitude in continuing to run the pack and complete the paperwork necessary to keep it going. I have no qualms about you becoming Alpha of the pack and the job is yours if you want it."

I couldn't believe my ears. Were they deceiving me? Or had my father just offered me the position of Alpha for the pack? My mother was nodding in the background, a wide smile on her face.

"We feel it's time," she said slowly "and when Amber comes back, I'll teach her how to be Luna" she offered "that is if she's willing to marry you. Otherwise, I'll continue in my Luna duties until such time as someone else can take over" she suggested. I knew that meant she wanted me to find another mate if Amber refused me.

"Mother, you said you contacted our lawyers" I prodded, remembering her mentioning it before father appeared "what did they have to say?"

She took a deep breath, my father's eyes focussing on her as he leaned forward, interested in what she was about to say as well "They said that you would be entitled to 50% custody as the rightful father of the child. But" she said a bit grimly and a little shocked "you need to prove your the father with a

paternity test and the only way you would get full custody of the child would be if you could prove that Amber was an unfit mother."

I raised an eyebrow at that. Interesting. I had options here, but the first step was to find out where Amber was. "How exactly would I prove she's an unfit mother" I argued, "when she's still pregnant."

My father looked pained. "She's not son, that's the point. You're going to have to persuade her to marry you or you are going to have to be happy with half custody."

"Or," my mother said slyly "we could be witnesses and claim that she's been doing things harmful to the baby."

I considered that and then shook my head. "No, let's just see what she says when I track her down and tell her I want custody. She might be willing to marry me to avoid a huge legal battle."

"You would hope so," my mother said drily "but Amber's not the type to back away from a fight remember? As much as I dislike her, I have to admire her tenacity and stubbornness. She also has one hell of a temper when she's provoked and won't hesitate to fight back if she believes she's defending her unborn pup."

I knew that too. Part of me knew there was a high possibility that she wouldn't just agree to come back to the pack with me. But there were other ways of persuading her. Like money for example or if that didn't work blackmail. I just needed to find the right means to persuade her that marrying me would be in her best interest.

"Anyway," my mother said casually, looking over at my father and how late the evening had gotten "I believe we'll make our way to bed unless there is anything else you need?"

I shook my head.

My father stood up and offered me his hand, shaking it and looking me deep in my eyes "Congratulations on becoming Alpha Son" he said a bit mistily "you've more than earned it."

They both made their way to the doorway and glanced back over their shoulders one last time, my mother's face being with pride at me, my father smiling widely before they held each other's hands and made their way out, shutting the door with a decisive click behind them.

I plonked myself back in the chair and stared at the door, unable to believe the turn of events. In one night I had become the Alpha of my own pack and my father had retired from the title. It wasn't something I had been betting on and now I had to admit just how exciting it all was. I was humming lightly under my breath when the telephone rang.

Ring Ring

Ring Ring

Ring Ring

I looked at the phone puzzled. Only Alpha's had the direct telephone number to the study and a few, well-chosen acquaintances. Wondering if it was something important, I picked up the telephone and held it to my ear, it feeling heavy as I was used to cell phones.

"Is this Darius?" asked a gruff voice. It didn't sound familiar.

"That's me," I said uncertainly "and who am I speaking to?"

"You hired me to find out the location of a certain Amber Henderson," the voice said sounding a little annoyed. Like I should know who they are just from their voice alone. I rolled my eyes at their arrogance but held my tongue in cheek.

"Are you telling me that you know where she might be?"

"I do, but I want another million dollars to divulge her location. Trust me, you won't find her otherwise" he added as I glared down at the receiver. Everyone wanted money for nothing these days I thought a little sourly, this man was certainly no different and I was not happy about being blackmailed for more money.

"If I refuse to pay you?" I asked

"Then good luck finding her," the voice said snidely "and I have some information that you might find interesting in regards to her wolf and her abilities. I not only found her but there's someone else looking for her as well. A rogue Alpha who's none too pleased with her at the moment."

A rogue Alpha. That sounded intriguing, I wondered why he was searching for Amber and realized that it must have something to do with her abilities, which meant her wolf had to be pretty special.

"How do you know about the rogue?"

There was silence for a moment "let's just say there's an interesting story to go with that, but this rogue alpha is not playing around. He's part vampire and strong as all hell. I doubt you could beat him in battle, but maybe you could team up with him? Do each other a favor per se" suggested the voice.

I fidgeted with my hands but the story was so intriguing and I could see the potential in getting a rogue alpha to help me get my hands on Amber. It would definitely be something worth exploring.

"How do I know you aren't lying?"

"You're just going to have to trust me," the voice said impatiently.

"Then start with where she is, and then move on to the Alpha Rogue and why he wants her."

"Fine" snarled the voice, the man's breathing heavy on the other line. "Your Amber Henderson is located at the Vampire King's Castle. She's been there for a few weeks now, so I'm under the assumption she's not leaving anytime soon. There are rumors going around that she's the Vampire King's Mate."

I swore silently to myself. If that was the case then my chances of persuading Amber to marry me had just gone down the drain. I frowned and then remembered the Alpha Rogue who wanted her as well. I leaned back in the chair and glanced out at the darkening sky, the full moon appearing in front of my eyes.

"Tell me about this Alpha Rogue" I demanded "and don't you dare leave anything important out. Do you understand me?"

Chapter 107 - The Alpha's Rejected and Broken Mate

Amber POV

I was nervous. After Stefan had asked about us sharing a room I had agreed but now that it was nighttime and I was standing in his bedroom, all I could feel was anxiety. His room was elegant with green drapes and a matching bedspread on the bed, a large four-poster bed that looked like it could easily fit more than two people in it comfortably. His bedroom was homely, with different shades of green and a painting of the forest on its walls, which was gorgeous as I examined it closely, finding all sorts of small creatures contained within it.

I was alone for now. But I knew Stefan would be up soon and so I took a shower, spending the time washing my hair which was slightly knotted from being tied up in a ponytail all day. The water was soothing, and I relaxed, letting the water cascade down all over my body the temperature warm and inviting. I reluctantly stopped the water and climbed out of the shower, wrapping a towel around myself and looking at my reflection in the mirror. I barely recognized myself. My red hair stood out beneath the lighting and my green eyes were sparkling with happiness. My skin was a golden honey tan color from being outdoors a lot of the time and my body, once slender and slim from training, had filled out some, my stomach containing a little baby bump that I rested a protective hand on. The girl in the mirror looked so happy and I had to admit, that I was in love with Stefan, adored him, and hated to be away from him. This was what I had once imagined it would be like when I found my mate and I thanked my lucky stars every day that I had found my second chance mate in Stefan.

I brushed my teeth and then dried my hair, before wrapping it in a turban and heading out the door, stopping in my tracks as Stefan turned around from where he was standing in the bedroom. I blushed and almost squealed, frantically making sure the towel was wrapped securely so that it wouldn't fall. Stefan appeared to be in a trance, his eyes glowing red as he stared at me, my body trembling in what could only be described as anticipation, and my heart thundering wildly in my chest.

"I um" he stammered "came up to check that you were alright and to ask if you needed anything?" he said, trying hard not to look directly at me.

I shook my head, feeling shy, even as my mouth went dry staring at him. He wore skin-tight jeans that showed off his long muscular legs and a white tank top that showed off his arms and taut abdomen. I licked my lips feeling myself becoming aroused and wondered if he could sense it, as his nostrils flared and his eyes went an even darker red. If he could, he was doing a damn good job of maintaining his self-control.

"That's good," he said sounding strangled "then I'll just turn my back while you get dressed."

He hastily turned and I felt a bit deflated. Did I want him to make a move, I wondered to myself as I began to rifle through the dresser. I dropped the towel and heard a choking sound behind me coming from Stefan. I whirled around to find he was staring straight at me and I blushed profusely, my body stuck to the floor, frozen, the towel laying there completely forgotten about at my feet.

"You, it's just that" Stefan stammered, moving forward and moving a stray curl behind my ear "look so stunning that I simply can't look away" he growled.

His face was inches from mine and I held my breath, watching as he bent his head almost as though in slow motion, kissing my lips possessively as I felt his hands grip my shoulders and hold me still. He tasted sweet, like honey, but his lips were anything but gentle, instead, they were rough, and demanding, forcing my mouth to open and give him access which I did so willingly. His tongue caressed my own as I moaned into his mouth, feeling like I was in a haze of some kind, unable to get enough of him or the way he was touching me.

"Stefan" I gasped, as his hands lightly stroked my shoulders "Oh god" I panted into his mouth, feeling tingles running down my spine and sparks flying between us. I could feel my juices beginning to flow and my arousal become even stronger. He senses it too, his eyes darkening further as he scooped me up in his arms as though I weighed nothing, placing me gently on the bed, and breaking off the kiss to my disappointment.

"Tell me no" he demanded "because I don't think I can stop once I've started Amber, you're too damn gorgeous and I want you so damn much it hurts" he growls.

I couldn't tell him no. Not when I was aching with need between my legs. I wanted him just as badly, desperate to feel him inside of me and craving to be touched.

"I want you," I told him honestly and watched him struggle within himself before he stood back up and slowly began to remove his tank top, showing me his chest as I shuddered.

He began to undo the zip of his jeans and then slowly, torturously, he dropped them down to his ankles and kicked them off. He wore no underwear and I sucked in a breath as I took in the size of him. He was huge, not to mention the width of it and I trembled, wondering if it was going to fit inside of me.

He came back to my side, noting where my eyes had darted to. "Relax" he soothed me, his hands beginning to feel along my body "I don't have plans to do that just yet" he hissed before he began to kiss the nape of my neck, making me arch my back in pleasure. He was gentle, and thorough, and began to trail his kisses down over my breasts, taking a nipple into his mouth and sucking lightly as I cried out. His other hand massaged my other breast and I felt like a jolt of electricity was running through me. "So damn soft" he murmured to me, before his mouth began to trail lower, down my navel and stomach, and down my thighs as I quivered in anticipation, my hands scrabbling at the bedsheets as the pleasure began to rise.

He stopped and gently breathed on my mound as I shook, and then, his eyes looking up at me once more, he stopped and lightly licked the walls of my vagina as I let out a cry. "You taste sweet" he groaned, and then lightly began to circle my clit with his tongue, his hands forcing my legs apart and holding them in place, so that I could do nothing but lie there and endure what he was doing to me. He lapped at my juices as I panted and writhed, mewling as he licked my clit, gently at first and then gradually applying more pressure, the pleasure building in me so intense that I thought I might explode. My body began to stiffen and I sensed an orgasm coming, causing Stefan to continue, his tongue diving inside of me again as I screamed out his name and came, hard, against his tongue. He gave a purr of satisfaction as he licked his lips and came up onto the bed again.

"You taste like sweet nectar" he growled and I felt himself about to position himself at my entrance and then hesitate.

"What's wrong," I asked anxiously and he gave me a reassuring smile.

"I just want you to be comfortable and I'm worried that this position won't be with the bump" he admitted wryly.

I remembered what the doctors had advised. "Sideways will be more comfortable," I told him eagerly, wanting him deep inside of me. Stefan gently helped me to shift onto my side and then positioned

himself behind me. I closed my eyes, waiting, and inch, by torturous inch, he pushed inside me, letting me feel all of him until finally, he was all the way inside me.

"Are you okay" he panted.

I was better than okay. I could already feel my hips rocking back and forth, trying to take him further in and feeling every inch of him against my walls. "God" I choked out "please move" I begged as he let out a low chuckle.

"Your wish is my command" he murmured in my ear.

Slowly he pulled out and then pushed his way back in. All the way back out and all the way back in. He was gentle and caring and his hands stayed on my sides, careful to avoid squishing my bump.

It was heaven or hell depending on how you looked at it. He was taking his sweet time, never letting up and my whole body was quivering. I was a mess, mewling, calling out his name, and literally shaking as he took me.

"Please Stefan" I begged unashamedly, barely recognizing my voice "please, for the love of god>"

"Tell me what you want" he growled, "tell me how you like it."

"Harder" I screamed, "faster."

He increased the intensity of his thrusts, pounding inside of me as I rocked my hips back and forth in time to his thrusts.

"God, you're tight" he muttered, our bodies slick with sweat now, smacking together in harmony, "so fucking tight" he moaned.

I gave a hiss as he began to pound even harder inside of me, my juices flowing freely now. His cock felt so damn good inside of me and even though I felt stuffed, it wasn't painful, just pure, unadulterated pleasure. He reached around and I felt his hand between my legs, gently fingering my clit.

"Stefan" I cried out and he didn't let up, his hand gently circling and rubbing my clit as I stiffened, the pleasure building to a crescendo. I couldn't last much longer. Not when it felt this good. I felt my body stiffening and my toes curling, my back arching and then I gave a loud scream, calling out his name, as I came once more "STEFAN."

He continued to finger me, continuing the orgasm, thrusting and pounding away inside of me, as I shook and quivered, tears coming to my eyes as the pleasure was so intense. I'd never felt this way before. This was nothing like what I had experienced with Darius when I gave him my virginity. Stefan was incredible and insatiable. I felt the waves of my orgasm wash over me as he finally stopped the fingering, his hands gripping my waist tightly as he began to frantically thrust away, his breathing heavy, his own body beginning to tense. I felt him curse as he came, spilling his seed inside of me and then collapsing on the bed next to me, his breathing hard and labored. Both of us were silent for a moment, lost in our thoughts. I was trying not to cry from the experience, not because I was sad but because I had experienced so much pleasure during the act. Stefan had been the perfect gentleman, making me cum before and during the act, something I guess I hadn't really expected but should have known better. He wasn't the type to be a selfish lover.

"That was amazing," Stefan said finally, turning his head to look at me, his hair all tousled and disheveled "did I hurt you?" he asked in concern.

I shook my head. He hadn't hurt me at all and while there was a slight stinging pain from between my legs, it wasn't intolerable, merely an indication of how long it had been since I'd initially had sex.

"I'm just a little sore," I said shyly and he leaped up and kissed me on the mouth.

"I'll run you a bath" he suggested and raced into the bathroom before I could utter a word, still completely naked and not phased in the slightest. I sat up and was about to get up when he came back and scooped me into his arms, carrying me cradled to his chest, my arms over his neck, holding me tightly as though he never wanted to let me go.

"Stefan put me down" I cried out with laughter in my voice, but he shook his head adamantly.

"No can do," he said calmly and then bent down and kissed me lovingly on the mouth "I love you," he told me softly as I melted from his words.

"I love you too" I whispered, knowing I would remember this moment and this experience forever and ever. Then, before I could change my mind, I leant over and sank my teeth into him, licking the wound clean and claiming him as mine forever.

Chapter 108 - The Alpha's Rejected and Broken Mate

Rowan POV

Last night I felt the most excruciating pains in my lower abdomen and stomach, cramping pains that couldn't be explained. I had howled, to Clarissa's astonishment, forced to pull the car over, when we were so close to our destination. I couldn't explain what was going on but Clarissa had looked at me, almost with knowing eyes, as though she knew exactly what was wrong but wasn't going to tell me.

We had finally tracked Amber down to her location, having heard of a beautiful red-haired girl who was the Vampire King's guest. I'm not going to lie, I was nervous being in vampire territory, even though I had heard only good things about their king, not all vampires felt hospitable towards shifters and vice versa. It was mutual dislike our races had towards each other, but I had heard this infamous King Stefan wanted to change that. I wished him luck. My people were highly suspicious of vampires and believed them to be blood thirsty creatures with a penchant for violence. I would hate to know what they thought about shifters.

"We're almost there," I told Clarissa who was nervously drumming her fingers on the dashboard, her long blonde hair covering part of her face. She was white as a sheet and nervous, but whether it had to do with where we were or just the anticipation of seeing Amber, I didn't know.

"Do you think she's being treated alright?" she asked me nervously, biting her fingernail.

I gave her a wry glance. "If she's being mistreated I'm sure we would have heard about it. Besides, we've been told she's a guest of the vampire King himself, so I guarantee she's being treated well."

Clarissa was almost bouncing in her chair she was that excited to see her baby girl. After hearing about Sophie's death and the suspicious circumstances surrounding it, I couldn't blame her for being worried about Amber. I on the other hand didn't know how I felt. There was a yearning inside of me to see her again, to touch her one more time. I remembered the way she used to smile, on the odd occasion in my pack, and the way her green eyes sparkled. I remembered the sparks that flew between us and the tingles that would run down my spine. Stacey had ruined everything with that blasted spell of hers and now I wondered if the mate bond was still present between us. I hadn't accepted her rejection so who knew? I would feel it on my side, but would she feel it on hers at all? Even just a little?

I stopped the car, the castle just a small distance away, several vampires coming out of the woodwork. Clarissa let out a gasp, but I had been expecting this. They weren't just going to let complete strangers into the castle after all. A tall man, heavily built, with a beard and dark eyes, wrenched the car door open and bent down to peer at us. Clarissa flinched, the man glancing at her with curiosity in his eyes but no malice in his gaze.

"State your business" he thundered and I sighed, glancing around at the crowd of interested vampires.

"We're here to see a friend of ours. A Miss Amber Henderson" I told them formally "she's my friend and this woman's daughter" I announced gesturing towards a silent and shaking Clarissa who had gone even paler.

The vampires began to mutter amongst themselves, but none disputed the fact that Amber was there, which was fascinating. My ears strained to hear what they were saying to each other.

"Have to inform the King"

"Better tell them, Ted"

"Hurry up, I don't want to be out here all day"

"Get their names first, idiot."

"Our names are Alpha Rowan and Clarissa Henderson" I yelled out and the vampires shot me a scorching glance, for having the nerve to eavesdrop in on their conversation.

"Just remain where you are," the tall vampire said, coming back and folding his arms across his chest, regarding us steadily "while we inform the King of your presence. You are a shifter yes?" he asked with a crinkle of his nose.

Could he smell my scent?

"Yes," I answered a bit tetchily it must be said. But damn it, Shifters were magnificent creatures and this vampire was looking at us both as if we were nothing but mangy mutts.

"Same as that girl then" he murmured to himself with a shrug.

I frowned. I guessed that he was referring to Amber but I couldn't say for sure.

A vampire came to the crowd and began to whisper urgently as the man left our side to go and speak to him. It seemed like it was a lifetime later, even though it was maybe five minutes at the most before they began to wave us through. I breathed a sigh of relief. I hadn't been looking forward to the prospect of having to fight my way through to get to Amber, I would have been beaten easily by this amount of vampires, but it wouldn't have stopped me from trying.

We drove, Clarissa gazing out the windows nervously, her eyebrows shooting up as we reached the castle and parked on the grounds. Outside there were numerous vampires, both men, women, and even children, walking around and we received quite a few interested and puzzled looks from the members. I got out of the car, but Clarissa needed to be persuaded, she was that nervous.

"I'm sure that Amber is waiting for us," I told Clarissa in an attempt to cajole her out.

She gave a huff at that and then slowly, gingerly, climbed out of the car and gently shut the door, gazing around her with nervous energy and a stricken look on her face.

"What if they attack us" she stammered.

I tried not to roll my eyes. "They aren't going to attack us. They would have done it already if that was their plan. Let's get going" I told her.

I took hold of her hand and gave it a reassuring squeeze. She had been an alright companion on our search for her daughter, complacent and compliant to any directions I had given her. She had even directed me to a few packs where we had finally been given the piece of the puzzle we'd needed to find Amber. I wondered how she was going to react to the news that Sophie was dead. I dreaded her mother having to give her the sad news.

The castle was magnificent to behold, a dark grey stone that stood out in stark contrast to the clear blue sky. The grounds were full of flowerbeds and flowers, roses galore, and an assortment of shrubbery and trees. The forest was nearby and I pondered for a moment, wondering how they managed to keep the castle a secret from humans. They must use a spell of some description, I thought to myself with a frown, for the castle was easily seen in the distance.

The doors were open and we wandered in, taking in the opulent surroundings and the expensive artwork and decorative statues everywhere. Clarissa's mouth was agape. The castle was easily three to four times the size of the biggest pack house we'd seen. Guards were everywhere and we hesitated, wondering where to go next. We needn't have worried though because the next thing we knew Amber was flinging herself into Clarissa's arms.

"Mother" she shrieked, brimming over with happiness, her red hair billowing behind her as she darted forward "how I've missed you" she exclaimed as Clarissa promptly burst into tears, holding her daughter tightly to her.

I stood back and observed, feeling like I was being watched by someone. My eyes lifted to see a man coming down the stairs, with shaggy dark hair and stubble on his chin, well built and tall, maybe slightly taller than myself, with an imperious and cold look in his eyes as he glared down at me. I wondered what I had done to displease him so much, or maybe it was the fact that I was a shifter. He looked to be of royal status though and I wondered if this was the infamous King Stefan.

"Mother," Amber said, sniffing into her mother's shoulders "what are you doing here?" She cast a look over her shoulder at me, a bewildered look on her face "and what is Alpha Rowan doing with you?" she asked with curiosity but no venom in her voice. I sighed with relief. She wasn't angry to see me here then, merely confused. The man continued down the stairs and stopped at the foot of it, the guards all bowing in respect. Automatically I bowed my head but refused to bow down all the way, commanding my own level of respect.

"Amber," he said softly as Amber turned to look at him, her eyes brimming with tears "perhaps this should be discussed in private" he suggested.

She immediately nodded, letting go of Clarissa and taking hold of the man's hand. I sucked in a breath at the sight, not realizing how painful it would be to see her touch another man, let alone a vampire male.

"Of course," Amber said respectfully, smiling at the man "mother this is King Stefan, King Stefan this is my mother," she said gesturing to Clarissa who immediately curtsied and smiled at the man. Amber pointed to me and hesitated slightly "this is Alpha Rowan" she stammered and I inclined my head to King Stefan who frowned at me.

"I think the throne room is empty," said King Stefan, tugging lightly on Amber's hand as my wolf let out a low growl inside my head, "if you would all be so kind as to follow me."

We followed him upstairs, King Stefan not letting go of Amber's hand and the rest of us going single file, me behind Clarissa who gazed around the castle with wonder and awe in her eyes. We wandered through several corridors before coming to the room, King Stefan ushering us all inside and informing the guards that no one else was to be allowed in, except for his friend Dylan if he came by. I wondered who Dylan was and then sighed. No doubt I would meet him if Amber permitted me to stay for a few days.

"Sorry about that, but privacy is a difficult thing to come by," said King Stefan, motioning for us all to sit at the table nearby. Amber sat beside him, making me stiffen, while Clarissa sat on one side of her and I was forced, rather grudgingly, to sit on King Stefan's other side, feeling extremely awkward and uncomfortable.

This was going to be hell, I thought miserably, wanting to do nothing more than reach out and touch Amber. She was so close to me, and yet seemed so far away as well. Was she even aware of my existence, or the yearning I was feeling? If she was, she was doing a damn good job of ignoring it.

"Mother, I am so happy to see you. I know I haven't kept in touch but I was planning to" babbled Amber "it's just things happened so quickly and then. . ." she trailed off apologetically.

Clarissa gave her daughter a warm smile. "It's alright darling, I understand," she said quietly wringing her hands together. She was contemplating what to say next, I could tell but it was her story to tell, and not mine. I waited impatiently for her to continue speaking.

"So how did you find me?" asked Amber leaning forward and gazing at me, a shy smile on her face "and you were so kind to accompany my mother here so she wouldn't be alone," she said, each word like a dagger in my heart. Did she honestly believe that I had done this out of the goodness of my heart?

"We got lucky" I answered honestly "someone in another pack had heard rumors of a red-haired girl called Amber being the vampire King's guest and we automatically assumed it was you."

Clarissa was sobbing quietly now and Amber looked at her stricken. "Mother," she said puzzled, glancing at King Stefan who leaned forward to grasp her hand "what is going on? What's wrong?" she asked sweetly "this is a happy occasion, isn't it?"

Clarissa choked. She sobbed harder. "It's a happy occasion," she said finally, her eyes red and puffy, as she reached over and took Amber's hand "but there is something I need to tell you. It's about your sister Sophie."

Chapter 109 - The Alpha's Rejected and Broken Mate

Amber POV

"Your highness there are two strangers at the front of the castle, requesting an audience with Miss Amber Henderson," said a guard, knocking on the door and interrupting the two of us. We glanced toward the guard, Stefan with raised eyebrows, wondering who the visitors could possibly be. We had just been about to kiss and judging by the annoyed expression on Stefan's face, he was none too pleased with the interruption. I stifled a giggle and looked towards the guard with a questioning expression on my face.

"Do you happen to know their names?" I asked evenly.

The guard gave an imperceptible nod. "The visitors claim to be a Miss Clarissa Henderson and a man calling himself Alpha Rowan Craven."

I gave a gasp, feeling a swell of excitement in my breast. My mother was here! I had no idea what circumstances had brought her here but I would be glad for her company. As for Alpha Rowan? Well, my heart skipped a beat at hearing his name. I had thought I was over Alpha Rowan, but a small part of me was delighted to learn that he was here as well and I fought to maintain my composure in front of Stefan.

"Clarissa Henderson is my mother," I told Stefan quietly "and Alpha Rowan is. . ." I trailed off helplessly, but Stefan knew instinctively who the man was. But then again, he knew my story and who Alpha Rowan was to me.

"The bastard who couldn't make a decision" growled Stefan looking displeased as he instructed the guards to let the visitors through.

"If he had made a decision, then I wouldn't be right here with you" I pointed out meekly, making Stefan smile in spite of himself.

"I guess his loss was my gain then," he said lightly, but frowning as he touched the nape of my neck with his long fingernail, where there were not one but two tattoos present. His mark and Rowan's were still there. "I want to know why his mark won't disappear" he murmured "especially considering the bastard forcibly marked you" he added with a growl.

"Never mind that, let's go" I protested, heading out the doorway in a rush, a startled Stefan left to follow behind me in my wake. I literally jogged down the stairs and raced into my mother's arms as I saw her and Alpha Rowan standing in the doorway.

"Mother" I exclaimed loudly as she burst into tears, holding me tightly to her "how I've missed you."

I felt rather than saw, Stefan's presence on the stairs as he came wandering down.

"Mother," I said, sniffing as tears formed in my own eyes "what on earth are you doing here?"

I felt her tense and then realized that Stefan's commanding influence was there.

"Amber," he said quietly, coming to my side "perhaps this is a conversation best done in private" he suggested and I gave a small nod. He was right. This should be discussed in private, well away from any council members. Something in my gut was telling me that mother and Alpha Rowan were not just here for a social call.

Speaking of Rowan. My eyes darted toward him, taking in his breathtaking appearance. His hair was disheveled and his dark eyes were piercing as they met mine. For a moment it felt like we were the only two in the room and I sucked in a breath, unable to look away from his handsome face or stop myself from gazing at his body. I quickly forced myself to come crashing back down to earth and smiled at Stefan.

"Of course," I said slightly stammering "mother this is King Stefan, Stefan this is my mother" I paused and hesitated before gesturing towards Rowan "and this is Alpha Rowan" I finished grimly, watching as Rowan inclined his head respectfully towards Stefan.

"I think the throne room is empty," said King Stefan lightly "if you would all be so kind as to follow me."

He held my hand as we walked up the stairs together, my mother following in our wake while Rowan brought up the rear. We crossed several corridors before coming to the throne room, Stefan opened the doors and informed the guards that no one, besides his best friend Dylan, was allowed to enter. We certainly did not want council members interrupting our little meeting.

"Sorry about that, but privacy is a difficult thing to come by" apologized Stefan as he encouraged all of us to sit down together. Mother sat on one side of me, Stefan on the other. Rowan, looking extremely reluctant, took his place on the other side of Stefan and we all looked at each other. Finally, I spoke.

"Mother," I said with genuine curiosity and warmth in my voice "what on earth are you doing here and" I paused and looked towards Alpha Rowan "with Alpha Rowan?"

I added hastily, feeling myself babble "Mother, I am so happy to see you. I know I haven't kept in touch but I was planning to" "it's just things happened so quickly and then. . ." I trailed off apologetically.

My mother gave me a warm smile "it's alright darling I understand" she told me, wringing her hands together. She seemed nervous and I couldn't understand why. I leaned forward and glanced at Alpha Rowan.

"How did you find me?" I asked and then "and you were so kind as to accompany my mother here so she wouldn't be alone."

I knew that wasn't the whole story. There was no way that Rowan had done this simply out of the kindness of his heart. There had to be more to it than that. Especially with the way my mother was acting.

Stefan could sense it too, his hand giving mine a squeeze as Rowan answered my question.

"We got lucky," he said "someone in another pack had heard about a red-haired girl called Amber who was the vampire King's guest" he finished. I huffed. Damn, the rumors were really flying thick and fast if I was being mentioned by shifters in passing.

My mother began to sob, loudly and I glanced at her puzzled. They sounded more than just happy tears. "Mother?" I asked her anxiously "What's wrong? This is a happy occasion isn't it?"

Stefan grasped my hand and held onto it tightly, both of us sensing something was seriously wrong.

My mother sobbed harder: "It's a happy occasion" she choked out and then reached over and took my hand, Alpha Rowan looking grim now "but there is something I need to tell you. It's about your sister Sophie" she added.

I was confused now. What was so upsetting about Sophie? The last I had heard, my sister had been deliriously happy with Darius. I was immediately concerned. "Did something happen to the baby?" I asked in a panic, putting a hand to my throat "oh my god, I knew I should have contacted her" I wailed.

My mother shook her head, tears trailing down her cheeks. "Your sister is dead, Amber. She died a few weeks ago."

Your sister is dead, she died a few weeks ago

Your sister is dead she died a few weeks ago

Your sister is dead

The words repeated themselves in my mind and all I could do was gaze at my mother horrified. Surely I had misheard her? Wouldn't I have felt Sophie die? Weren't twins meant to have some sort of special bond when it came to stuff like that? Mother had to have been making a horrible mistake. But when I looked over at Alpha Rowan and saw the way his jaw was clenched, and the sadness in his eyes, I knew that it had to be true and just like that I felt like my world was crashing down.

"She can't be dead" I cried, tears trailing down my cheeks as Stefan reached over and grasped me in a hug, letting me cry all over his shoulder. "What, how" I spluttered "what happened."

I was inconsolable, and it took Stefan several minutes before I was able to regain some of my composure. My mother sat in silence, stiff as a statue, and Rowan said nothing, but his eyes were sympathetic toward me.

"Your sister was poisoned," said my mother quietly "she ingested something that was fatal, by someone who breached the grounds and pretended to be an omega. We don't know why it happened, perhaps someone saw her as a threat by her becoming the future luna of the pack. We discovered her too late to save her" she finished with a sob.

Why would anyone want to kill Sophie? It didn't make sense. I felt sick to my stomach. Bile rose up in my throat. I swallowed it down, glancing at Rowan. "Do we know who it was that killed her?"

"No," said my mother smoothly "we have no proof of who it was."

But Rowan was hesitant. "I believe it might have been Stacey" he admitted wryly "and Darius."

"Darius" I gasped "but he loved Sophie with all his heart. Sure he didn't like being forced into the marriage, but he came around to it and he never would have harmed his baby."

My mother sighed. "Sophie lost the baby a few weeks before she was poisoned, another incident where there was no proof and she claimed she had fallen down while out in the woods."

I was having trouble digesting all this. I felt like I was becoming hysterical, my breathing hyperventilating as Stefan tried to rub soothing circles onto my back.

"What does Stacey have to do with Darius? I didn't even think they knew each other" I added pointedly, sucking in deep breaths of oxygen.

"I can't prove it" Rowan drawled "but Stacey was a prisoner in my dungeon and on the same day Darius visited, she was suddenly gone. I know it was him though."

Why the fuck had Stacey been a prisoner? My head was spinning with all this information being thrown at me. It was almost too much for me to handle.

"Why was Stacey a prisoner?" I asked, feeling dread inside of me. I didn't dare speak out that she was in fact, now working at the castle.

"She put a spell on me to make me fall in love with her," said Rowan with a low growl and shake of his head "I found out I figured the dungeon would be more merciful, considering she was pregnant."

"What would" I choked out "you have done with her once the baby was born?"

An awkward silence. Rowan's face flushed red. He put a shaking hand through his hair and looked at me with a sheepish expression on his face "I would have killed her."

"Do you think Stacey killed Sophie?"

"I think Darius put Stacey up to it," Rowan said pensively "but I can't prove it. It could have just as easily been someone else" he added with a frown "your sister did have some enemies."

Oh, I bet she did. She wasn't exactly the nicest girl in school that was for sure. Still, I resolved to find Stacey after this and demand the truth from her. I didn't want my mother anywhere near her, in case she lost the plot or something. For all, I knew there was a rational explanation for it all or Stacey might not have had anything to do with it at all. I was the only one who even knew she was in the castle and I had to keep calm and be logical. But how do you be rational when you've just discovered that your other half, your twin sister is dead? You can't be. Emotion defies logic. My heart felt like it had been torn in two and ripped to shreds, leaving behind a void that could never be filled by anyone else. I had been looking forward to Sophie meeting my child, even if I had dreaded going back on the custody agreement I had initially agreed to. I had wanted my child to have an aunt to love and who would help to raise them and now that was all gone. Stolen away from me and my child. I wanted justice, I thought with a grimace and I wouldn't hesitate to get the answers I sought.

Rowan reached over and grabbed my hand and I instantly jolted, feeling the tingles running down my hand and spine. Crap. I knew what that meant and I wondered why he hadn't accepted the rejection. But the feeling couldn't be denied and I glanced at Stefan, knowing by the grim expression on his face, that he had just caught on to what was happening and he was anything but happy about it.

Chapter 110 - The Alpha's Rejected and Broken Mate

Sophie POV

It felt like I was floating in mid-air, my body suspended in limbo, and I reached out experimentally, feeling nothing, seeing nothing but darkness all around me. I could feel pain, but it was fading, my body convulsing and then stopping in intervals. My hand crept to my stomach which was no longer swollen with child and I felt tears come to my eyes. I struggled to remember what happened to me. I had drunk something, sweet tea? But it had been full of poison and the last thing I remembered was that omega standing over me, watching as I slowly and torturously died in front of her. But was I dead? Or was there something else, going on? Had I perhaps lived or was I stuck in limbo, not in heaven or hell but doomed to stay stuck in the middle forever?

I gently placed my feet on the ground, expecting to fall or for my feet to sink into the nothingness. Instead, it was like I was touching solid ground, even as my eyes blinked, trying to adjust to the dark. I could see a small patch of sunlight in the distance and as though I was in a trance, I slowly began to walk my way toward it, barely even noticing I was naked, just wanting to be out of the dark and in the sunlight once more.

Time had no meaning. I couldn't say how much time had passed as I made my way toward that small patch of light, but it felt like a lifetime of slowly stepping forward, my body never growing tired, and the

pain has gone completely. Finally, I burst into the light and took deep heaving breaths of fresh air, the sky a beautiful blue, birds chirping away in the distance. The sun felt warm on my naked body and I felt the warmth with gratitude. My feet sank into plush green grass. A wolf was lying beneath a tree in the far-off distance and I hesitated, feeling an overwhelming need to go to it. What was so special about that wolf?

I wondered if there was anyone else nearby. I opened my mouth but all that came out was a strangled sound. My voice felt like it was on fire, my lips were dry and I let out a small growl of frustration. The wolf lifted its head and regarded me steadily and then placed its head back down and rested it between its paws. I felt nervous as I made my way to its side. What if it tried to bite me? Or attack me? But it seemed placid enough, its eyes regarding me with curiosity more than anger or annoyance. Why did this wolf seem so familiar to me? Like I had seen it before or knew it from somewhere? I reached out with a trembling hand and began to stroke its soft silky fur, hearing it give a growl of contentment, much like a cat that purrs when it's being patted.

"Do you not remember your wolf?" came a voice from behind me.

I turned around and gaped at the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. She had silvery blonde hair that cascaded down over her shoulders. She had pale, white skin and lovely pink lips, with sparkling blue eyes. She wore a simple and plain white dress that gathered on one shoulder and went tight at the bodice, before flowing down to her ankles. She was barefoot but wore an anklet that had moons dangling from it, crescent ones. Something pricked at my memory. I knew this woman, I was certain of it, but I didn't know where from. Her name would not come to me, no matter how hard I tried to remember it.

The woman looked upset to see me. I wondered why. Was she perhaps dead as well? Maybe I had been wrong and this was heaven?

"You don't remember your wolf" she repeated as I frowned at her.

"My wolf?" I asked, gently reaching down and patting it, "what do you mean by my wolf?"

Now the woman looked perplexed, reaching out to touch my cheek, stroking it gently, her eyes losing their sparkle. "Oh child" she sighed "I guess this is going to be harder than I thought."

The wolf let out a low huff that sounded suspiciously like laughter. The woman glowered at it. "Sandy that's enough" she admonished it and the huffing stopped. So the wolf's name was Sandy, I thought to myself bemused, how interesting.

"Sandy" I repeated the word, glad to note I could now speak, my voice sounding hoarse but illegible.

The woman sighed. "What do you remember?" she asked me quietly, sitting down on the grass and motioning for me to join her, sitting next to the wolf.

I sat down gingerly and stared into the distance, trying to gather my thoughts together. "I remember being in a cabin with Darius" I began thickly "and then an omega came in and gave me something to drink" I continued with a heavy sigh "and then I think I died or something. Is this heaven?" I asked the woman and she gave me a searching look.

"It's not heaven per se," she said slowly "and I guess now would be the time to tell you I'm the moon goddess. We have met before, but you won't remember it" she added.

The moon goddess! I couldn't believe my ears. I had thought she was nothing more than a legend that people told around the fire, a tall tale told to children. I certainly hadn't envisioned that she was real. I gaped at her and she fidgeted uncomfortably on the grass.

"You're the moon goddess," I said slowly, trying not to squeal "but how, why am I here?"

Now she looked regretful. "You're here because you died" she explained quietly "and I'm here to rectify a mistake that I made. One that should never have happened," she said sadly.

The moon goddess had made a mistake? Surely not? Did Gods and Goddesses make mistakes? I guess in hindsight they were more like regular people than I realized. But what mistake was she referring to?

"What kind of mistake?" I asked quietly.

She sighed and shook her head, eyeing me carefully. "Your death for one," she said calmly "not to mention the loss of your baby. I once told you that you would find happiness with Darius if you came clean to him, but even I couldn't foresee just how evil he was."

My hand went protectively to my stomach and tears welled in my eyes. She glanced down at my stomach and nodded grimly to herself. "Your child is where it belongs now, back in your womb," she said and tears trailed down my cheeks. Had she given back the baby I had lost?

"Yes," she said as though reading my mind "I looked after your child until such time as you came here. Now they are back with you and will remain with you until it's time for you to give birth."

I blinked back the remaining tears and felt nothing but sheer, unadulterated joy at the thought of having my baby back. I couldn't believe it. I felt certain I was dreaming.

"This is no dream," said the moon goddess kindly "and you did die, but now I'm giving you a second chance. One that I don't offer to a lot of people," she said with an exhale "but you've more than earned it. Plus, you are needed very much by your family, who are grieving the loss of you."

I glanced over at the wolf. That was my wolf, I realized, Sandy was mine. The moon goddess watched my eyes dart toward Sandy and gave a wry smile. "Your wolf is also ready to take the next step in your journey with you," she said as the wolf gave a nod and a low grunt. I couldn't help myself and laughed out loud, embracing the wolf with a hug, no longer fearful of it. My wolf was as much a part of me as my baby was, perhaps more so.

"So what happens now?" I asked the moon goddess with a frown, wiping my tears away.

"What happens now is that you wake up in a minute, far away from your pack" she explained, "you cannot let Darius discover that you are alive, do you understand me?"

I nodded. There was no way I wanted my ex-husband to know that I had survived his plan to poison me to death. I had no qualms the poisoning had been his doing.

"Where do I go?" I asked and the moon goddess smiled at me.

"Make your way to the vampire King's Castle. Your family is there including Amber, your sister, and your mother. Your father remains at the pack for now" she explained.

I wasn't surprised by that. Knowing my father, he'd probably turned to the drink once I was dead. More than usual I mean, considering he was a full-functioning alcoholic.

"What about Sandy?"

"Your wolf will come back to you, but only when you need her," said the moon goddess "she is recuperating from the poison and needs to rest. She will come to your aid when required," she told me cryptically.

I heaved a sigh of relief. Then I looked up at the clear blue sky and raised an eyebrow as I saw storm clouds gathering in the sky and lightning flashing. What had seemed to be so tranquil was fast becoming chaotic. The wind picked up, and I shivered, the moon goddess seeing my discomfort.

"Goodness you must be freezing" she exclaimed, waving her hand at me.

I was engulfed in a shimmering white light that pulsed gently around me and then when the light had faded, I glanced down to see myself clad in warm leggings, a sweatshirt, and sneakers. They were comfortable and fit perfectly, another one of the moon goddess's talents it would seem. My long hair had also been put back into a ponytail, pulled well away from my face.

"You might as well be comfortable" chuckled the moon goddess.

I patted my wolf and the moon goddess motioned for me to walk with her, away from Sandy. I did so, reluctantly, with one last glance over my shoulder at my wolf.

Lightning cracked and I found myself flinching at the sound of branches breaking and the trees swaying wildly in the wind. The moon goddess appeared unphased however by it all. Even her dress wasn't billowing in the wind like I imagined it should be. Soon enough, the further we walked, the darker the light above us got, until we were standing in a small patch of darkness.

"It's time for you to wake up now Sophie," said the moon goddess quietly as she waved her hand. I gaped at her, but didn't get the chance to call out or yell or anything like that, as I felt myself falling from a distance, crashing rather roughly, it had to be said, into a large shrubby bush-like thing and wincing from the pain.

Are you alright?

I rejoiced in hearing my wolf's voice, even as I awkwardly sat up, feeling pained. The moon goddess could have given me a warning about the crashing at least. I could feel bruises and scrapes all around my body. I winced as I stood up and peered around with curiosity. I was in the forest, that much I was aware of but how close was I to the Vampire King's Kingdom and how far away was I from my own pack? I could still remember the moon goddess reminding me not to let Darius catch me or see me alive and I was cautious, sniffing out nearby shifters and rogues, of which there were none. A backpack came tumbling down from the sky and out of reflex, I caught it. It was heavy and full of food items, clothing, and even a blanket. At least, I thought to myself wryly, as I put the backpack over my shoulders, I was well equipped for a long journey. Without hesitation I set off, determined to find the nearest pack and orient myself.