

Alpha's Rejected 71

Chapter 71 - The Alpha's Rejected and Broken Mate

Amber POV

I got out of the hospital and didn't bother to contact Rowan. Instead, I discharged myself and walked across the grounds, feeling more like myself as the sun shone down on me, warm but not too hot, perfect for the mood I was in. I was so angry still that Rowan didn't believe me, that he was willing to believe that Stacey hadn't done it. I didn't care if she'd been under guard the whole time, I still suspected her, and I'd be doubly careful about what I ate from now on.

Laurence greeted me at the door, a placid smile on his face, beaming from ear to ear. I frowned at him as he brandished a plain white envelope toward me.

"Somebody is missing you" he joked, and I gave a small glance towards the letter, my heart jumping in my chest as I recognized Sophie's writing.

"Thanks," I told Laurence drily, taking hold of the letter and resolving to go and read it straight away in the room.

I briefly wondered where Rowan was, then shrugged at myself. If I was honest, I really could care less and thought it was a bonus that I wasn't running into him.

"Where are you going?" asked Laurence.

I glowered at him. "Upstairs" I bit out "if that's alright with you? I assume that I do still have a room in this pack house? Until Rowan makes a damn decision that is" I snapped.

Laurence looked taken aback. "Sorry" he apologized, his hands out in surrender. "I didn't mean to make you angry."

I merely glared at him and then stomped upstairs, my hand holding tightly onto the letter.

Once inside, I tore the envelope open and several sheets of paper fell out. I frowned as I saw not only Sophie's handwriting but Darius's as well. What did he want? Maybe it was to tell me all about their honeymoon?

Dear Amber

I've missed you so much! I know it's only been a few weeks but it's felt like a lifetime since I saw you. I had to get your location from mother in order to write to you, as father wouldn't give it up. Not surprising, I know. I had the greatest time on my honeymoon. You should see Australia, sometime Amber, it's beautiful and the people are so welcoming over there. It's very different to us here in the USA.

We did all sorts of interesting things, like eating in restaurants, but I suppose the most interesting thing to see was the different packs as we traveled. I did some shopping, of course, and Darius mainly stayed in the room when I went off to do that. I guess it's true what they say, men really do not enjoy shopping.

I really hope this letter isn't upsetting to you, Amber. I want us to have a relationship as sisters. Proper ones. I know I wasn't the nicest sister to you, but I hope that you can forgive me for that. I especially want to come down and see you, see how you are getting on. I wonder if the monstrous alpha is as beastly as they claim he is. You poor thing. I was so mad when I got home and found that you had been married off, or attempted to be married off by father and mother. If I could have prevented that, I would have, believe me. After everything that's happened to you, you deserve far better than that.

Darius and I are hoping to come and visit you soon. He's written you a note as well and I really hope that you aren't too upset with me, Amber, over it. I seriously didn't mean for it to happen. You'll know what I mean when you read Darius's letter.

I love you

Love from Sophie.

I frowned as I put Sophie's letter to the side, Darius's still folded up. I felt a bit apprehensive about opening his, feeling like a shiver ran down my spine. What could Sophie have possibly meant by hoping I wouldn't get too upset with her? What had she done? My hands were shaking as I slowly unfurled the other letter, which was written in harsher, more masculine writing. I recognized Darius's handwriting at once.

Dear Amber

First off, let me tell you that the honeymoon was superb and that Sophie and I had a great time. The other packs in Australia are fascinating and so different from our own. They are much more welcoming and I have to let you know, that they treat undesirables much better than we ever have over here. I hope to do the same when I take over my pack as Alpha and Sophie as Luna.

I heard about your close call and almost being married. I'm so sorry Amber. IF Sophie and I had known, we never would have left for Australia and we would have argued with your father to leave you alone. Even if it made my own parents angry. I can't believe they tried to marry you off to the monstrous alpha. How horrid. How cruel. I still don't understand how any parent could do that to their child. I hope that, despite everything, you are getting along very well and haven't been forced to marry the bastard after all.

There's something I have to bring up with you and it requires discussion in person. Please don't be too upset with Sophie for telling me this, but she recently let slip that you are pregnant with my child. I want to discuss possible custody arrangements and I would very much like to do it in person. Please don't be angry, Amber. I know you probably never wanted me to know, but now I do and I can't not play a part in my child's life, so please don't ask me to. If I had known you were pregnant, things might have turned out very differently, but I can hardly complain now that I adore your sister and love her so deeply.

If you get a chance, please write back. Otherwise, Sophie and I are planning a trip to this beastly alpha's pack very soon because she's worried about you.

All my love

Darius

My whole body trembled as I put Darius's letter on the floor and stared at it, hard. I had feared that someone, would let slip that I was pregnant with Darius's child, but I had never dreamed that it would be Sophie. My face went ashen. What if he tried to take my baby away from me? What if he wanted joint custody? What if Luna Marian found out and tried to take the baby? All these questions were running through my mind as I glared at the paper.

I wanted to scream out loud and vent my rage. I crumpled up and threw the paper across the room, watching it bounce against the wall and fall to the ground. What was I going to do? My mind was whirling with possibilities. I could run but then I remembered that I was forbidden to try and leave because Alpha Rowan had seen fit to use his fucking alpha tone on me. Lilac was quiet and pensive. I turned on her, angry that she wasn't as annoyed as I was.

Why aren't you helping me? Darius could be here any day now and then we're stuck! What if he takes the baby from us, Lilac?

He won't. He just wants to play a part in his child's life, you heard him. It seems reasonable, doesn't it? I mean, technically, he is the father. It would be unfair to keep his pup from him.

What about me Lilac? I don't want to have to share my baby with Darius.

Well, sadly, you probably should have thought about that before you slept with him, child. Now you have to face the consequences of your actions.

Great, thanks for nothing, Lilac.

I moodily shut off the link with her and blocked her out. I got up and began to pace the floor, my panic rising with each step and each breath I took. Then a knock on the door startled me out of my thoughts. It was Laurence.

"There's somebody here to see you."

I frantically glanced toward the window and began to push it open. Maybe, just maybe, I will survive the fall. I wasn't thinking clearly and was almost positive that the visitor would be Darius and Sophie. So I was stunned when I heard my mother's voice come from the doorway, sounding puzzled.

"What on earth are you doing?"

I halted in my tracks and whirled around, surprised to see her. For as long as I can remember, she never did anything without father by her side, and I expected to see him with her and was shocked to see that my father wasn't there, nor did he come up behind her.

"Nothing" I muttered sheepishly, turning around and giving her a hug "what are you doing here? Where's father?"

My mother flinched. "Your father is still at home," she said slowly, "recovering from another hangover" now she sounded bitter.

"No offense," I said wryly, not in the mood for bullshit, "but what exactly are you doing here, mother? I thought for sure that you would never come and visit me once I was gone from your life. I mean, isn't that why you tried to marry me off? So you wouldn't have to see me anymore?"

She blanched, her face going pale and her eyes looking haunted. She put her hands together and I noticed they were trembling.

"Amber" she whispered, "I'm so so sorry for everything. When you were younger, I loved you unconditionally, but your father was so angry that you didn't look like us, that he wouldn't look past that. I let him influence me and manipulate me into not loving you and, for that, I cannot express how sorry I am."

I raised an eyebrow. She seemed close to tears. "You had so many chances to stand up to him, mother, and you never did. You let him do whatever he wanted, no matter who it hurts. So what's changed now? Why should I believe that you've changed?"

My mother looked upset, but I was angry. My entire life I'd been treated like crap by my family and now everyone was suddenly changing their tune. You don't just think that the person will automatically forgive you, just because they have apologized. It doesn't work that way.

"I guess what's changed is that I see your father for what he is now. A mean, horrid, person who takes great delight in bullying people to get what he wants."

She turned and looked at me sideways, a sad smile on her face as she reached up and used the sleeve of her shirt to wipe away her makeup. I let out a gasp. There on her cheek was a big purple bruise, that was slowly fading, but still evident under the light. It looked extremely painful as well and was slightly swollen, now that I was looking at it properly.

"Oh my god," I cried out, moving towards her and taking hold of her arm, "why did you let him hit you? How long has this been going on?"

She took a deep breath. "Since you and Sophie were little" she admitted, "I tried to go to my parents once, for help, and they told me that I had made my bed and I needed to lie in it. They had no sympathy for me whatsoever. I was only thankful, that until you were older, he never laid a hand on you both. I did the best I could to make sure you girls never saw him strike me."

She was openly sobbing now and I guided her to the bed, making her sit down as she wiped her eyes with her sleeve. "I have always loved you, Amber, I want you to know that. Sophie too. I was a terrible mother, a selfish one, and if you let me, I want to make things right."

Her crying was tugging at my heartstrings. I couldn't deny her, no matter how badly she had treated me in the past. I eyed her critically though, knowing she couldn't possibly be thinking about going back to father or that house.

"Mother, you need to stay here," I told her quietly. "don't go back to him. He'll end up killing you one day if you're not careful. No one deserves to be in an abusive marriage."

"I can't impose on you" she sniffed, "I was going to try and find a place in a nearby pack."

I took hold of her hand and squeezed it. "Stay here, it will do you good and we can get to know each other", I urged. "Plus, I have my wolf now and I can tell you all about what's happened to me."

She looked me in the eyes and gave a slow nod. "Alright, I'll stay," she said lowly, "but I have to warn you, Amber, that I'm afraid of your father. He's gotten a lot more violent since you left and Sophie stays in the pack house. What if he comes looking for me?"

Chapter 72 - The Alpha's Rejected and Broken Mate

King Stefan POV

I stared at the messenger incredulously, my hands clenching into fists. My brown hair hung loosely on my shoulders and my brown eyes were blazing. "What do you mean, that they have taken some of our precious children?" I growled.

The messenger looked everywhere but directly into my eyes, which were slowly transitioning to red.

"They have two vampire children and are claiming that they will kill them if we don't give them what they want."

"What is it that they want?"

The messenger looked nervous now, as I glared at him from my study desk, my best friend Dylan sitting in the armchair opposite me.

Dylan looked entirely too comfortable there, dressed in a leather jacket with a white shirt and jeans. There was an angry look on his face though, and I was sure that the same expression was mirrored in mine.

"Out with it, man," snarled Dylan, "tell the King what it is this Alpha Rogue wants?"

The messenger swallowed hard. He looked like he would rather be anywhere but in the castle facing me right now.

"They want you, Sire," he squeaked, "or rather they want your blood as the Vampire King."

I slammed my fist down on the table and the messenger gave a strangled gasp, his body trembling in the face of my anger. Dylan was just as mad.

"You're excused" I muttered beneath my breath and the messenger didn't hesitate, hightailing it out of there, as I plonked back down on my chair and rested my chin in my two hands.

"Stefan, you can't possibly be thinking" he began, and I held up my hands.

"Dylan" I interrupted, "you can't be telling me to let two innocent children die at the hands of shifter rogues. If I have the ability to save them, then I should do it, don't you think?"

Dylan shook his head, running a hand through his hair in frustration. "What exactly are you proposing, because the council will never let you go? You know that, right? Especially if you don't have an heir", he continued.

Yes, not having an heir was problematic, but could I help it that I hadn't come across my mate just yet? I, unlike a lot of my kind, was waiting for my mate. Sure, I've had relationships, even long ones. I was no saint, but I had never gone so far as to propose marriage to anyone. Was it my fault if some of my exes assumed I would marry them eventually?

I looked at Dylan wryly. "Let me guess," I said angrily, "you're proposing you go instead?"

He leaned forward in his chair. "It makes better sense. You're the king for heaven's sake, the council would have a fit if something happened to you, whereas if I go, I'm dispensable."

"You're not dispensable", I argued back in a low voice, not wanting to draw attention to us both. Vampires have sensitive hearing, after all.

"Thanks," Dylan said calmly, "but you know what I meant."

"It's too risky," I told him blithely. "they'll take one look at you and kill the children on sight."

"I doubt it," Dylan said quietly, "they haven't clapped eyes on you before, so how are they going to know the difference?"

I considered it. As the King, however, I felt like I had a duty to my people and that meant to all of them, whether they were children or adults. But why my blood? What use could it be to an alpha? It made no sense to me and, judging by Dylan's look in his eyes, he had no idea either.

"My blood," I said softly, "there must be a reason they want it so badly. Don't you think? To go so far as to use children to get it."

"That's the other reason I don't want you to go. We both know that vampire blood is potent, but yours, as the king, is doubly strong and able to perform miracles. Besides, what if they don't let you go? You could end up in a dungeon or worse", Dylan continued to vent out his frustrations to me. It wasn't anything I wasn't used to. As friends we let each other know what we were thinking or feeling all the time.

"They'll know you're not the king the second they try to take your blood and use it" I scoffed with a shake of my head, my hair moving in time to it. "Then you'll end up dead along with the children. No, it has to be me."

"Then I'm coming with you."

"You're needed here. Who else is going to be able to run interference for me in regard to the council?" I asked.

Dylan frowned at me. I raised my eyebrows. He sighed.

"I hate running interference. Plus, you know the council can't stand me" he added, "because I'm not a full vampire but only half of one. They think I'm an abomination."

I scowled at that. Dylan wasn't wrong though. The council did tend to look down on Dylan because he was only half vampire, his mother had been human whereas his father had been a vampire. They also didn't like it when a vampire mated with a shifter, which was few and far between with our race. I

suspected it was because the council disapproved, that there were so few matches between us and different races.

I felt differently but I wasn't sure of the reason for it. I felt like we were destined to be with the one person in the whole world who was meant to be with us. It didn't matter if they were a shifter, a witch, another vampire, or a fae. As long as they loved you and you had a mate bond, then it was destiny and the council needed to change its thinking. I had been working on it, but the council was made up of elders, who were stubborn and old-fashioned, set in their ways. They needed me to find a mate and produce an heir and it was fast becoming tiresome for me, for they were talking about setting up an arranged marriage if I didn't find one soon.

I glanced down at the message that had been left for me. It was simply put, but a map had been provided of their whereabouts.

King Stefan.

We have managed to procure not one, but two innocent vampire children. We will not hesitate to kill them unless you come alone, to the map's location, and provide your blood to us. We require only your blood and will know if you try to trick us or bring anyone along with you. Unless you come, the children die. This is not a joke.

Come alone and you have two weeks to make it. After that, the children are dead and it will be your fault.

The Alpha Rogue.

I scowled at the letter. How cold-hearted did you have to be to threaten small children? As it was, we would have to locate the parents of these missing children, for none had been reported. "Two weeks" I mused, "they clearly have no idea how fast a vampire's speed is when he moves. That means he's not familiar with vampires", I said with a wicked grin.

Dylan just grimaced. "I want to come with you," he said, "but I guess I'm going to be running interference and covering your ass, once again."

"I appreciate it," I told him sincerely, showing him the map. "What do you think of this? They just sent the coordinates like they didn't care what I did with it?"

"They are either arrogant or cocky enough to believe you won't risk the children," Dylan said, "or it's a trap."

I was leaning toward it being a trap. I mean, why else would you provide a map for Christ's sake? You would have to be an idiot otherwise. Or desperate.

A knock sounded on the door and I glanced at Dylan, hastily shoving the message and map in a drawer, shoving it hastily shut as the door swung open with a large creak.

"Come in," I said sarcastically, for they were already standing in the doorway.

I recognized the wizened face of one of the elders, Elder Mathias, who stood there looking grim-faced. He glanced pointedly at Dylan, snubbing my best friend, who scowled darkly at the man.

"I believe that this conversation would be best in private, King Stefan," said Elder Mathias, drawing himself upwards to his full height.

I sighed. Dylan just glared at the man and then huffed. "I'll see you later Stefan," he said, his eyes looking at the drawer where I had placed the message and map. I nodded tightly and watched him almost stomp from the room, slamming the door shut behind him. The elders never failed to rankle him.

"What is it you want, Elder Mathias," I said grimly, not beating around the bush.

The elder merely raised his eyebrows at my shortness, but it didn't deter him from talking. "I have just come from the latest council meeting," he said thickly, "and we must advise you that it's time that you take a wife and produce an heir to the throne. "

"I'm waiting for my mate" I hissed, my eyes fully glowing red now.

The elder blanched but continued on, "we feel that as King it's your duty to provide an heir to the kingdom. It has been far too long and you put the kingdom and your lineage in danger by not doing it."

"It is my decision to make" I growled.

The elder shook his head. "If you wish to remain king, then you must abide by the council. It has always been that way and it always will be. The elders have all agreed. You have two weeks to find a wife or we will find one for you."

My nails dug into the palms of my hands, drawing blood. "The council has gone too far. You are abusing your powers. I will not be forced into a marriage that I do not want."

"Your father was the same," the elder said unexpectedly, warmth flooding his tone, "but he did the right thing and found a wife. He was much like you, not wanting to get married, but in the end, he did what was right for the kingdom and so will you. Do not push us, King Stefan, for we are much older and far wiser than you."

"You dare to insult me" I growled, and the elder looked off to the side, shrugging lightly. "It is not an insult," he said, "merely an observation. Now, if you will excuse me, I must be off. Please remember what we have discussed. You have two weeks, no longer, to find a wife or have one found for you."

He turned around and left as I glared daggers into his back. The second he was gone, I flung the table into the wall, wood splintering everywhere and shattering to the ground. I ripped the art off the walls and stomped on them, like a petulant child throwing a temper tantrum. I was beyond tired of this council sticking its nose into my business. Thank goodness they hadn't caught wind of the messenger and enquired about that.

Dylan came wandering back in. "Whoa," he said, seeing the destruction in the room, "what did the council do to piss you off this time?"

"They've given me two weeks to find a wife or I'll be forced into marriage" I hissed as Dylan began to laugh out loud. "It's not funny you moron."

"In two weeks' time, you'll be at that location" pointed out Dylan, "which means they can't force you into marriage until you get back. Once you're finished there, I suggest looking for a wife, otherwise, you'll be stuck with some old ugly hag that the elders think will be suitable for the position of queen."

I shuddered at the thought. But I was damned if I was going to give up on finding my mate. The council could go to hell, I thought, even if I had to be the one to send them there.

Chapter 73 - The Alpha's Rejected and Broken Mate

Amber POV

"You're afraid that father is going to come looking for you? I mean, did you tell him where you were going?" I asked as my mother fidgeted nervously, wringing both her hands together and looking wretched.

"No," she said in a low tone of voice, "but here's the only place I would go, besides the pack house and I'm too embarrassed for our friends to know the truth."

I sighed. Great. Rowan was not going to be pleased, but I hardly cared what that bastard thought. Instead, I got up from the bed and grabbed hold of mother's hand, tugging her downstairs, towards the kitchen where I made us both a cup of tea, after sniffing the contents. This time I went for a plain black tea, far too wary of the herbal concoctions on offer. Could you blame me though? It made sense to take precautions.

I sat a plate of biscuits in front of us both as well, dunking the biscuits into the tea and eating them quite happily. A girl's got to eat and at that moment I was eating for two.

Rowan chose that momentous moment to come walking in, his eyes wary as he sized up my mother, who gulped nervously.

"Alpha Rowan, you remember my mother," I said politely and a bit pointedly.

"Of course I do," he said gruffly, a look of reluctance on his face. At least he was too polite to bring up the fact that my mother had failed to disclose my pregnancy to him. Not that he would have dared to, of course, not after his own bloody actions of late.

"To what do we owe the pleasure?" asked Rowan calmly.

My mother hesitated, but I reached over and touched her hand. "Mother is here for a long visit. She's missed me and I've missed her" I said evenly, daring him to say anything to incite my anger.

Wisely he said nothing, nodding and then ducking back out of the corridor. I gave a big sigh of relief. We had been civil to each other and cold, but otherwise uncommunicative. I blamed him, still blamed him for marking me and, evidently, he was still angry about my pregnancy. Not exactly the mate either of us wanted, and yet, he still would not reject me.

"What was that all about", mother commented, and I shrugged. I could hardly tell her the reason for us both being so cold towards each other.

"We're just going through some things," I said instead.

She gave a tentative smile. "So tell me about your wolf," she said, leaning forward eagerly "what is she like?"

I thought about it for a moment, trying to think of the right words to describe Lilac. "She's unique and very sarcastic sometimes. Her name is Lilac and we're supposedly a rare wolf, but I'm not sure about that" I said a bit gloomily. I mean, my powers seemed cool but they didn't make me as powerful or not as I imagined, but maybe I was being too harsh.

"I think that your wolf must be something special for it to have come to you so late. What brought it on? Your transformation."

Instantly my mind flashed back to that night. Wrestling in Rowan's arms, his wolf having taken control, begging and pleading with him not to do it and him not listening to a single word I said. The bite and the most excruciating pain I've ever felt and the agonizing transformation. Images flooded my mind and a

single tear came to my eye. I shuddered at the memory and faced my mother with a tight smile, my fingernails digging into the countertop.

"Rowan marked me," I said tightly, not hiding the fact I wasn't overjoyed about it.

My mother's eyes were alight with curiosity as they strayed to the nape of my neck, where the mark stood out like a beacon. I said nothing more, concentrating on my breathing and making it more even instead of shallow and anxiety-ridden.

Then we heard a commotion at the door and Rowan came waltzing past, muttering under his breath. "What on earth," I cried as the banging on the door grew more insistent until it was a heavy pounding. My mother cringed, cowering in her chair as I pushed past the kitchen, watching Rowan answer the door.

My father stood on the other side of it, a drunken look on his face as he staggered past a stunned Rowan, who looked very displeased to see him.

"Beta Mathew" Alpha Rowan greeted him with a raised eyebrow and a look of concern on his face "to, what do we owe the pleasure of your visit."

My mother was now standing behind me and I could sense her body trembling from where I stood. I moved directly in front of her, but it was far too late, for my father had seen her, even in his drunken stupor.

"I came to get my wife" he slurred, stumbling slightly.

Alpha Rowan glanced at me. I mouthed the words 'no chance' at him and watched the man give me a small nod, his eyes fixating on my father who was glaring down the corridor toward myself and my mother.

"Slut thought she would leave me, but I knew she would have come here" he continued to slur, "She doesn't have anyone else to take her in. She needs to come home with me" he added.

Alpha Rowan frowned. "I believe that your wife is here for a visit and so I must respectfully tell you that she is not going anywhere with you, especially in that state. Good god man" he said, a little incredulous "did you drive here while you were this drunk?"

My father blinked at him, clearly astonished that Alpha Rowan was interfering with what he was after. "Course I drove" he snapped, coming to himself a little bit "how else would I have gotten here?"

I rolled my eyes.

My mother let out a low groan from behind me, her shoulders shaking as she kept herself ducked down behind me, using me as a human shield. I guess I couldn't blame her after seeing those bruises and the way father was staring at us, but still, it would have been nice to see a little courage from her.

"Clarissa" snarled my father, moving forward a few steps even as Rowan moved to intercept him. "get your ass moving, it's time to go home."

"I'm not going" my mother piped up from behind me, looking over my shoulder at her husband with contempt in her eyes, "I won't take your abuse anymore Matthew. The last time was the last straw. Never again" she declared, as I silently cheered her on. It made me so angry to think that she had been hiding this for so long and now it was all out in the open.

Alpha Rowan digested her words, his eyes narrowing. His hand shot out, preventing father from moving and he unceremoniously pushed my father backward against the wall.

"Listen here you bastard" he hissed as my father wriggled against his grasp "I can't stand wife beaters or abusive men at all and you're nothing but a piece of shit, that's going to leave quietly and never come back."

My father sneered at him. "What if I want more money for Amber?" he demanded. "I'm willing to bet the little slut has already opened her legs for you. I bet you want to keep her. I've heard she's excellent in the bedroom" he continued, as I went pale and stiffened. This was not the way a father should talk about his daughter. I felt hurt, but most of all, I felt degraded and humiliated.

"I gave you plenty of money" Alpha Rowan growled, grabbing my father by the neck and watching him kick and squirm, with something akin to satisfaction. He literally threw my father through the open front door, which had been opened by a very silent Laurence, who had been about to come in. Laurence dodged my father's body just in time, his mouth agape.

"You son of a bitch" hissed my father, getting up from the ground and dusting himself off, his eyes turning pitch black in his anger. "Why don't you come and fight me like a real man" he demanded.

I wanted to move forward. If anyone was going to fight my father, it was going to be me, but Rowan held out a hand to stop me in my tracks. "I don't want him to know you have your wolf" he whispered and I understood, even if I felt a bit annoyed. It was best to keep a secret from my father, for he would just find some way to use me if I didn't keep it a secret.

My mother gasped, placing a hand to her mouth. Laurence, God bless the man, quickly went over to her and grasped her by the hand. "Let's go back into the kitchen," he said quickly. "You don't need to see this."

I was damned if I had to go back in the kitchen. I wanted to see my father get his comeuppance.

Alpha Rowan went outside. "I'm giving you one last chance to go away," he said icily to my father.

My father was beyond rational now and glowered at Alpha Rowan. He shifted and leaped for the Alpha, but Rowan was quicker, shifting in mid-air to meet him. They fell to the ground, clawing and biting towards each other, before Rowan kicked him off and my father went flying through the air, stopping at a complete skid, before running and tackling Rowan head-on.

I watched the two wolves, one completely black and the other one silver, feeling somewhat detached. The black wolf was Rowan's and it was fast, faster than the silver which was my father's. It wasn't really a fair fight, considering father was somewhat drunk but he had issued the challenge and Rowan was meeting it.

A growl sounded as Rowan got hold of my father's neck and flung him into a tree trunk, his body hitting it with a large thud. The silver wolf's body slumped to the floor and then got back up, eyes blazing. I had enough of this and stole back into the kitchen, retrieved a weapon, and went back outside. As my father tackled Rowan once more, on top of him, I reached back and threw the large kitchen knife, hitting my

father in the side, as the knife lodged itself inside of him. He let out a low yelp and Rowan bucked him off, grabbed him by the neck, and quickly swiped downwards, cutting my father enough that a large pool of blood began to form beneath his body. Rowan let go and my father slumped to the floor, the knife still in him. I darted forward and pulled the knife out, eliciting a whimper from my father, who remained in his wolf form, unable to continue to fight.

Rowan shifted and stormed over to me. "Are you crazy?" he demanded, shaking my shoulders "you could have been hurt". He almost roared.

"I think you mean to say thank you," I said testily, "because my throwing that knife just shortened the fight."

He gaped and then turned back to the silver wolf, which was now lying unconscious. My mother came to the doorway and let out a huge groan, going towards the silver wolf. I went to stop her in her tracks but she managed to surprise me.

She touched my father's body and then shouted into the air "I, Clarissa Henderson, reject you, Mathew Henderson of the Silver Wolves pack as my mate."

I watched her sink to the ground in pain as the mate bond severed and sprinted to her side, helping her back up as she looked at me gratefully.

"I've wanted to do that for a very long time," she said to me quietly. "Do you think it was cowardly to do it while he was out?"

I shook my head. "I think it was brave", I told her honestly.

Alpha Rowan's eyes were glazed over as he mind-linked what I assumed were warriors, as several came to retrieve father and take him away to the hospital.

"He'll be taken care of and then sent on his way," Alpha Rowan told me and my mother as we hugged. "He'll be under guard in the hospital, don't worry. Clarissa" he said gently, "you are welcome to stay as long as you like or even make this your new home. As long as you are here, you are under my

protection", he added, and I watched the relief come onto my mother's face. Part of me hoped that it would stay that way.

Chapter 74 - The Alpha's Rejected and Broken Mate

Sophie POV

"Father, what on earth happened to you?" I cried, rushing to his side. He was severely injured, with a slash on his side, and multiple bruises on his body, not to mention a concussion. Darius was with me, looking concerned but not overly so. I suppose for a strong shifter, this wasn't fatal, but what had he done to piss off Alpha Rowan aka the monstrous Alpha so severely? I had gotten a call from a distant-sounding mother, that my father had been injured and had rushed towards this pack, Darius dragged alongside me. I guess I was panicked, not knowing whether father was alive or almost dead or even dead. I hadn't been certain.

"Sophie" my father mumbled, sitting up awkwardly on the hospital bed, "what are you doing here?"

"I came to see you" I huffed, gesturing towards him "and look at you. Father, what on earth were you thinking, challenging an Alpha for heaven's sake?"

My father was still out of it and quite heavily drugged, otherwise, I'm certain that he wouldn't have spoken as he did.

"Bastard tried to keep my wife from me" he muttered, "like it wasn't my right to drag the bitch back home."

Was he speaking about my mother? I frowned and looked at Darius, who looked back at me grimly. I know he had never liked my father, but I had always assumed it had been from the way my father treated Amber.

"What about mother?" I asked and my father glowered from his sitting position.

"Bitch" he snarled as I flinched, "she rejected me, can you believe it" he added bitterly.

My mother had rejected my father. But why? They had always seemed so happy together, but now hearing the way father spoke about her, I had to wonder if it had all been an act for my and Amber's benefit.

My father winced in pain as he shifted in the bed. I hurried to help him, Darius sitting at the bedside, calmly viewing my father with what I could only describe as contempt.

"Sophie, fetch a nurse" my father hissed, scowling darkly. "tell them I want more pain medication."

I looked at Darius, who gave a barely imperceptible nod, before scurrying from the room. A nurse, upon hearing that it was my father requesting the pain medication, rolled her eyes at me in frustration.

"He's had as much pain medication as he's allowed," she said brusquely when I tried to explain that he was still in a large amount of pain "he can't have any more for another two hours."

"Please" I begged, but she was having none of it, shaking her head and moving past me, to tend toward other patients. I gave a huff of frustration and was about to go back to my father's room when Amber came walking through the front entrance of the hospital.

Upon seeing me, she turned pale and hesitated, almost like she wanted to turn tail and run. I rushed to her side and gave her a large hug, Amber stiffening upon contact, before relaxing slightly and hugging me back. "What are you doing here?" she whispered, pulling away and viewing me with curiosity.

I motioned for her to sit down in the waiting room with me, folding my ankles and wringing my hands together. "I got a phone call telling me about father. What happened? How did he get hurt so badly?" I asked in a rush, uncomfortably aware that Darius was still alone in the room with my father.

Amber sighed. She sat down and faced me. "Mother came to see me, she had bruises on her face, Sophie, and it's not the first time that father has done it to her."

"But I've never seen bruises on her face" I protested in horror, even though I suspected Amber was telling the truth. After all, she had no reason to lie. Then I remembered the time I had seen bruises on her face and the lies she'd told me. She hadn't been training after all.

"Makeup is a wondrous thing," Amber said drily. "It can be used to cover up all sorts of things" she pointed out.

I felt disgusted with my father. How could he have been so horrible as to lay a hand on our mother? No reason was good enough for it. Now I was sorry that I had even come here to see how he was doing.

"Is that why she rejected him?" I asked softly.

Amber nodded. "Yeah, among other things," she said quietly, fidgeting with her hands and wriggling in her seat.

"What made him challenge Alpha Rowan?"

Amber rolled her big green eyes now. "He was drunk and he made a few not-so-nice comments about mother and me. Alpha Rowan decided to take exception to it and when our father challenged him to a fight, like the drunken idiot he was, Alpha Rowan accepted and then kicked his ass. He deserved it too", she added with a scowl.

I wasn't in disagreement. It sounded to me like father deserved everything that had happened to him. I was surprised, however, to see Amber in the hospital.

"What brought you here?"

She ducked her head, looking sheepish. "I was coming in to check with the nurses to see how father was going. I wasn't going to visit him but I wanted to make sure he was going to be okay. Even if he is a complete asshole, he's still our father."

Amber was such a forgiving person, I thought to myself in awe. Even with how she had been treated, she still gave a damn about her father, even when he didn't give a shit about her.

"Is Darius here?" Amber asked so quietly, my ears almost missed it.

I remembered why she might be panicking and was quick to grab her hand and squeeze it. "He's here, but he just wants to speak with you Amber, that's all. He's not angry at you", I was quick to reassure her as she placed a protective hand against her stomach.

"I wanted to tell him" she choked out "but mother and father..." she trailed off.

"Not to mention me, I didn't want you to" I helpfully replied.

A voice came from behind us. "Well, I'm here now and there's no time like the present to have this chat," said Darius breezily.

Amber went as white as a sheet and for a moment I worried that she was going to keel over, or faint or something. But instead, she drew back her shoulders and faced Darius head on. "You're right, it's time we had a talk," she said quietly and stood up "but a hospital is no place for it, let's go back to the pack house" she suggested, raising an eyebrow at me "unless you need to go and see dad first?"

I shook my head. My father can fend for himself for now. I would see him later after we had all had a discussion.

Amber led the way, walking out of the hospital with her head held high, looking brave and courageous, like she always did. I don't know how she does it, but no matter what, she always shows her strength as a person. I didn't know that I would be so brave in her shoes. She's definitely unique and a one-of-a-kind individual. We walked, silently, across the grounds, the pack house coming into view. It was magnificent to behold and, unlike a lot of pack houses, it was simple but elegant and looked homely, rather than a large cold mansion. I liked it on sight.

Amber held the door open and ushered us inside. She led the way to the kitchen and we sat down at the dining table together, everyone waiting with their breath held, for someone to break the silence. Finally, my husband, Darius, spoke and when he did, it was gentle. "About this child," he said quietly, "I have every intention of being in my child's life, but I will not take custody of them", he explained, "I think that you should have full custody. It's only right. "

Amber looked relieved and a little touched. "You would give me full custody," she said a little suspiciously, "providing you get to be in the child's life?"

Darius gave a short nod. "I understand that it might prove to be somewhat difficult, but should you get married, then there are the both of you to parent the child. I want the child to have a happy family that provides for it. Don't get me wrong, I'll provide for it financially as well, but I want you to be its main parent and caregiver."

Amber was stunned and silent. She glanced at me hopefully, asking with her eyes if Darius was lying. I gave a shake of my head.

"Believe me, it's what we both want" I explained calmly, "and if you don't want us to be a part of the child's life, we'll not take you to court, but it will be upsetting for us."

"No I um" stammered Amber, "agree with what you are saying. It's more than fair, thank you Darius" she breathed "I was so worried that you would try and take the child away from me."

"No way" protested Darius, "after everything I've put you through, there is no way in hell that I would put you through that as well," he declared.

Our eyes met. I gave a small nod and a smile. "We want the child to get to know it's brother or sister", I added, and watched Amber's eyes widen in realization.

"You're pregnant" she squealed as I nodded happily.

"Oh my god, congratulations," she told us both magnanimously.

"Congratulations to you as well," I told her. "it should have been said before now."

"I can't believe it. My baby is going to have a brother or sister to play with", Amber said excitedly, leaning back in the chair as Darius and I laughed at her excitement.

"Congratulations" chimed another voice and I glanced over at the doorway to see my mother hovering, looking nervous and pale. Without her makeup, the bruises on her face were clear for everyone to see. They were purple and ugly, in the process of healing, and I wondered why my mother's wolf was not

healing her as quickly as a shifter normally would. In fact, now that I have thought about it, I have yet to see my mother shift, ever, let alone know what her wolf looked like.

"Thank you," I told my mother, feeling a pang at how frightened she looked "please come in and join us," I said as she hesitantly stepped through the doorway and sat down beside me and opposite Amber.

"I guess you know what's happened", my mother said slowly, with a glance at Amber, "and I know that you came to see your father, but I must ask you not to tell him that I'm going to be staying here. As soon as I can find a decent lawyer I'm going to be serving him divorce papers" she explained in an even tone that brooked no arguments.

It saddened me to hear that, but in her defense, I also couldn't blame her. I was astounded that she had stayed in the marriage as long as she had, considering the circumstances.

"We understand," Darius said and I nodded, Amber nodding also. For a moment there was nothing but awkward silence at the table and my mother coughed uncomfortably.

"I should get back and go see father," I said finally, pushing back my chair and turning to Darius, who did exactly the same thing. "But when I get a chance, I'm going to come back and see you mother", I promised as she smiled at me.

"I'd like that," she said.

"As for everything else," Darius said seriously to Amber, "let's just work out the details after you give birth", he added, "and Sophie has too, of course."

Amber shook his hand. She looked a lot happier and relaxed now. "I will."

We began to move towards the front door, when a man stepped out of the shadows, halting us in our tracks. I viewed the man with interest, taking in his disheveled and slightly shaggy hair, to the scar on his face, and the muscular build of his body. This could only be the monstrous Alpha and I could see how he had gotten the name. He was more than a little intimidating.

"Rowan, this is my sister Sophie and her husband Darius", Amber said, looking nervous.

"Darius," he growled, "like the one who got you pregnant?"

Amber looked more than a little nervous and thoroughly put out. "If you're going to start up again, then I'm not going to listen to it. Darius, Sophie, this is Rowan and they were just leaving" she said, urging with her hands for us to make a move.

We were more than happy to oblige as the monstrous alpha stepped to the side, his eyes dark and piercing, his arms folded across his chest. As we left, all I could think about was how intimidating the alpha was and how sorry I was that Amber was still stuck with him. Darius was considering the same. "Maybe we should offer her sanctuary at our place" he suggested, looking over his shoulder at the pack house.

I thought about it and then shook my head. "She has our mother there for her. If anything, she doesn't have to go through with the marriage now. I'll pay anything if he demands it", I said softly, and Darius nodded grimly, his jaw clenched tight. I knew that he would do the same, no matter the cost. But I suspected that Amber had no intentions of marrying Alpha Rowan, not with the way that she had stared at him, with her mouth tight and unsmiling. She was pissed at him and I wondered why. Because when Amber gets mad, she gets even. So if the Alpha thought he had her cowed, he had another thing coming.

Chapter 75 - The Alpha's Rejected and Broken Mate

Amber POV

I don't know what gave me the first inkling that something was badly wrong. It might have been the rustling I heard in the background or the soft crunching of leaves beneath a footstep, a soft thud of a paw hitting the ground. Whatever it was, it gave me the notion that I wasn't as alone on my walk as I thought I was. Perhaps I had been a touch foolish to go walking in the forest, but after my discussion with Darius, I had needed some alone time to think and to just breathe. To be alone rather than surrounded by people in a sea of chaos.

I whirled around, my eyes searching the forest, Lilac urging me to be cautious. "Hello" I called out, "is anybody out there?"

Surely there would be a member of patrol close by? I was being anxious over nothing. There was no one there. At least none that I could see. Lilac wasn't so convinced.

There is a wolf out here. I can smell it and sense it. It is close and coming closer still. Be prepared to shift, for I don't think it's a friendly wolf.

You got it Lilac, but I don't smell anything rotten, does that mean it's not a rogue?

It smells like an ordinary shifter wolf to me. It's very near now, be on your guard.

My eyes scanned the forest, looking for this wolf which suddenly seemed to appear out of nowhere. One second all I saw were trees and the next was a grey and white wolf coming out from behind one, its ears pricked back and a snarl on its face. I hesitated, seeing that its eyes were not red. This meant that it had to be a member of the pack, I thought to myself, but the wolf was unfamiliar to me. It was not one I had come across before. It was also decidedly male.

SHIFT CHILD shouted Lilac and I did as she ordered, wincing as my bones cracked and broke, readjusting themselves, until I stood in my pure white wolf form. The grey wolf didn't hesitate, putting its head down and then running head-on toward me, as I dodged to the side just in time. It skidded to a stop and then turned around, jumping and I jumped as well, meeting it in mid-air. I gave a yelp as its claws found my side, leaving a big gash, even as I too managed to drag my own nails down the stomach of the other wolf, eliciting a howl from it.

We fell to the floor, the other wolf backing away, its ears pricked back as it silently observed me. I waited patiently for it to make its move. It began to run once more towards me and I dodged it, taking off, my paws thudding against the ground. I wanted to lure it towards the grounds or closer to patrol. Some part of me wanted this wolf caught, in order to find out which pack member it was. It shouldn't have been able to match my speed, but the next second it was in front of me, barring my retreat and growling, showing off its sharp and dangerous teeth.

Whoever this is, they are sure determined to take you down. Have you pissed off any pack members lately?

Not that I can think of Lilac. None besides Stacey and this wolf is decidedly male. It's not an Alpha either, but rather just a normal shifter. Where the hell is patrol? They should be close by. This feels like a trap to me.

Screw patrol Amber. They aren't going to get here and we can't rely on them. It's time to use another ability. I want you to picture fire coming out of your mouth. Do you hear me?

Fire, since when can we breathe fire?

Since always, I've just been keeping it for an important occasion and this happens to be it.

So I just picture it?

Picture it and feel it. Feel the warmth of the flame in your throat and expel it from your mouth. You can do this child. I have faith.

I'm not sure I feel comfortable burning another wolf to death.

Are you comfortable with being dead yourself?

I get your point.

The wolf was still there, observing me. Its hackles were up and it was still growling in its throat. Its eyes were narrowed in on me and I knew that it wouldn't be long until it made its move. I took a deep breath, picturing fire in my mind and trying to feel its warmth. Heat filled the back of my throat. At first, it was deliciously warm and tolerable, but it gradually began to intensify, to a burning hot sensation, It was so hot, that I automatically opened my mouth and I jumped back as a large flame came rushing out, towards the wolf which appeared stunned, it dodging only some of the flame, as the rest of it caught the fur of the wolf alight. It yelped, frantically scrabbling at the ground and rolling over and over, some of a tree sparking and becoming aflame.

Fuck, at this rate the forest would be afire if I wasn't careful. Lilac, however, seemed pleased with what I'd done, as the wolf came to a stop, large black burnt marks of flesh and fur appearing on it. I winced.

That looked extremely painful. It glowered at me and then turned tail and ran! I tried to chase it through the trees, but it weaved and darted back and forth, appearing to know the forest well and I lost sight of it for mere moments. That was all it took to lose sight of the blasted wolf. I tried to track it with the burnt smell, but with the tree burning behind me it confused my senses.

Several patrol members came running past me, one with a large hose, which he began to aim at the one tree that was silently burning.

"Make sure it's out" I heard a loud booming voice from behind me and turned to see a grim-faced Alpha Rowan who was silently observing everything and everyone.

We should shift back to normal now that the threat is gone.

Yeah. But I'd sure love to know where that wolf ended up going.

Perhaps our mate can help with that.

Yeah, right, I thought sourly, as I began to shift back into my human form. The sounds of bones cracking and readjusting made me flinch, and then I stood there, right in front of my supposed mate, vulnerable and naked. It wasn't the nicest feeling.

"What happened?" asked Alpha Rowan, his eyes widening as he took in my appearance.

I felt a throbbing sensation as well as something trickling down my side and glanced downwards to see that I was bleeding from a large gash in my side, courtesy of the other wolf. I placed my hand against it, in an effort to stem the bleeding.

"I was attacked" I gasped "out there" indicating with my head the direction the perpetrator had gone.

"Was it a rogue?" asked the Alpha hastily, his eyes full of concern as he moved closer to me.

"No, it was definitely not a rogue. I think it was a member of this pack" I said shakily, still feeling like my throat was aflame.

"Are you certain?" asked Rowan, standing up to his full height and pulling back his shoulders.

"I'm one hundred percent sure" I answered, frowning at him.

He turned towards his men. "Get your best trackers out here and find this man," he said, his voice thundering throughout the quietness of the forest.

His men began to assemble.

"I think I burnt him," I said quietly "whoever it is that is. He's badly burnt."

Rowan gave a small nod. "That should make it easier," he said softly, mind-linking his men. I could see his eyes glaze over as he did it, informing everyone of the other wolf's injury.

"How did you manage it?" asked Rowan confused and bewildered "I mean the fire, how did you start it?"

I opened my mouth to answer him when I saw none other than Stacey rushing towards him, followed by a quiet-looking younger man behind her.

"Rowan darling" she trilled "are you alright? You weren't hurt, were you? Who started the fire?"

Rowan looked thoroughly put out as he turned toward his ex-girlfriend. "Stacey" he bit out, "what are you doing out here?"

I was curious to know too. She shrugged at him. "I was coming out here for a walk with Grant," she said sweetly, gesturing towards the other man. Grant gave a nod, peering at the forest with curiosity in his eyes.

"Looks like you managed to put it out" Grant commented, "luckily the whole forest didn't go up into flames."

"Luckily" Rowan agreed drily.

"We're on the lookout for someone from the pack who is burnt from being put on fire," Rowan told Stacey who gave a startled gasp of shock, placing a hand against her mouth "have you come across anyone who looks suspicious? Or been acting suspiciously?" he asked.

Stacey slowly shook her head, her long raven black hair swinging behind her back. "No" she whispered shakily "but if we do see something like that, we will be the first to tell you."

"Good" Rowan said exhaling deeply "but in the meantime, I don't want you out here for your own safety. Grant would you mind escorting her back to her room?" he asked, turning to the quiet pensive guard.

Grant merely nodded, placing a hand on Stacey's arm. Stacey opened her mouth to protest and then thought better of it, giving a sigh and allowing the man to escort her out of the forest.

Then Rowan turned to me. "We should get you checked out at the hospital," he said with a frown "you look as pale as a sheet."

There's no need child. Have you forgotten you possess the ability to heal yourself? Remember what you did last time and do it again? I can't believe I have to even remind you.

I concentrated, picturing white light coming from the palm of my hand, and placed it against the gash on my side. Within moments, the gash began to knit itself together, flesh and bone pulling until it was completely closed and there wasn't a sign of any injury, not even a scar. My skin was completely unblemished. Rowan looked impressed in spite of himself.

"You can't even tell there's an injury" he commented, "your skin looks smooth and scar free."

I grinned despite myself and turned around, feeling somewhat shaky on my legs. "I think I'm going back to bed" I tossed over my shoulder "but will you inform me of what happens next? Let me know if you find the person responsible?"

Rowan frowned. "We'll see," he said finally and I was forced to accept that even if I thought it was a little condescending. Part of me wished that I had completely finished the other wolf, but I had never liked the idea of killing someone, even if I was in danger because of them. As I walked back to my room, I had plenty of time to think. It might have been my imagination, but I could have sworn that it felt like there were eyes watching me during the fight and even while I was talking to Rowan. Sure, there had been pack members shooting me curiosity looks, but it had felt like much more than that. It felt like something else, something far more sinister but I couldn't explain it. Then there was that weird guard of Stacey's Grant. Not only had he been unusually quiet, but something about the way he had moved had been off. It hadn't felt like he was moving naturally, but rather like he was forcing himself to move in a certain way. Could he possibly have been the one to attack me? I still believed Stacey was responsible for my ingesting poison. Was it possible that her guard was responsible as well? I knew if I went to Rowan he wouldn't believe me again or would dismiss my concerns, so I decided to keep them to myself for now and investigate further. But I was suspicious and part of me, instinctively knew that I was right about Stacey and her guard Grant.

Chapter 76 - The Alpha's Rejected and Broken Mate

Rowan POV

I spent hours out in the forest, hunting for this unknown assailant of Amber's, alongside the best trackers in my pack. But whoever this man was, he knew how to hide his scent and it all came to naught. Which also reminds me or rather begs the question, how did Amber start the fire in the first place, let alone manage to burn another shifter wolf? She had to have been standing really close, which explained why a tree got put on fire by accident.

"I'm afraid that there's nothing further we can do" Laurence spoke, after observing the men for awhile. He had been brought up to speed on what had happened and had even contributed his own help, but with no luck, same as everyone else.

"I can't stand that it was a pack member who did this" I growled, my hands clenching into fists.

"I know" Laurence murmured "neither can I. I thought everyone here at least tolerated Amber and now it looks like she has an enemy in our midst. How are we going to track this person down? The only

person besides Amber that is, that we know for sure it isn't is Stacey and that's because she's constantly under guard. Which rules her out" he added somewhat gloomily.

I heaved a sigh. I had my suspicions before about it possibly being Stacey but Grant was a dependable fellow who was trustworthy and never failed to do anything asked of him. There is no way the man had left Stacey's side since he was supposed to be guarding her. But what possible motive could anyone else have, in wanting to harm Amber or her child? Because Amber had very nearly miscarried when she'd ingested that poison, otherwise known as Penny Royal according to the tox screen. It didn't help that the poison was easily accessible in the forest, which meant anyone could have grabbed some to use.

"It's strange" Laurence muttered as he moved around and came closer "but do you feel like someone is watching us?"

I glanced around the trees and shuddered, feeling the same. But they weren't close enough to be seen, whoever they were, otherwise my alpha nose and high sense of smell would have picked it up by now.

"Let's go" I instructed Laurence, leaving the men to continue the pointless search "I feel very uneasy all of a sudden."

We walked to the pack house together but then Laurence took his leave and I went towards the study and then thought about it. Did I really want to concentrate on work right now? Sure, I was Alpha and it was my responsibility but it wouldn't hurt to leave it for one night, would it? Besides, I really wanted to check on Amber and make sure she was all right after that ordeal. I mean, it wasn't saying much for my patrol if they missed the fighting in the first place. No one should ever be attacked on pack grounds, and not by another pack member. That was what was making me sick to my stomach.

I trudged upstairs slowly, feeling every bit of my years, and walked towards the bedroom, thankful that Stacey's was on the other side of the pack house, and got into my room, shutting the door carefully behind me. Then I undressed, tossing the clothes casually to the side of the room, and heading into the bathroom, where I started the water in the tub. My muscles were sore and achy and I wanted them to soak, sure that I would be spending yet another day out there trying to track down this bastard who had dared attack, my mate. Part of me wondered how I hadn't known she was in danger, but when I queried Daemon, he too didn't know why we hadn't felt it through the mate bond. It was a conundrum.

I lay back in the tub, letting the water relax me and sighing a big sigh of relief. This was all I needed. Some quiet time to myself and some time soaking in a hot bath. I couldn't even tell you how much time had passed me by, only that it must have been at least an hour or more, before I came back to myself,

semi-dozing in the tub, and let the water out. I reluctantly hopped out of the bath and dried myself down, before wrapping a towel around my waist. Then, I let myself back into my room and stopped short.

I could have sworn that I locked the door to my room, but apparently, I hadn't as Stacey was lying on my bed, dressed up in the most revealing lingerie I had ever seen. Her long raven black hair cascaded onto the pillows and she was lying on her back, with her legs spread wide as she smiled brilliantly at me. She had no shame whatsoever, all of this a blatant attempt to seduce me. I knew I needed to be careful.

"Stacey," I said carefully "what are you doing in here?"

She smiled and didn't look a bit contrite. "I wanted to surprise you" she purred, sitting upright and then kneeling on the bed. It was difficult not to look at her cleavage which was quite large in her red lacy bra. Her underwear to match, barely covered her vagina and was a thong, showing off her rather nice, it did have to be said, ass.

"Oh, I'm surprised alright" I muttered under my breath. What on earth was this woman thinking? Hadn't I made it clear to her that I wasn't interested? Or was she getting mixed signals from me? I didn't know anymore.

She batted her big green eyes at me. "Come on Rowan" she urged "why don't you come and sit down with me?" She patted the space next to her. I hesitated and then sighed, deciding to sit with her and convince her to leave. I could at least be polite about it. But when I sat down I took a huge whiff, smelling that delicious perfume of hers, albeit unusual. It was so intoxicating and it pulled me in closer to her.

"You like this perfume, don't you" Stacey whispered, sounding triumphant and her voice coming from far away "don't you Rowan?"

"I do," I said obediently, sniffing it and wrinkling my nose.

She grabbed hold of my hand and placed it on her breast. "You want to squeeze me, don't you" she whispered and my hand began to slowly squeeze her breast. I had no idea what was going on with my head, my body seemed to have a mind of its own. She arched her back and began to reach behind her, undoing the clasp on her bra. With a triumphant grin, she let the small piece of fabric fall to the floor,

and now my hand was touching her bare flesh, squeezing it, caressing it. She gave a small hiss of pleasure.

"Kiss me" she whispered, lying back against the pillows.

I followed her down, noting how beautiful her eyes were as I gazed directly into them. "You're so beautiful" I whispered, claiming her lips with my own. She moaned as I took advantage of her open mouth, delving my tongue inside of it, caressing hers, and making her open her mouth wider.

"Rowan" she gasped, kissing me back just as passionately.

My hands began to grip the sides of her arms, lightly pressing them, my towel now lying forgotten about on the floor, my cock twitching with excitement.

I began to kiss the nape of her neck, smelling that perfume of hers as it wafted up from her skin.

"Oh god, touch me," she said shakily and I proceeded to do just that, my hand lightly skimming along her arm and down her stomach and side as she sucked in a breath. I wanted to touch her everywhere, my hands exploring her perfect body.

Back in the deep of my mind, I knew that this was wrong, that I still had my mate waiting for me. That I hadn't really made a decision when it came to either Stacey or Amber. But my body was responding to Stacey in a way I had never felt for her before and I couldn't seem to stop myself from doing what I was doing to her. I nibbled lightly on her earlobe as her arms wrapped around me. "Rowan, god yes" Stacey cried out, almost shrieking.

I could smell her arousal and her juices flowing from her vagina. I grinned and began to kiss downwards, taking one of her nipples into my mouth and twirling my tongue around it.

"Oh my god," Stacey moaned.

Her nails dug into my skin. She continued to arch her back in pleasure. I began to slowly reach down towards her panties, one finger hooking inside of it when I heard a knock at the door and heard none other than Amber's voice.

"Rowan," she said a bit shakily, as I stopped in my tracks and listened, "I think I might need to go to the hospital, something's wrong," she said in a strangled voice.

The door opened and she poked her head in, gasping as she saw us both. Realization dawned on her face. "Oh my god" choked out Amber, immediately turning and fleeing as I leaped off the bed and tried to cover my erect cock with my towel.

"Amber, wait" I shouted out but she took off running into her room and I raced out after her, hearing the definitive sound of a lock.

I pounded on the door. "Amber" I shouted, "Amber, just listen to me."

"Go away, you bastard" she shouted back miserably "no wonder I'm in pain. You told me you hadn't made a decision yet, but it sure as hell looks like you have. every time you are with her I'm in pain, because you won't reject me" she screams "and I can't reject you."

I heard sniffing. Was she crying? I felt like the world's biggest heel now. I continued to pound on the door. "Amber, let me in, we can talk about this" I pleaded.

Stacey came up behind me, clad in her bra and a robe thrown over herself. She draped herself on me, but I shrugged her off.

"Rowan why are you being so cold to me" she pouted "we were having so much fun."

There was silence coming from Amber's room now.

I scowled at Stacey. "Leave" I snarled "you had no business being in my room and you know it. Go back to your own room Stacy" I hissed, gesturing at her wildly.

She smirked at me. "You weren't complaining a minute ago" she pointed out and I winced because she was right. Up until Amber's timely interruption, I wasn't complaining, I was being a willing participant. Which confused the hell out of me. Why was I being so loving and passionate towards somebody who I despised for cheating on me?

"Just leave," I told Stacey tiredly, pointing toward her room.

She frowned at me and opened her mouth, glanced towards Amber's door, and shut it again.

"Fine" she said huffily "I'll leave but I hope you know that I'm not happy about this Rowan. You're being a complete tease" she said, almost shouting it.

"Go" I thundered and she scowled and stomped off in the direction of her room. I listened to her footsteps as they faded away and then knocked on Amber's door.

She opened it with a white face and red puffy eyes. I'd made her cry. Again. God, I was an asshole.

"I can't do this Rowan," she told me firmly "I can't keep having you come back and forth, without a decision. Heck if you want the truth, I want you to reject me," she said quietly "and let me live my life in peace. I have a child coming soon" she added, putting a hand protectively over her stomach "and I can't have someone as my mate who can't stay faithful to me or who doesn't want the child as their own."

I mulled her words over. "I'm sorry Amber, but I just can't let you go" I said thickly. My heart was racing at the mere thought of letting her go.

She seemed to deflate and then too late, I saw something sharp in her hand. I lunged to try and stop her, but it was far too late. She swiped across her wrists with the large piece of glass she clutched in her hand. Blood spurted out everywhere, all over me, the floor, amber, and the walls. I felt nauseous as she collapsed right in front of me.

"Why," I said hoarsely, kneeling beside her and watching her eyelids flutter "why would you do this to yourself."

She stared up at me for a moment "because I can't live like this any longer" she whispered, "that's why."

I gathered her up in my arms, ignoring the blood, and raced downstairs. My heart skipped a beat as her eyes rolled to the back of her head and she went limp, completely unconscious. She was losing so much blood, it was terrifying and as I raced across to the hospital, all I could do was pray that I would make it there in time before it was too late and she was gone forever.

Chapter 77 - The Alpha's Rejected and Broken Mate

Amber POV

It was dark, that was my first thought. My eyelids felt gritty and as I forced them open, I half expected to see that I was in a dark dank cave or something. But instead, the sun was shining warmly, and I could feel it on my skin. I experimented with moving my limbs, happy to see that they were all functioning fine.

How had I gotten here? I remembered what I had done. I had sliced my wrists in a desperate attempt to get some sort of freedom, unable to live with a mate who was incapable of making a decision and who had literally made me feel like I was living in prison. Did I intend to die? Maybe. Because that was the only way I had of escaping the prison and getting away. But right now it didn't feel like I had died. I wasn't in the hospital either. Instead, I was lying down on lush grass, the sky a clear blue overhead, birds chirping away from their nests and perching on branches. There was a meadow up ahead, full of vibrant colorful flowers and I sat upright, feeling my hair swaying in the breeze.

Where was I? I had never seen this place before. It was beautiful though. Eerily so. I struggled upright and then automatically glanced down at my wrists. I flinched, seeing dark red scars where I had sliced myself with a shard of glass. But they weren't bleeding, in fact, they were just scars and nothing more. Old ones, as though they had healed already. How was that even possible? By all rights, I should be in the hospital, unless I really had died and this was heaven? It wasn't how I envisioned heaven though.

I awkwardly began to make my way towards the flowers, each step feeling light and my body feeling like it was floating as I walked, bending down to sniff the flowers. I can't help but notice that the majority of them consist, surprisingly, of purple roses, which are my favorite flowers in the world. They have the most delicious sweet scent, which reminds me of perfume. It never fails to cheer me up when I smell it.

Ahead, I could hear the sound of trickling water and I made my way toward it, seeing a waterfall up above. My hands automatically go together and I scoop up some of the liquid, the water refreshing and cool to the touch. It immediately satiates my thirst. It tastes so pure, so divine. nothing like normal tap water or fresh water from a spring. It tastes a million times better. I headed towards a nearby tree that offered plenty of shelter and had a low-hanging branch, allowing me to sit beneath the shade and away from the warmth of the sun. For some reason, I feel relaxed, like I have no worries whatsoever. Nothing was causing me any concerns. It was like all my worries had floated away.

"Are you well?" asked a musical voice and my head whipped around to see the most beautiful woman I have ever seen, standing directly behind me.

She had silvery glistening hair, with big blue eyes, and a mark of a crescent moon on her forehead. The woman wore a white dress that was off the shoulders, tight underneath her generous bosom, and then flowing down to her ankles. She was barefoot, an anklet of small round moons dangling off the anklet.

"I'm fine, thank you," I told her with a dry mouth.

She smiled, her teeth a brilliant white, and moved to the front of me, so that I might see her better, instead of having to look over my shoulder at her.

"You know, you scared everyone with that little stunt you just pulled," she said quietly, grabbing hold of one of my arms and examining my wrist with a critical eye. She seemed pleased to see the scars, examining my arm all over, before finally letting go. I was speechless and wondering who this woman was, who seemed so comfortable touching me. She was a shifter, that much I could tell just by looking at her, while she also smelled intoxicating, like a bunch of flowers, similar to the scent coming from the meadow. Part of me suspected she was a goddess of some kind, because of how beautiful she was.

"I'm sorry," I said dumbly as she gave a small huff of annoyance.

"You know, you could have died" she continued in that musical tinkling voice of hers, "and your plan would have gone horribly wrong, wouldn't it?"

I wondered how she knew about the plan.

"Don't you want to sit down?" I asked her suddenly, wondering how she could possibly be comfortable, standing there without shoes on, even with the softness of the grass.

She waved a hand in response and suddenly another branch appeared, seemingly out of nowhere, which allowed her to sit and perch on it, still facing me. She looked concerned.

"Your mate is worried about you" she began.

Ha, I thought to myself sourly. I bet my mate was worried about me. It was his fault that I had gotten this desperate in the first place. If he'd just rejected me or allowed me to leave, things wouldn't have turned out this way. I didn't care how worried Rowan was about me, all I cared about was getting my freedom back. I needed to get out of Rowan's pack and the more time I spent there, the more confined and claustrophobic I felt.

"My mate," I snarled, "is the reason I did it in the first place. Plus, he isn't my mate. If I could reject him, then I would."

She bit her lip, looking a bit forlorn. "Do you not find anything to love about your mate?" she asks sadly "anything at all?"

I thought about it. Rowan was gruff, pigheaded, stubborn, obstinate, and a real asshole. As far as I was concerned, there was nothing to love about my mate at all.

"Nothing," I assured her, "there is nothing that I like about my mate."

What was it to her if I liked my mate or not? It's not like it affected her in any way.

"What would you do then, if you had the chance?"

"Reject him," I said automatically. "Get my freedom back, go travel. Finally, get another job and maybe go to college."

"What if he doesn't want you to reject him? What if he begged for your forgiveness?"

I still wouldn't forgive him for everything he's put me through or done to me. Rowan had really fucked up and I couldn't stand to be near him half the time. When I found my mate, I wanted someone who was willing to fight for me, to show me just how much they adored and loved me. Instead, I had gotten Alpha Rowan, which was far removed from what I had imagined.

"It wouldn't make a difference," I told her calmly. "he went too far when he used his alpha tone on me to prevent me from escaping or leaving his pack."

She went silent for a moment, grabbing hold of a flower and quietly sniffing it, looking content to sit where we were, looking a bit upset. "Yes" she murmured, "he did go a bit far when he used that dratted tone. There was no excuse for it" she sniffed, looking a bit haughty.

She sighed. "I had such big plans for the two of you, but now I can see what mistake I made, planning the two of you getting together. You are too feisty for him, I think, and require a more dominant and loving mate than Rowan can possibly be."

She stretched, her hands high up ahead, muttering things under her breath as I sucked in my own breath. What could the woman mean by planning for Rowan and me to get together? Nobody had that kind of power that I knew about, except for the moon goddess and she was merely a legend. She wasn't real, was she?

"My name is Selene," the woman tells me sweetly, stopping what she was doing, "and I'm the moon goddess, in case you haven't guessed already."

My jaw drops open and I stare at her in shock. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. So much for the moon goddess being a legend or a tale talked about around bonfires. She was real and she was standing or rather sitting right with me in the flesh! This had to be a dream or maybe I was really dead?

"You're not dead" she muttered, obviously reading my mind, "although it was touch and go for a little while" she added, frowning at me.

I glanced down at my wrists involuntarily. She watched me, with a scowl on her face. "Foolish child," she said softly, "to try and end a life that has yet to live. I know you've grown up experiencing abuse and pain, but it's made you the resilient and brave woman you are today. That is why I was so surprised to see you take this route. I don't normally intervene in such matters, but in your case, I made an exception."

"What is it you want from me?" I asked her quietly.

She stiffened. "It's not what I want from you, but rather what you are going to do for some children in the future. You are going to be the one to save them. As only you have the ability to. Just like you have the ability to heal and breathe fire. Not to mention the ability to bring undesirable wolves or other sides to the surface."

I digested her words. "Why," I asked her suddenly, confused and bewildered, "why did you give me these special powers? Why not someone else?"

She mulled my words over. "I think you mean, why not you" she pointed out. "Why not you Amber? You're one of the strongest women in the world, not because of the fighting prowess you possess, but because of your ability to live with the punches and keep fighting, even when everything looks bleak. Not to mention the forgiving heart you possess. Not everyone is as forgiving and loving as you are. You possess a uniqueness not easily found in this world."

"You give me too much credit", I protested weakly.

"Or you don't give yourself enough," she told me, counteracting my argument. "Now then, you need to go back, child, and I'm prepared to do something for you, but only if you are certain that you want to reject Rowan. So make your mind up now, because once you decide, there is no going back."

I didn't have to think about it, let alone consider it for any length of time. I knew what I wanted to do and I wasn't afraid to speak out and say what was on my mind. "I want to reject Rowan", I said honestly, and sincerely.

"Then I'm giving you the ability to ignore his alpha tone and the orders he used. When you wake up", she told me quietly, "you will have the choice to stay where you are and give Rowan another chance or to leave and find a second chance mate, one who will hopefully treat you better. However," she paused

and looked off into the distance, her eyes going cloudy for a moment. "The second chance mate will not be one that you are expecting and will come as a great surprise. I can tell you, that he will adore you, and will fight for your love, but that's all I can tell you."

That sounded more than a little thrilling to me. I smiled at the moon goddess and shrugged my shoulders, wondering what she meant by my getting back. "Bless you child" she whispered, and then I felt her touch my forehead and stroke it, as she closed her eyes. I felt like I was falling through the sky as there was a rush of wind, and then suddenly I was surrounded by darkness once more. I could hear an annoying beeping sound this time and when I tried to lift my arms I couldn't. My eyes felt gritty and I struggled to open them, seeing a white ceiling up above me. My eyelids fluttered and then I heard the soft sound of my mother sobbing quietly in the corner of the room. I lifted my head up, wincing at the pain in my head, and heard my mother's voice as she hastened to my side.

"Thank goodness you're awake!"

Chapter 78 - The Alpha's Rejected and Broken Mate

Rowan POV

I stared at her in the hospital bed. She was so still, so silent, her red hair cascading over the pillow. I can't even tell you how afraid I was for her. Rather than be with me, she chose to slice her wrists with a large shard of glass. How had it come to this? For it to have gone so far, that she would rather choose death than to remain with me or my pack a moment longer. I was filled with immense guilt, unable to even stand myself at the moment and the brute that I had become.

"My baby" cried Clarissa, barging past me and staring down at her daughter, the tubes and ivs plugged into her, the machines in the room beeping incessantly. She sobbed, standing at the head of the bed, one hand reaching over to grasp her daughter's hand. She whirled her head around and glared at me. "This is all your fault" she hissed as I recoiled "if you had just made a damn decision" she cried "then Amber wouldn't be lying here."

She was right. It was my indecisiveness that had led to this. I couldn't say anything to defend myself. All I could do was stare at Clarissa mutely. She glared at me, her eyes shooting daggers at me.

"I'm sorry" I whispered but she wasn't having it. She was being defensive on behalf of her daughter and I couldn't really blame her.

"Sorry isn't good enough" she hissed "for what you've put her through. Now leave" she demanded and as much as I wanted to stay, to make sure that Amber was going to be alright, I couldn't put that into words and I found myself respecting Clarissa's wishes, disappearing silently out the door and leaving Amber behind.

I walked the grounds, shaken, frightened for Amber and what we had both become. Gone was the sassy fiery girl I had originally met and now all that was left was a defeated woman who had turned to the only option she could think of. It would take a miracle, for Amber to survive, not to mention the child she was carrying. I shifted, unable to stand a moment longer of thinking about Amber and needing to get the hell away if only for a little while.

I ran, my paws thudding loudly on the ground as I headed directly into the forest, a blur as I dodged fallen branches and debris, weaving in and out without a particular location in mind. The pain grew in my heart until it became intolerable. To my surprise another wolf joined me, running alongside me, keeping up with my stride even though my wolf was the fastest in the pack. Daemon snorted in disgust in my mind, but I ignored him, content with whoever was keeping me company on this otherwise sad and downhearted run.

We came to a waterfall and I stopped, the other wolf doing the same. The water was soothing and relaxing. I could hear the sounds of it trickling down while the waterfall itself sounded like a roar. The location was peaceful and tranquil, which was what I needed. I shifted back to my human naked form, looking over at the other gray wolf which seemed to hesitate, before doing the same. Somehow I wasn't surprised to see who it was, but this time I surprised myself by being glad to see her.

She stayed standing where she was, hesitant to approach me and I wondered if it was because of the permanent scowl I seemed to have on my face. Either that or perhaps she was frightened of the look on my face. It wasn't my intention to be this fearful, this much of a brute of an alpha. Once upon a time, I might have turned this woman away, but I was tired and weary and scared. I didn't have the heart to do it this time. Not now at any rate. Perhaps later, I might regret that decision, but for the moment, all I could be was grateful for the company.

"How is she?" she asked me, her voice trembling slightly in the wind.

I frowned. "She seems to be alright, she's pulling through but otherwise. . ." I trailed off and shrugged helplessly. The doctors hadn't exactly been too forthcoming with me before Clarissa arrived. I know they will keep me informed, but to be in the darkness, was not something I was used to.

"I'm sure that she'll pull through" Stacey murmured sounding concerned for the young girl "god knows what she was thinking though, to do something so drastic."

I knew what she was thinking. She was thinking she didn't have a choice, I wanted to yell at Stacey, but she had done nothing wrong to incite my anger toward her and I couldn't take all my frustrations out on the innocent woman. She was merely trying to comfort me, in the best way she knew how.

"She was desperate" I muttered, "and it's all my fault."

Stacey moved a little closer, but stayed well enough away, reaching out to grasp my hand and give it a reassuring squeeze.

"Rowan," she said quietly "perhaps it's time that you made a decision? Especially if it's come to this" she added, her voice dripping with meaning and intention.

I just looked at her. I knew that I needed to make my decision but this didn't make it any easier. On the one hand, Stacey was potentially carrying my child, but on the other hand, my mate was in the hospital, because of me.

I sighed heavily and sat down on the ground, feeling like a petulant child who was being told off, when in actual fact it was anything but that was happening.

I had to think about my pack as well as the unborn child Stacey was carrying. That child would be an Alpha when it grew up and heir to the pack. If it was mine, that was. It would also take over the leadership when the time was right for me to retire. Stacey was trying her best, in fact, although she might have attempted to seduce me several times, she hadn't pressured me otherwise. Amber was the one who had wanted me to make a decision, who had constantly argued with me over it until I'd felt forced to use my alpha tone on her.

But how do you pick one over the other? How do you be rational when your mate bond is begging you to choose your mate? That when you make a choice, you find yourself tethered to the other person forever? It wasn't just a simple mistake you made, it was something that would entail a lifetime of either happiness or misery.

Stacey quietly joined me and I inhaled sharply, recognizing her familiar perfume that smelled of roses and honeysuckle. It was such a unique perfume and yet it suited her immensely. It was also very tantalizing. I sniffed it appreciatively as she drew her knees up.

"Listen Rowan" she murmured, "we've had our differences, you and I, but until I cheated on you, we did love each other, didn't we?"

She wasn't wrong, I conceded. We had loved each other and it had been a shock to find her cheating on me. But right now I didn't want to think about that, I didn't want to think about Amber lying helplessly in a hospital bed. I just wanted to feel something again, anything, to distract me from my pain.

I turned and kissed Stacey who seemed stunned for a moment, before moaning into my mouth. I pulled her against me, lying her down on the ground and following her, never breaking the kiss, my tongue delving inside her mouth. The perfume wafted up my nostrils and I gave a low growl of satisfaction, my hand trailing down her arms and feeling the smooth creaminess of her skin. One hand cupped her breast and massaged it, eliciting a whimper of pleasure from her. I bent my head down and licked the nipple, causing her to arch her back and hiss, taking her nipple into my mouth and lightly sucking on it.

"Oh god Rowan" she moaned and I gave her a wicked grin, my other hand sliding down between her legs as she spread them eagerly. One finger found her clit and slowly began to finger it and circle it as she moaned my name again.

"Rowan."

I began to insert a finger inside of her and began to thrust it back and forth, as she let her head drop down to the ground, whimpers of pleasure coming from her throat. I could feel her beginning to tense and knew she was close, inserting a second finger inside of her, curling my fingers up, and began to pump them back and forth.

"Oh my god" she hissed, and I growled, watching her body tremble, her toes curl up and her body stiffen as an orgasm washed over her. She panted heavily, her body flopping back to the ground, speechless, her eyes beseeching me.

"Please god Rowan" she begged, "I need you inside of me."

My cock was rock hard and I put my hand over it, guiding it toward her entrance as her eyes darkened and she licked her lips in anticipation. Part of me hesitated, Daemon frantically trying to remind me of Amber and I put a block up, ignoring his threats and vehemence. Stacey spread her legs wider in an invitation, reaching up to grab me around my waist and another of her hands reaching towards my cock. The perfume was strong, making my nostrils flare as I smelt it once more and I blinked, feeling a bit dazed, confused for a moment about what I was doing, and then the next thing I knew, I found myself deep inside of Stacey, pushing my way in, until I was in deep and pulling back.

"Yes" she mewled, her hands scrabbling at the dirt as I pulled all the way back and then thrust all the way in, hard, deep, rough. Just the way she liked it, I remembered dazed.

I began to pound inside of her, thrusting away furiously, back and forth, her small cries of pleasure spurring me on. I took her hard, in a rough primal way, enjoying the feel of her tight walls around my cock. But I wasn't finished with her yet and I pulled out, to her disappointment, and reached down, rolling her over and pulling her up until her hands and knees.

She looked over her shoulder with a smirk and a raised eyebrow, waiting as I plunged inside of her. Her hips moved back and forth in time with my thrusts, her long hair cascading down her back. I reached out and grasped her hair in my hand, tugging it roughly and eliciting a small squeal from her.

"You slut" I growled and she nodded frantically.

"Your slut" she whispered back and I grinned, hearing the sounds of our bodies slicked with sweat, hitting one another, in a sea of pleasure. It was almost too much. I couldn't hold on much longer and her body suddenly stiffened as I reached down and frantically began to finger her clit again. Her walls clenched tightly around my cock, another orgasm washing over her. My body tensed, my cock tingling at the feeling of her tight walls around me and I blew my load, spilling my seed inside of her, before I reluctantly pulled out, collapsing on the floor next to her as she continued to pant and breathe heavily next to me.

"That was" she panted "amazing Rowan."

I felt satisfied, forgetting all about Amber and my problems in that instant, concentrating on Stacey and how awesome she had just made me feel. She smiled at me tentatively and rolled over so that she could face me better. She looked stunned and a little bewildered. "Do I take it" she said very slowly, "that you've made a decision?"

I closed my eyes in resignation. God help me, but I had made my decision and it was right in front of me. I opened my mouth and said the words I knew she was waiting to hear. "Yes."

Chapter 79 - The Alpha's Rejected and Broken Mate

Amber POV

I felt the pain first. The most crippling sensation in my abdomen and stomach, the cramping was excruciating and I doubled over, my mother, of course, rushing to my side as I cried out in pain.

"What's the matter?" asked my mother anxiously as I clutched at my stomach in disbelief.

"I don't know," I moaned, "but it hurts."

My mother looked concerned as she poked her head out into the hallway and summoned a doctor. A female doctor came waltzing in, took one look at me, and immediately rushed toward the ultrasound machine.

"Do you think there's something wrong with the baby?" I panted, feeling panicked.

The doctor tried to give me a reassuring smile. "I'm sure it's nothing, but I'm concerned about the pain you are clearly in. Let's double-check that everything is fine, shall we" she said breezily.

She pulled the ultrasound machine over and plugged it in, putting gel on the probe as I slowly pulled up the hospital gown to expose my stomach.

"Gel will be cold" she warned, and then without further ado, she placed the probe on my stomach and began to move it around as I writhed in pain on the bed. The pain was getting worse, so painful that it brought tears to my eyes.

I stared at the image on the machine, willing my baby to be okay. The doctor frowned as she too looked at the image. I waited on tenterhooks for her to speak, not sure what I was looking at.

"Your baby seems to be fine," the doctor said reassuringly. "When did the pain start?"

"A few minutes ago" my mother interjected, stroking my forehead in an effort to keep me calm.

"Where is the pain?" she asked, still holding onto the probe.

"My abdomen and stomach" I wheezed, the pain coming in waves.

The doctor bit her lip but my mother was looking suspicious now.

"Do you have a mate?" the doctor said finally, unable to look me in the eyes.

I frowned, wondering about the question. "Yes," I admitted, "why?"

"Because that pain means that he's cheating on you," my mother said grimly as the doctor reluctantly put the probe away, leaving my stomach a sticky oozy mess. She handed me some towels to wipe myself as I curled into the fetal position.

"You mean that he's sleeping with someone else" I whispered, shocked, but not overly so. It looked like Alpha Rowan, the miserable bastard, had made his decision, but the least he could have done was reject me first so that I didn't have to feel the pain of him sleeping with Stacey.

"Precisely" stormed my mother, "I'm going to give him a piece of my mind when I see him again."

I shook my head. "Don't bother, I was planning on leaving him anyway. I want a mate that loves and adores me and this Alpha Rowan isn't who I want."

My mother looked incredibly sad. "I'm so sorry, Amber, for everything. This is all mine and your father's fault."

I took a deep breath while the doctor began to hook something up in my iv. "This will help with the pain but it will only make it fade, not go away completely", the doctor murmured, "I'm sorry but all we can do is make you comfortable."

I nodded miserably, wondering how long this pain was going to last. Thankfully, whatever the doctor gave me seemed to take effect straight away and I could feel the pain but at a much lower level.

"I need to leave," I told my mother and the doctor objected, pointing to the IV. "Give it at least ten minutes and then we can pull it out."

But I was determined. I wanted to leave while Rowan was busy with Stacey.

"Where are you going to go?" asked my mother anxiously.

I gave her a sad smile. "I don't know, I'm thinking of maybe traveling for a bit, maybe going to some other packs and see if I can find one to call home."

"You could come back home?" Mother suggested quietly.

I shook my head. "That pack has never been home to me, mother, I want somewhere that I feel accepted as who I am. Just because I have a wolf doesn't mean I'll be treated any differently. I'll always be seen as an undesirable in the pack, mother, so please understand what it is I want."

I felt incredibly guilty but my mother just looked thoughtful, rather than sad.

"I think I might go stay with your sister and Darius for a while. Your father wouldn't dare try to go after me again, not there, and Luna Marian has always been a good friend to me" she muttered, "especially since I plan on serving your father with divorce papers."

I was proud of her, I knew it couldn't have been easy to come to that decision but she'd made it all on her own. I hoped father would show good sense to leave her alone, but I felt she would be in safe hands with Darius and Sophie, not to mention she would be able to help them with the baby when it came. The doctor quietly left the room.

I took a few deep breaths and then tore the iv out. The pain came back but was less than it had been previously. Good, maybe Rowan was finished with sleeping with Stacey. I didn't harbor any ill feelings towards either of them, although part of me was annoyed about Rowan not rejecting me first. After all, if Stacey was having his child, then it was only natural that he would have chosen her rather than his mate. He had responsibilities but so did I. The difference was, that I would be raising my child alone, should I fail to find a second-chance mate or a mate who, like Rowan, did not want to raise another man's child.

"Amber," said a shocked voice from the doorway, and I turned to see Teddy standing there, leaning weakly against the doorway "what on earth are you doing here?"

I gave him a grim smile. I didn't harbor any hatred or contempt towards the man at all, despite what his son was doing to me.

You know we could heal him, all you have to do is what you did last time. Imagine a white ball coming from the palm of your hand and directing it towards his chest. You can heal his leukemia.

That's great. Why can't I heal the pain I'm currently feeling then?

Because it's due to the mate bond. Once you've rejected Rowan, you won't feel it any longer.

I motioned towards Teddy to come closer and he did, plinking himself on the edge of the bed, my mother looking at him a bit askance. "Mother, this is Teddy, Teddy this is my mother," I said quietly, introducing them to each other "Teddy is Rowan's father."

"It's a pleasure to meet you," Teddy said softly, shaking my mother's hand.

My mother, despite her anger, was charmed by the man in spite of herself. She gave him a tentative smile.

I closed my eyes and began to concentrate. "Teddy, I need you to hold still," I told him sternly and felt, rather than saw, him nod his head in acknowledgment.

I felt the warmth of the healing power come through me and into the palm of my hand, creating a small globe of white energy. Teddy gave an astonished gasp as I directed it straight into his chest before he could move, concentrating and imagining all of him healed from the disease currently taking his life. I could feel tingles through my spine and felt Teddy remain still, as though stunned by what I was doing. I stopped and opened my eyes, to see Teddy's own eyes clearer and sharper than I had ever seen them.

"What did you just do?" he stammered, looking at me in awe.

"I healed you," I told him quietly. He looked so much better already, color coming into his face and his limbs no longer shaky. There was a broad smile on his face and his eyes were twinkling. He looked well.

"I didn't know you possessed that ability" gasped mother, and I shrugged, looking at her nonchalantly.

"I'd prefer to keep it on the down low", I told them both and Teddy nodded, while my mother looked nonplussed. I'm sure she was questioning why I wanted to keep such a thing secret, but the last thing I needed was to be used by people for my healing ability. Surely she would understand that.

"I gotta go" I mumbled wildly, pulling out the iv and quickly healing the wound. I got to my feet and staggered slightly, Teddy rushing to my side, while mother let out a quick gasp.

"Are you sure about this?" he asked, "you could leave when you're feeling better."

But I wanted to leave while Rowan was busy. I shook my head and walked to the doorway, mother walking quietly behind me now, sensing my determination. I gave Teddy a hug goodbye. "I'll see you again", he promised me and I just nodded with a smile. I did hope to see him again, despite Rowan, I

actually adored his father. Mother took my arm and led me out of the hospital and towards the grounds, a pensive look on her face.

"What are you going to do for clothes?" she asked me rather desperately.

I sensed she wanted to keep me here and was coming up with any excuse to bring it about.

"I'll steal some if I have to" I answered confidently, "but I plan on being in my wolf form for as long as possible and heading south to the next pack. Mother, I'm more worried about you", I told her honestly.

She sighed. "I'll be fine, it's the parent's job to worry about their children, not the other way around."

"Go straight to Sophie and Darius's, mother. I wouldn't hang around once I've left. I don't know how angry Rowan is going to get" I muttered, my hand protectively over my stomach which was only now beginning to stop the cramping.

"Like I care whether he's angry or not" my mother hissed, "considering that he cheated on you, he'd be a damn idiot to try and get mad at me."

I admired her spirit. Since she left father she's been showing a lot more spunk and attitude. I liked it. She wasn't letting father hold her back anymore and she was more willing to express her opinions.

"Alright let's do this" I muttered to myself, feeling slightly uneasy. I peered through the trees and sniffed, but there was no scent or smell of either Stacey or Rowan, which meant they could be anywhere. Hopefully, they weren't in the forest.

I turned and gave my mother a hug and she hugged me back tightly. "I love you" she whispered in my ear and I closed my eyes, not wanting to let go but knowing I needed to.

"I love you too, mother" I whispered back, and then reluctantly let go of her. I began to pull off my hospital gown as mother watched wide-eyed.

Lilac, it's time we got the hell out of here

I know, but this will hurt, no matter how you look at it. But you're right, we deserve so much better than this. We shouldn't be a second option for anyone.

Damn right. We need to be a priority, not someone who's easily dismissed by our mate. Let's get going.

We shifted into our white wolf and gave mother one last searching glance and then we were off, our paws thudding through the forest, dodging debris and fallen branches, the wind in our fur, darting back and forth until we reached the boundary line. Only then, did I shift back so that I could utter the words that would finally let me be free.

"I, Amber Henderson, reject you, Alpha Rowan Craven, as my mate, now and forevermore."

The sound of a wolf howling in the distance made me shift back to my wolf form and then, taking a deep breath, Lilac and I jumped over the boundary line and headed towards the next pack, leaving my ex-mate in the distance.

Chapter 80 - The Alpha's Rejected and Broken Mate

King Stefan

I crept closer towards the location, my feet barely hitting the ground, the wind in my hair and face. I was fast, faster than I'd ever been and I had yet to see a trap of some sort. I really hoped that Dylan was managing to cover my absence without being questioned by the council too much. The map was clutched in my hand tightly, but I barely needed it, having memorized the map's co-ordinates.

The scenery passed by in a blur, the sun going down. I debated whether to make a stop or to continue in the darkness. After all, vampires can see clearly at nighttime, far better than shifters. I wanted to keep going though, the children relying on me to save them. I couldn't bear the thought of them spending another night separated from their parents, even if Dylan and I had not managed to find said parents before I left.

I slowed down, wanting to be far more cautious, walking slowly now, my eyes scanning the dark forest. The co-ordinates led to a large cave and I could see what looked like two children in a homemade cage, restrained by shackles and chains to prevent their escape. There were no guards. That in itself was highly suspicious. I looked around but could see no evidence of anyone, nor could I smell the scent of rogues nearby.

There was a little boy and a girl sitting in the cage. Both had blonde hair and blue eyes and it seemed like they might be twins. The girl's hair was all matted, the pigtails she had were loose and dirty, and her clothes were slightly torn and ripped. The boy was not in much better shape, his hair too was dirty and his face was. His clothes were even more torn up and disheveled than his sisters, that is if they were brother and sister. Their facial features were almost identical. They were sobbing and the sound drifted up toward me, causing me to wince. It made my heart feel broken to hear them. How long had they been captured for? How long had they been missing?

I was careful, sliding my feet along, avoiding the leaves and debris, and trying not to make a sound that might give me away. There were no fires, no flames, nothing to help in the way of light or keep the creatures at bay. I managed to make my way to the back of the cage and held up a finger towards my lips, indicating that both children should keep quiet. Their eyes widened in disbelief. The boy hurriedly nodded, while the girl merely stared at me.

"Ssshhh" I murmured quietly "what's your name, little ones."

The boy hesitated and then spoke, so softly that my ears had to strain to hear it. "I'm Cory," he said shyly and the little girl piped up with "Carrie."

"Are you both brother and sister?"

They nodded.

"Where are your parents?"

They looked confused by that answer. "We don't have any" Cory said with a bewildered look on his adorable face. My heart sank. That meant that these two had to have been stolen from an orphanage or something.

I began to test the branches of the cage. They weren't too strong, in fact, they were no match for my strength but they would make a hell of a lot of noise when I broke them into small pieces.

"Where is the person who brought you here?" I asked softly, moving around to peer into their eyes. Both looked about to cry and I fervently hoped they wouldn't.

"Don't know" Carrie whispered, sucking on her thumb.

The brother nodded his agreement. Great, had they just been left here? That didn't make sense to me. This was a trap, I was certain of it.

"Well Carrie, Cory. I'm going to get you out of here" I promised thickly. I sniffed once more, determining there was no one nearby. With a shrug, I began to pull, hard at the thick branches, bending them down like they were nothing more than small twigs and sending them flying across the forest floor. I ripped the chains off the children and they gave a small cry, hugging me profusely. Then I stiffened as I heard someone's voice behind me.

"I guess you were right Alpha Gordon, he went straight for the children and ignored the fact we were surrounded" scoffed the voice. I quickly let go of the children, who were looking terrified, and straightened my shoulder's turning around. I was greeted by none other than the Alpha Rogue who must be Gordon, who looked immensely satisfied to see me.

"King Stefan" he greeted me cordially "it's a pleasure to meet you."

"I wish I could say the same thing" I snarled, eyeing the Alpha. He was huge, with broad shoulders and muscled arms. He had long shaggy brown hair and beard, and his skin was tanned from being outdoors. He looked like a viking warrior or something, that's how tall he was. I felt my mouth go dry just looking at him. He was surrounded by several other men, most looking tall and impressive, but some in a state of starvation. Clearly, these ones he found to be expendable, I thought to myself as they were the weaker shifters. Even as rogues they looked like they were easy to take care of.

"Jordan" snapped Alpha Gordon, motioning towards the man who had said his name, a scraggly-looking dude with unbleached blonde dreads and dark brown eyes, tanned skin, and stout looking. He resembled more of a surfer guy than he did a rogue and it made me wonder absently how the two of them had met. "Get the children" snarled Alpha Gordon.

I put both children behind me. "No, the agreement was that you would let them go if I came and I did as you asked."

Alpha Gordon cackled "you think that I would take your word for it? There's no way I'm going to lay bets you'll do everything I ask" he sneered. But I wasn't going to let them take the children. Instead, I turned to them both, watching them as they stared wide-eyed. They would have to take their chances in the forest, with luck I would be right behind them.

"Run" I muttered under my breath and they seemed to understand, Cory grabbing hold of Carrie's hand and tugging her along with him. Jordan let out a roar and went towards them and I punched him, hard in the face, making him stumble backward and giving the children a chance to escape. I immediately went on the offensive, running over and kicking and punching the men attempting to grab the children, fighting for all I was worth. I wasn't a King for nothing. One of them I drained completely dry of blood as I held him by the neck, gasping for air as Alpha Gordon watched me with narrowed eyes. He did not look pleased with how everything was going.

Jordan came running towards me and I tackled him, both of us rolling over and over on the ground, my fangs protruding as I bit him in the neck. He swatted me away and got to his feet, kicking out and missing as I dodged to the side and got up, my eyes now glowing red in my anger. I spared a glance over my shoulder. Over half the men had been taken down and the other half looked hesitant to approach me. There was no sign of Alpha Gordon but I could hear the kid's running footsteps as they got further and further away. They were safe then. I heaved a sigh of relief and then moved toward Jordan who raised his fists at me.

Thwack. I got a good hit on the side of his head and he gave a low growl and then shifted into his wolf form. Great, this was just the beginning then. He raced towards me, his claws glinting in the moonlight and I raced towards a nearby tree, climbing up and then throwing myself down on his back as he let out a loud roar, trying frantically to get me off of him. The other men shifted as well and I grimaced. I might be a royal vampire but there were more than half a dozen wolves now and the odds definitely weren't in my favor.

I went flying off Jordan's back and hit a tree trunk hard, hard enough that it went flying on its side. I was lucky not to be impaled on one of its branches. I rolled and got back to my feet, watching the wolves as they approached me in a circle, effectively cutting me off from escape. I pondered what to do and was about to jump up high when I heard a strange whirring noise come towards me and then felt a slight sting in my thigh. I glanced down in puzzlement, to see a dart embedded there. I glanced back up quickly

and saw Alpha Gordon standing there with a tranquilizer gun, a smirk on his face. He slowly lowered the gun down as the shifters growled, still in their positions.

What the fuck had he used on me? My limbs began to feel heavy and I felt myself topple sideways, hitting the forest floor hard. My limbs felt like they wouldn't move, no matter how hard I tried and I could feel my airway becoming constricted. Vampires, luckily, don't need to breathe oxygen as shifters do, otherwise, I was certain I'd be unconscious by now. As it was, all I could do was stare mutely up at the shifters, as they made way for their Alpha, who stepped past them all, a wide grin on his face.

"Finally" he breathes "finally I have you and your blood. You will heal me and all will be right," he said cryptically. I sniffed once more and was bewildered. Why couldn't I sense his wolf? He was an alpha, he gave off that aura, but I couldn't smell or sense his wolf at all, almost as though he didn't have one. But then, how had he gotten all these shifters to be loyal to him without one? It made no sense.

My eyelids were beginning to flutter closed. Alpha Gordon chuckled lightly under his breath. "You should see how pathetic you look" he hissed "such a weakling of a vampire. I expected more from you" he commented sourly.

I said nothing. My mouth opened and closed, but not a single noise was I able to utter. He bent over me and I felt another prick, this time in my arm, my eyes glancing down involuntarily to see a needle drawing blood. Fuck. My blood was potent, stronger than the average vampire, and could be used for all sorts of things. I imagined he wanted it for its healing abilities, but I couldn't see him using it on his lackeys, etc. He wanted the blood for himself, but what did he need to be healed? It had to be some sort of tumor or disease that was eating away at him, for he looked fine on the outside.

The needle withdrew from my arm and I grimaced, as the Alpha stood up and then quietly injected himself with the blood right in front of my eyes. I hissed, seeing his eyes glow red for a moment. The fool didn't know what he had just done. With that much blood, he would not only heal whatever was ailing him, but he would turn half-vampire as well. Maybe that had been his intention though. I swore silently under my breath. He began to convulse as his men looked on shocked, before he fell to the ground, frothing at the mouth. For a moment there was nothing but silence and then I heard Jordan's voice. "Alright, everyone, leave Alpha Gordon alone. Get the Vampire King and restrain him. You know what to do."

I felt myself being lifted up by several arms and then moved toward the cave. As we reached the cave, I closed my eyes in resignation, unable to fight the sedative I'd been given and passing out unconscious before they could restrain me.