

## **Chapter 23**

Nicole was tired of just hanging around and doing nothing all day. The boredom and idleness were eating her up. Because she spent all day doing nothing and waiting for Liam, she had time to worry about her current situation.

Perhaps, if she was occupied with something, she wouldn't have had the time to question her existence or wonder why life was unfair to her.

At Crimson, she was always occupied with something; whether working as the Luna, completing park duties, or working as Shane's slave. Once, she prayed that the Moon Goddess would give her rest because she was always outdoing herself and had no time to herself.

She attended both the old and the weak, the women and the children, even meetings and conferences. There were still times when she received torture from Shane and his sluts. It was a time of never-ending tasks.

Nicole also realized that the pampering and soft treatments weren't going to get her anywhere or set her free. She had been hungry for freedom for a long time, coupled with the fact that she was

getting bored and needed something to occupy her time.

She knew that she needed to do something, to find a purpose and sense of fulfillment in her life, so she made up her mind to start working to pay off her debt. It was a small step, but it was something that she could control, something that would give her a sense of accomplishment.

Nicole decided to talk to Alpha Liam about it. As she walked to his office, she felt a stream of nervousness flush within her. Alpha Liam always bore a powerful presence and she couldn't help but feel a little intimidated by him. Regardless, she knew she had to do that, so she pushed her nerves aside and knocked on the door.

"Come in," Alpha Liam's voice boomed from the other side of the door. And as always, it triggered the nerves in her body. Even his scent drove her wolf crazy.

Nicole took a deep breath and opened the door. Alpha Liam was sitting behind his desk, Nicole saw him engrossed in the study of a map of the forest which was on his table. He looked up and his piercing blue eyes locked on her.

As soon as she entered the room, she could feel the intense attraction between them. It was like the air around them was charged with electricity.

"Nicole," Alpha Liam said, his voice low and smooth. "What can I do for you?"

Nicole took a deep breath and gathered her thoughts. "Alpha Liam, I wanted to talk to you about something. I've been feeling a little restless lately, and I think that I would like to start working to pay off my debt."

Alpha Liam raised an eyebrow. "Working? What kind of work?"

Nicole hesitated for a moment, unsure of how to explain her plan. Her heart drummed in her chest as she felt Liam's gaze. "Well, I was thinking that I could do odd jobs around the Pack. Maybe help out with the gardening, the cooking, or even the cleaning. I just want to do something, to contribute in some way."

Scoffing, Liam leaned back in his chair. "Nicole, Nicole, Nicole. I cannot say I understand what you're feeling, but it's obvious that you've become preconditioned to suffering. If not, why on earth would you be suggesting such when you're under my care?"

Did I ask that you begin to pay debts? Other ladies would be basking in the joy and be proud to not have to lift a finger, but not Nicole, the Ex Luna of Crimson."

From where she stood, Nicole trembled at the slight anger and power laced in his voice. She

swallowed and looked away. Her body and mind were busy bringing up their moments together. Nicole felt a pang of disappointment at his words. It wasn't surprising, but it still hurt. Did he intend to keep her here forever? What would happen when he finally got tired? Nicole didn't want to live in bondage. She had hoped that Alpha Liam would understand her.

She opened her mouth to argue, but he beat her to it.

"Don't Nicole. Don't overstep your boundaries." He says dismissively, "When you're done with your yapping, you can go and sleep."

"What do you suggest, then?" She said defensively, tired of doing nothing.

"How about getting out of my sight until I call for you and knowing your place here?"

The mark and the number of times they had made love gave Nicole's wolf more audacity.

An annoyed growl fell off her lips, startling both her and Liam.

"Did you just?" He trailed off

Realizing what she had done, Nicole stepped back. Her hands clasped around her mouth and she shook in fear.

Liam let out a louder growl and got to his feet.

"You know, Nicole, that I don't have the time for this. You know that I've been busy trying to stop

the new enemy roaming the forest, yet you decide to waste my time?

This should be the last time this nonsense will occur. Besides, this is not the best time to be talking about this. We have a new enemy in the forest and I need to focus on protecting the Pack."

"But I can help. If there's nothing to do in the pack, I can help with..."

Liam looked at her for a long moment, his expression unreadable. Finally, he sighed. "I appreciate

your enthusiasm, Nicole. But I can't deal with this now, leave..."

Trembling, Nicole excused herself from his presence feeling frustrated. She had cooked up the courage to go and speak to Alpha Liam, and now he had scared her off. She couldn't continue like that, she needed something to do; she was tired of idling around. Yet, Liam's angry response terrified her so much.

A lot was going on in her head, so she decided to take a walk. As she wandered about, lost in thought, she nearly collided with Garrett. He caught her by the arm and steadied her with a concerned look on his face.

"Nicole, are you okay?" Garrett asked, his voice laced with worry.

Nicole forced a smile, trying to push aside her disappointment. "Yeah, I'm fine. I just had a meeting with Alpha Liam."

Garrett raised an eyebrow. "And?"

"He doesn't think it's a good idea for me to work right now. With the new enemy in the forest, he needs everyone to be focused on staying safe. The thing is, I need something to do, Beta. I'm going out of my mind staying in this pack house all day.

You're a high-ranking member of Dark Moon, so you know my true story. You know that I was bought. I need to earn and pay off that debt. I need my freedom. Dark Moon is a good place to be and the people here are accommodating, but I'm not happy."

Garrett nodded with a thoughtful expression. "I see and I know how hard it can be. Maybe there's something that we can do?"

Nicole looked at him, surprised. "What do you mean?"

Garrett shrugged. "Well, I've been meaning to talk to you about something. I've been doing some work on the side, helping some of the other packs with odd jobs and such. Nothing too difficult, just things like delivering messages and helping with repairs."

Nicole frowned, unsure of where he was going with that. "What has that got to do with me?"

"I was wondering if you might be interested in helping out," Garrett said, his voice tentative. "It's not an official Pack job, but it would serve as a means for you to contribute and earn some extra money to pay off your debt."

Nicole felt a spark of excitement ignite in her chest. The idea of working and having a purpose and a sense of accomplishment was too tempting to resist. "What kind of jobs?"

Garrett grinned. "Well, like I said, nothing too arduous. You mostly have to run errands and do odd jobs from here to other packs. They pay pretty well and it would be a way for you to earn some money."

Nicole thought for a moment, weighing the pros and cons. Alpha Liam wouldn't approve, but she needed to do something. "I'm interested. But how do we keep it a secret from Alpha Liam?"

Garrett's expression turned serious. "We'll have to be careful. We can't let anyone know, especially Alpha Liam. We'll have to meet in secret and come up with a plan."

Nicole nodded, feeling a mixture of excitement and fear wash over her. She liked the idea of working without supervision or protection since she had always been under someone's protection.

She had never wandered past pack borders before and she anticipated moving between borders in secret, especially since Dark Moon had new enemies. What excited her the most was the idea of earning something, becoming purposeful and venturing into the world outside the Pack. It was too tempting to ignore.

"Okay," she said, her voice firm. "Let's do it."

Over the next few days, Nicole and Garrett met in secret to plan their operation. They decided to keep their jobs as low-key as possible, taking on small tasks like delivering messages and running errands for Dark Moon in other Packs.

They secured a safe communication channel to keep in touch and they made sure to cover their tracks, leaving no evidence behind. Nicole was very tempted to let Asha, her only friend, in on the secret, but Garrett scolded her.

He reminded her that he was still testing her skills and until he was sure that she was perfectly capable of handling herself, that it wasn't a permanent position.

In the days that followed, he took her out secretly and showed her hidden routes to follow. He taught her to mask her scent, taught her how to obtain information and a lot of other things that Nicole was new to. Most importantly, he taught her to disguise herself, so she appeared as another

wolf.

He reminded her that Crimson was still sore over what happened to them and could come for her despite the blood oath and so, she had to be as stealthy as possible.

Nicole found herself enjoying the work. It was satisfying to feel useful again. She was able to earn enough money to start paying off her debt, and she took pride in knowing that she was doing something other than lounging around and waiting on the busy Alpha Liam. She loved seeing the world outside the Pack.

But the secrecy of their operation weighed heavily on her. She knew that Alpha Liam would never approve, so she was constantly on edge, afraid of being caught.

Before heading out each day, she made sure that Liam would not seek for her for the whole day.

To do that, she would purposely go after him and annoy him when he was busy, so he would chase her away and then she could do whatever she wanted for the rest of the day.

It worked for the time being, but deep down she knew that once the problem with the witch in the forest was over, she needed to find a smarter way to leave the pack without Liam noticing.

It was also crazy that she transferred through the same forest that Dark Moon had warned its pack

members to stay away from. Although it was exciting, but Nicole knew that the moment Liam caught her, hell would break loose.

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Chapter 24

## **Chapter 24**

Liam was frustrated. He had never faced an enemy like the witch before. He had assumed the position of an Alpha at a very young age and had to fight off a lot of bullies and older wolves to keep his stake in his territory. But then, those enemies were werewolves like him; they had always been known and visible.

The witch? The witch was far from that. Her power was formidable, and it seemed that no matter how hard he tried, he could not understand her motives.

He spent countless hours with his warriors, trying to come up with a strategy to defeat her, but she always seemed one step ahead. It was one random attack or another.

No one had been hurt yet. It was only lesser spells with strong dark magic that had people running Helter skelter. Deep down, Liam knew that she was coming. He knew that soon the witch would

do something that would drive him crazy and the whole thing was unsettling.

As Liam paraded the forest with the scouts, they could sense the witch's malignant aura, but they couldn't locate her. She was like a shadow, always lurking just out of reach and taunting them with her power.

The attacks increased, and Liam knew that it was only a matter of time before the witch behind them made her presence known. And when the warning finally came, it was not what he expected. He had been exhausted after their final search in the forest, and his intuition screamed at him to allow the wolves who were present at the bar to go. He was deliberating about it with James and Garrett, and they concluded on taking them somewhere far away and dumping them with foodstuffs.

Suddenly, there was a commotion. Out from the forest which he had just searched came a young wolf, walking out of the same forest they had just searched.

Rogue! His senses alerted him immediately. The warrior wolves barred their teeth to attack, but the young male continued walking boldly until he was before them all.

Liam was stunned but also irritably angry. Firstly, they had just searched the same forest;

secondly, they had tightened their security at the border, so how on earth were these things happening?

Fear curled up his spine as he reasoned that the witch had probably snuck in and was already among his pack members. However, he pushed that thought away immediately because he would have known. It was why he was Alpha; his senses would have notified him immediately.

"Liam Hallows, Son of the Alpine Hybrids that came down from the mountains and conquered all.

I'm coming. This time you have bitten more than you can chew, I will return you to your cold dreary mountains.

You do not belong here. Prepare! But not for battle, because there's nothing you can do against me. I'm coming to end you, Liam Hallows." His words were laced with dark magic that sent chills all through Liam's body.

As he finished speaking, the rogue fell to the ground in torment. He was obviously possessed by the witch's power. He growled and writhed in pain until he died.

The message was clear - the witch was not to be underestimated. She had sent a warning to Alpha Liam, letting him know that she was coming for him. And he knew that he needed to prepare his pack for her arrival.

"Fuck!" He growled as the body of the wolf was carried away!

"Ponder on her words, Alpha, have you heard them before? Does it sound familiar? She made mention of your origin. That's from thousands of years ago. Is it a family feud?" James questioned.

"You think I haven't thought of all this?" He raged, "I have! There's nothing. Her words feel familiar, but there's no remembrance of them."

Liam was frustrated. He paced around with his jaw clenched and his mind in deep thought. He knew that his pack was strong. When he became Alpha, Liam worked hard to strengthen the people. The Dark Moon was known to be tough, but it was not invincible. He needed to find a way to protect them.

The witch's power was so strong that he realized he needed to train his pack members, teaching them how to build up magical defenses.

She was yet to attack the Dark Moon. All she did was play around with other small territories around his own, easily influencing their wolves to come into the Dark Moon and act crazy. He knew that with that announcement, her coming was close.

"I think the reason she's able to sneak past our defenses is that she's able to subdue those at the

border with her power," Garret mused.

"Yes, witches have that effect. They can control the mind and action with their powers,"

"There are some wolves who resist that. It is said that in the times before now, witches used these tricks against werewolves, but then there was a special breed that wasn't affected by any form of magic. They were the ones who defeated the witches.

"I've heard about them," Liam murmured, "but aren't they extinct? They were killed because they began to resist even their Alpha's powers."

James nodded, "That was long before the werewolf hierarchy came into existence. Because of them, the elders were inspired to differentiate between the dominant from the other wolves. Those wolves were either too dominant to respect anyone or too submissive to the effect of any magic.

They were slaughtered but some survived. To hide and preserve their race, they interbred with other wolves. They are rare now. If this witch is as powerful as she looks, then it's only a 'witch bane' that can kill her. It is also rumored that this breed possesses magical powers too."

"Nice moment going back in time there but, what we need now is to protect ourselves," Garrett cut in. "You cannot go around in search of an extinct race when you need to protect the pack.

They are like myths."

It was a daunting task, but Liam was determined to protect his pack at all costs.

He turned to his chief warrior for advice. "What can we do?" he asked.

"Garret is right, we need to train our pack members," James replied. "We can't rely on finding a witch. We need to make sure that every werewolf in our pack is strong enough to resist the witch's power."

Liam nodded. It was a good idea, but he knew it would take time. He needed a plan of action. He called a meeting with the Pack stakeholders to discuss the matter.

"We are facing a powerful enemy, and I need to make sure that every wolf in our pack is strong enough to resist her power. We need to train them, but we also need to find a way to protect them."

The stakeholders nodded in agreement. They knew that the witch was a formidable foe, and they needed to be prepared.

"I suggest we reach out to other packs," one of the stakeholders suggested. "We need to find allies who can help us."

Liam hesitated. He was not keen on asking for help. He even wanted to keep it quiet because

when the most powerful pack cried out for help, he might get allies, but it would also bring on more enemies. Dark Moon had a lot of keen eyes waiting for it to stumble.

He sighed and ran his hands through his hair.

"No. We will seek help through other means. From today, reach out. Let's secretly inform our sister packs and closest allies, then seek information about witch banes. I know most of them became lone wolves for their family's sake. Find them." Liam instructed.

After a while, he added, "Please be nice to anyone you find. We cannot force them to help us.

Werewolf kind turned their backs on them a long time ago. It is right that they don't want to respond to us."

"Noted Alpha, but if I may ask, why is this witch after you?"

Liam shrugged, he had racked his brain to find answers.

"It's above me. Today she made mention of my origin. I should go back in history and check my lineage. I'll be doing that." Liam answered. He decided to also visit old werewolves who knew the pack's history.

As the meeting ended, Liam found himself thinking of Nicole. He wondered why she was not

around and disturbing him. In recent times, he only saw her once. He missed her, even though he knew he was not supposed to.

He tried to push thoughts of her away and told himself that what he missed was her body and nothing else. It was jarring to think that he missed Nicole. He pushed thoughts of her away and focused on training his pack members.

He spent hours every day working with the wolves, teaching them how to control their magic and build up their resistance.

As he worked, he began to notice that some of the wolves had a bit of natural resistance to magic.

He equipped them and himself with techniques to evade being subdued as much as possible.

Some pack members were better than others, it was difficult for power to penetrate them at all.

Liam knew that these wolves would be invaluable in the coming battle. Although they were still very weak compared to the Witch Bane, and could still be harmed after a long while, it was better than nothing.

Nicole wandered back into his mind again. He knew that he should not be thinking of her. She was a distraction and he had a responsibility for his pack, but he could not help himself.

His wolf kept on whining about how much it missed her, it also hinted at how something was

wrong with her. He could sense his wolf's fear of losing her and fear that the bond was weakening. Liam refused to dwell too much on it. Although he wanted to be rid of his attraction to her, it broke his heart a little.

During practice one morning, he sensed her presence even before she wandered into the training arena.

He was, like on the first day he met her, stunned by her appearance. Her ash-brown hair seemed to flow in the wind, she looked healthier, stronger even. He smirked, proud that being in his pack brought out the beauty in her. As for the bond, it was still as strong and viable.

Immediately she saw him, she froze in place and turned to scamper away.

"Don't," he growled, startling the trainees gathered around. "Come here,"

Slowly, she moved toward him.

"Liam," she said, her voice soft and hesitant.

Cutting her off, he pulled her into a hug and sniffed her scent. His wolf was overjoyed. She smelled glorious. The only reason he wasn't trying to kiss her was that it would mean he was claiming her as his before his pack.

He couldn't do that, he had always kept his many women and relationships away from the Dark

Moon. Even holding Nicole like he was doing now was sending a strong message, even to the many females who had tried and were still trying to claim him.

He couldn't stop himself, to him nothing smelled as wonderful as Nicole and he had been away from her for too long.

He could detect a few changes in her scent, it was certain that she had been exploring a lot and she was outside frequently, even in the forest.

That ticked him off.

"Have you been outside," he growled into her ears. She trembled in his arms and he loved it. He was fighting the urge to kiss her. He wanted to take her somewhere private and do so many things with her.

"Damn, Nicole answer me."

"Maybe," she whispered.

"Are you crazy? You're not even strong enough to defend yourself from an ordinary attack, talkless of a witch,"

To the curious pack members, he laced his voice with power and said, "Resume training and stop listening,"

"I-I told you that I was bored, didn't I?"

Liam pulled away, realizing for the first time that she was his weakest link. With the bond still viable, he couldn't risk losing her.

"From now on, you're going to be training with the pack, I cannot have you playing around. You're part of the Dark Moon until this shit between us is over." He said.

Nicole stared skeptically at him, "But I thought," "No buts, you train with us. You are training now. The Dark Moon doesn't harbor weaklings."

Nicole shrugged and walked towards Asha. As he watched her go, the thought of what would be when he was done with her flooded his mind. He didn't want to think about it. He needed to focus on protecting his pack. He watched her train and was quite impressed that she was able to stand her ground.

He realized that he didn't know anything about Nicole. He had always thought she was a trophy Luna, who did nothing but fulfil Shane's wishes. Seeing her fight showed him how wrong she was. He decided that it was good he was wrong. He didn't want to know much about her. He needed his thoughts to be under control. But just as he thought he had it all under control, the witch struck again.

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