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Chapter 56

Her hands began trailing his tattooed-covered arms. He sighed and pulled her onto him, so she rubbed her cunt against his throbbing crotch. Nicole gasped as want and pleasure thrummed through her.

"Breath," he whispered into her ear, She inhaled deeply and exhaled slowly. "Good girl," he murmured. She swallowed. She wasn't prepared for it when he slowly began to trail kisses on her neck.

"Fuck," she cursed, igniting a dark chuckle from him. The rumble of his chest made her core throb.

"Nicole, I reckon we need a long shower before getting into bed. What do you think?" He murmured, finding his mark and kissing it. Nicole moaned, "Yes Alpha."

His torturing lips took her out of the world. She could barely comprehend what he was saying.

His hands left her waist and palmed her breasts.

She collapsed completely into him.

"Liam..." She moaned.

He chuckled, "What you're feeling now is what you do to me every time. Do you understand?" "Y-yes."

"Now about that shower," he said, nipping her neck and letting her go.

A moan of protest escaped her the moment they lost contact and her eyes fell on his fat dick.

"Hey, eyes up here." He growled.

Exhaling slowly, she dragged her eyes off his dick and admired his abs. She was going crazy with the need to touch and explore him. To map out his tattoos.

"Nicole," he growled and looked into her eyes again.

"Keep your eyes trained on mine."

His tone caused her to shudder, but she obeyed him. "Now walk into the shower," he instructed. Her legs began moving on their own and he followed from behind.

He was barely inside before she dragged him and joined their lips together. She felt like she would die if she didn't have him immediately. The kiss was slow and filled with passion.

Reluctantly, Liam detached his lips from hers and held her back.

"Stay," he grumbled, his eyes filled with lust as he looked at her body. "Fuck, you're so perfect." He looked so hungry for her. The deranged look in his eyes mirrored her lust-crazed own. He

grabbed her face and gave her a lingering kiss, then stopped.

"Liam," she growled frustratedly.

"Patience," he teased, with a smirk.

She jerked back as the cold water poured on her. His eyes lingered on her breasts. He dragged his eyes off them, then crashed into her, kissing her roughly. He pushed her to the wall and his mouth trailed down her body until he locked one of her nipples in his mouth.

Nicole couldn't recognize the sounds coming out of her.

"L-Liam," She moaned, writhing in his grasp. He chuckled and moved to the other breast. "I missed you Nicole," He gritted as he flicked her nipple.

With his mouth still on her breasts, his hands wandered to her core and began teasing her clit. She

shook with pleasure.

"Oh Nicole, you're so ready for me," he growled.

"Oh my Goddess," she screamed, "Liam."

She wasn't prepared for it when he inserted his long fingers into her. Her core clenched around his fingers and he groaned.

His fingers fucked her until she felt herself approaching climax.

"Oh no, you don't," he growled abruptly, hefting her up and slamming her back into the wall. When he plunged into her, he let out a growl. Her eyes were rolled back and her mouth hung open. She moved, trying to adjust so she could fit him completely.

"Nicole," he warned, but she wriggled, moving until she was stretched to contain him. His head collapsed on her shoulders and he groaned softly. He hissed as her walls clenched around him. She felt him tremble.

"Liam, fuck me," she growled.

As if her voice was the key to unlocking him. He groaned and began to thrust like his life depended on it. The clapping sounds, her screams and his groans echoed around the bathroom. Nicole's nails dug into his back and scratched it. "F-uu-ck, Liam," she sang as he rammed into her. The pleasure threatened to drive her mad and soon her body was racked with spasms. It was amazing as he had his release a few seconds later. Her legs slid off his waist and wobbled, but he held her tight as he panted into her shoulders. They stood in each other's embrace for a long minute until they both recovered. Afterwards, he grabbed the soap and began to lather her body. "This is going to be one long shower, Nicole. I hope you know that I'm just beginning." He said

with a sly grin. "I want you to understand how much I yearned for you."

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Nicole lay beside Liam, the warmth of his body enveloping her. She woke up the next morning, her eyes fluttering open to find him still peacefully asleep. A mixture of contentment and fear washed over her.

As the remnants of her dreams faded away, her past traumas clawed their way back into her consciousness. The memories of Crimson, the abuse she endured, surged forward like a relentless tide. It was a part of her she couldn't shake off, no matter how much she wished she could. Guilt gnawed at Nicole's heart as she admitted to herself the truth she had been avoiding—she was attracted to Liam. In the depths of her being, she felt an undeniable pull towards him. But that same attraction sparked her fears, igniting a fire of doubt within her. How could she trust him? How could she let herself be vulnerable again? The memories of their previous encounters still haunted her. Liam had been distant, even cold,

unaware of the torment she had endured in Crimson.

His initial treatment of her had been a painful reminder of the abuse she had suffered. The wounds

inflicted upon her heart had not fully healed, and she feared that history would repeat itself.

Nicole's emotions waged war against her. She yearned for the love and affection Liam offered, yet her fear whispered cautionary tales.

The scars of her past etched deeply into her soul, creating an impenetrable barrier between her and the rest of the world. She couldn't bear the thought of exposing herself to more pain.

Seeking solace, she withdrew from Liam, distancing herself emotionally. Walls rose around her heart, shielding her from the vulnerability she feared. She retreated into the shadows, isolating herself from everyone, especially him. It was a defense mechanism, a survival instinct she had honed over time.

But now, he was her mate. What a twisted fate. She had thought that whatever pull she had on him would be severed when her wolf awoke. Instead, they were fated mates. She was still trying to wrap her head around it as she tried to adjust her position.

The moment she moved, Liam's grip around her tightened instinctively. He emitted a soft snore, a sound that brought a tender smile to her lips. His wolf was present, even in his sleep, ready to protect and guard her. It was a small gesture, but it warmed her heart immeasurably.

She closed her eyes and tried to relax and bask in the feeling that spread through her body as remnants of their passionate night together lingered in her thoughts.

Sleep had left her, so she surveyed Liam's room, which was bathed in soft morning light, casting a gentle glow over the intimate space they shared. Her body buzzed for more. Her wolf was ready to wake him up and continue from where they stopped. She looked at Liam and was captivated by his peaceful expression. Then she sighed. How could she allow herself to be so attracted to him after everything she had endured? How were they supposed to be mates? She wanted freedom, but being his mate meant she was attached

to Dark Moon for life.

Liam stirred in his sleep, emitting a light snore that made her smile. As if he was reading her mind, his arms tightened around her instinctively, as if he couldn't bear to let her go. She loved it, and at the same time, she was wary of herself. The warmth and protectiveness in his touch were what she had ached for all her life. It was what she wanted from Shane. She had wanted him to touch her with care. It would have succeeded in eroding some if not all of her doubts and fears. Tired of staying in one position, she shifted slightly in his embrace, attempting to find a more comfortable position. Her movement roused him from his slumber.

His eyes fluttered open, revealing a mix of sleepy confusion and sharp focus. In an instant, his wolf instincts took over, his gaze scanning the room for any signs of danger. When he realized it was her, a tender smile graced his lips.

"Good morning," he murmured, his voice husky with sleep. "Are you alright?"

Nicole met his gaze, her heart skipping a beat. "Yes, I'm fine," she replied softly, her voice betraying the underlying emotions swirling within her. "Just adjusting."

Liam's eyes softened, his fingers gently caressing her cheek. "You don't have to be afraid anymore, Nicole," he reassured her, his voice filled with sincerity. "I'm here, and I'll protect you with everything I have."

His words resonated deep within her, melting away some of the barriers she had erected around

her heart. A small part of her longed to believe in his promises, to trust that he had changed and truly saw her for who she was. Another emotion overwhelmed her. It was the desire to be with her mate.

Their faces drew closer, their lips some inches apart, and a sudden knock on the door interrupted the fragile moment they shared. Garrett's voice followed, muffled but urgent.

"Alpha, I apologize for the interruption, but we have an urgent matter to discuss," Garrett said through the closed door.

Liam sighed, torn between his responsibilities as an alpha and the budding connection between him and Nicole. Reluctantly, he released her from his embrace and climbed out of bed.

His movements are fluid and purposeful. Nicole couldn't help the pang of disappointment that washed over her as the intimacy of the moment was abruptly severed. Her wolf growled haughtily. It wanted its mate and it wanted it immediately.

"Wait here, Nicole," Liam instructed gently, his eyes filled with regret. "I'll be back as soon as I can."

Nicole nodded, her heart heavy with a mixture of longing and uncertainty. She watched as Liam

slipped on a shirt and made his way to the door, leaving her alone in his room. The emptiness that enveloped her felt suffocating, and she fought against the rising tide of doubt threatening to consume her.

He was her mate, so what next? Would his pack even accept her? They didn't have any choice when an Alpha like Liam was concerned. Would he accept her? She remembered clearly how he wanted to rid himself of the mark; she knew he had been trying to show her affection lately, but did it mean he wanted her as a mate?

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Minutes turned into what felt like an eternity, and Nicole paced the room restlessly. The weight of her past bore down on her, the memories of pain and mistreatment etched deeply into her psyche. She wondered if she would ever truly escape the shadows that haunted her, if she would ever find solace and acceptance within the confines of a pack. She should leave, she wanted to leave but she couldn't.

Just as her anxiety reached its peak, the door swung open, and Liam reentered the room. His eyes searched for hers, an intensity burning within them. "I'm sorry it took longer than I expected," he apologized, a hint of regret colouring his words. "But I'm here now. I hope you can forgive me." Nicole studied him for a moment, her gaze tracing the lines of sincerity etched upon his face. In that instant, she made a choice— to let go of the past and embrace the possibility of a future with Liam. With a hesitant smile, she stepped closer to him.

"There's nothing to forgive," she whispered, her voice barely audible. "It's nothing." Instead of the smirk she was accustomed to, he looked longingly at her. "It's not nothing, Nicole. Nothing about you, is nothing okay?" Her heart skipped several beats at once. "Okay." Relief washed over Liam's features, his eyes shimmering with unspoken emotions. Without a word, he closed the distance between them, his hands cradling her face tenderly.

"Mate," he growled softly, his wolf making itself known.

Nicole's heart fluttered as her wolf purred. She was suddenly shy as a shiver ran down her spine. Liam smirked, then pulled her closer. They leaned in for their anticipated kiss when another knock

hit the door. Frustration creased Liam's brow, his desire for privacy momentarily overshadowed by the intrusion.

"I'll be right back," Liam murmured, his voice laced with annoyance. He planted a quick but tender kiss on Nicole's forehead before making his way toward the door.

Garrett stood on the other side, his expression grave and tense. The moment Liam swung the door open and let out a growl. Garrett wasted no time in delivering his report, his voice laced with urgency.

"Alpha, we have a problem," Garrett began, "I apologize for the interruption, but Nicole is missing again."

Liam's voice, laced with irritation, snapped back, "She isn't missing. She's right here with me." Startled by the conversation, Nicole couldn't resist the temptation to peer out and observe the exchange between Liam and Garrett. She gently pushed the door open, just enough to catch a glimpse of the two men.

"Why would you think she's missing?" Liam retorted, his tone edged with irritation.

Nicole's presence caught Garrett off guard. His eyes widened in surprise, his brows furrowing as he assessed the situation before him.

The weird look in his eyes did not escape Nicole's notice; it was a blend of astonishment and something she had yet to understand. It was clear that her presence had caught him off guard and left him less than pleased.

Clearing his throat, Garrett quickly regained his composure and refocused his attention on Liam. "Apologies, Alpha. I must have been mistaken. It's just that we couldn't find her," he explained, a touch of exasperation coloring his words.

"Asha said she ran off into the forest in a strange manner, and we thought she needed some time alone, but when we didn't see her, even after dark, we panicked."

Liam's expression softened, his concern evident in his voice. "She was with me, Garrett. It's safer this way."

Garrett nodded, but the tension in his shoulders didn't fully dissipate. "Understood, Alpha. I'll make sure to keep a closer eye on things in the future."

Before Liam could respond, Garrett continued his report, his voice carrying a hint of urgency.

"That's not all, Alpha. Lilian has demanded to return to her former pack."

Liam's shock was visible, his eyes narrowing as he processed the gravity of the situation. He knew

too well the dangers that awaited Lilian if she were to return to her former pack. The witch could attack again.

Nicole stared wide-eyed at both of them as she wondered what Lilian thought.

"No, that's not happening," Liam declared firmly, his voice laced with determination. "It's not safe for her there."

Garrett nodded, his voice filled with concern. "I tried to reason with her, but she insisted on going back. She believes she can handle the situation, but I fear it's too risky."

Liam growled as he raked his head, "What the hell is wrong with all of you today," he grumbled. His wolf was pissed. It wanted to stay with its mate. Liam needed to stay with her to assure her that he wanted to be with her. From the bond they shared, he could feel the doubts seeping in. Liam's jaw clenched, his mind racing with the complexities of the predicament. He needed to ensure the safety of both Nicole and his sister while maintaining peace within his own pack. Why was Lilian always being bitchy in times like this? Liam finally replied, his tone resolute. "Make it clear that Lilian is to remain within the pack's territory until further notice. I don't want any risks taken. I'll go and see her now."

Garrett nodded, his eyes flicking at Nicole again before returning his gaze to Liam. "Understood, Alpha. I'll relay your message immediately." As Garrett turned to leave, Nicole couldn't help but feel a mixture of unease and curiosity. Something was amiss, and she sensed that Garrett's reaction held more significance than what was

apparent on the surface.

"Wait," Liam called out suddenly, "I'll do it myself." His eyes turned golden as he relayed the information. As soon as he was done, he turned his attention back to Nicole, who stood in the doorway, her presence undeniable. His voice softened, tinged with a mixture of protectiveness and concern. "Nicole, stay here in my chambers," he instructed firmly, his eyes locked with hers. "Avoid any contact with Lilian until I can resolve the situation. Your safety is my priority."

Nicole nodded, her heart quickening at the intensity of his gaze. The fear in his eyes made her curious. She had never seen Liam as vulnerable as he was with her. She understood the gravity of the situation and trusted Liam's judgment. "I'll stay put," she assured him, her voice steady. Liam's lips twitched into a half-smile, he was worried but undeniably grateful. "Thank you," he said quietly, his voice filled with unspoken appreciation.

As soon as Liam left, Garrett pinned her with a stare. "What's going on?"

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Garrett turned his attention to Nicole, his expression serious and probing. The air seemed to grow tense as he fired questions at her, leaving her feeling cornered and unsettled.

"Nicole, what's going on?" Garrett asked, his voice laced with a mix of irritation and concern.

"You know that you're not supposed to leave the pack as soon as we resolve the issue with the witches. Why did you disappear without a word, and what are you doing here?"

Nicole's heart sank, guilt flooding her being. She had tried to escape the weight of her past to find solace and acceptance within Liam's pack. But now, facing Garrett's scrutiny, it felt like she had betrayed herself.

"I... I didn't mean to cause any trouble," she stammered, her voice tinged with remorse. "I just needed some time alone to sort through my thoughts."

Garrett's annoyance seemed to deepen, and she couldn't fathom why. The tension was growing uncomfortable, and she struggled to find the right words to explain herself without revealing the true nature of her relationship with Liam.

"I understand that, Nicole," Garrett replied, his tone strained. "But you have to understand that we're in the middle of a dangerous situation. Your actions affect everyone in this pack. We can't afford any distraction whatsoever or deviations from the plan."

Nicole nodded, her eyes downcast, the weight of guilt intensifying. "I'm sorry, Garrett. I didn't mean to be a burden or cause any complications. I'll make sure it doesn't happen again."

Garrett's gaze bore into her, searching for something she couldn't quite discern. The silence hung heavy between them as he assessed the situation, his features a mask of unreadable emotions.

Finally, he spoke in frustration and disappointment, "Nicole, I thought I could trust you with yourself and your emotions. I believed you understood the right reasons, and you had started ignoring the pull of the mark.

You said it yourself that after earning enough, you would pay off Liam and be set free. And then you became a witch bane, so I figured that you would help us in our fight against the witches,

then leave. But now, I wonder if you're truly capable of doing it."

Nicole's eyes widened, her heart sinking further. "I want you to heal, Nicole, but right now, I'm worried that you're too distracted and not committed to setting yourself free."

Nicole's conscience pricked her. She disliked that her actions had created doubt in Garrett's mind. The realization cut so deep that she struggled further to find words good enough to defend herself without revealing the truth about her bond with Liam. "I am committed, Garrett," she pleaded, her voice laced with desperation. "I've endured so much, and being here has given me a chance at a new life. I want to help, to be part of something bigger than myself. I also want my freedom. I want to heal, too."

Garrett's gaze softened momentarily, a flicker of understanding crossing his features. But it quickly dissipated, replaced by a hardened resolve. "You have to prove it, then," he said firmly. "Actions speak louder than words, Nicole. Show me that you're willing to put your well-being above your personal desires."

Nicole's heart sank even further. She had hoped for acceptance and understanding, but instead, she found herself facing a daunting challenge—a test of her loyalty and commitment.

"I will," she whispered, her voice filled with determination. "I'll prove myself, Garrett. I won't let you down."

The tension in the room seemed to ease slightly as Garrett's stern expression softened, his gaze holding a glimmer of reluctant respect. "I just hope you're right, Nicole?" he replied, his voice tinged with a hint of uncertainty. "For all our sakes." As they stood there, with the weight of their conversation hanging in the air, Nicole couldn't help but feel a pang of regret. She wished she could confide in Garrett, tell him what exactly happened, but she wasn't sure anymore.

The fear of the unknown and the consequences it might bring held her back. She had to protect their secret, their connection, even if it meant enduring the weight of guilt and the uncertainty of Garrett's reactions. Her wolf didn't trust him at that moment.

"I... I didn't plan for any of these, " she stammered, trying to explain to him, her voice remorseful. "Things just... happened, and I found myself drawn to Liam. I didn't mean to cause any trouble." Garrett's irritation seemed to intensify, his tone harsh. "You're putting yourself and the pack in danger, Nicole. You can't afford to let emotions cloud your judgment."

Nicole's gaze fell to the ground, a blend of shame and confusion washing over her. She hadn't expected Garrett's reaction to be so severe. It was as if he held some deeper resentment towards her, but she couldn't fathom why.

"I understand the risks," she murmured, her voice barely above a whisper. "I never wanted to cause harm. I just... I didn't expect to find a connection like this. It's complicated." Garrett's eyes bore into hers, searching for something she couldn't quite decipher. His voice softened, but the undertone of frustration remained. "Nicole, we've known each other for a while now. I've always looked out for you. I just don't want to see you hurt again."

Nicole's brow furrowed in confusion. She had always considered Garrett a friend, someone she could trust. But his words now held a hint of reproach, leaving her feeling vulnerable and uncertain.

"I appreciate your concern, Garrett," she replied cautiously, choosing her words carefully. "But I have to make my own choices, remember?" A flicker of surprise crossed Garrett's face, quickly replaced by a mask of indifference. His voice hardened once again. "This isn't just about your feelings, Nicole. There are bigger things at stake. You have a role to play."

Nicole's wolf clawed within. It was mad that Garrett was bringing up Nicole's insecurities.

"Nicole, you have to understand," Garrett continued as he spoke earnestly. "I've seen what you went through in your previous pack. I watched you suffer, and I don't want to see you go through that again. Liam may be the alpha, but love and care are not his strong suits."

Nicole winced at the mention of her past trauma, the memories threatening to consume her. She ached to defend Liam, to tell Garrett that he had changed, that he had shown her kindness and compassion she had never experienced before. But the pain in her heart silenced her, leaving her unable to find the words to articulate her conflicting emotions.

Garrett's gaze softened as he noticed the hurt in Nicole's eyes, his tone milder. "Nicole, I'm sorry if my words hurt you. I truly am just looking out for your well-being. I don't want to see you hurt again."

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Tears welled in Nicole's eyes, her voice trembling as she finally found the strength to respond. "I appreciate your concern, Garrett," she replied, her voice quivering with suppressed emotion. "But I think Liam has changed. He's shown me kindness, understanding..."

Garrett's features hardened, his voice curt. "Nicole, you can't let your emotions cloud your judgment. You've been through trauma, and this is why sometimes it's hard to distinguish between true affection and the illusion of safety. Sometimes, people can change temporarily. It's important to think long-term, to consider the consequences." Nicole's voice trembled as she tried to convey her feelings. "I know that. I know what I want, Garrett. My decision hasn't changed yet. Give me a break."

She had hoped for understanding, for support from someone she considered a confidant. Instead, she felt a growing sense of isolation and a gnawing ache of betrayal towards herself.

Nicole suddenly felt tired and drained. "I never intended to disrupt anything. I just wanted... a moment of happiness, some time away from the pain I've endured."

"Nicole, I understand that. But we have to think about the pack, about their safety and yours. You

have a gift, a unique ability to withstand the magic of witches. It's crucial that you fulfil your purpose. At the same time, you shouldn't get too attached. It's temporary."

Nicole's eyes welled with unshed tears, the weight of her choices, and the burden placed upon her shoulders becoming almost unbearable. She had always longed for freedom, for a chance to be her own person, yet it felt like she had betrayed herself and her convictions.

"I never asked for this power," she whispered, her voice trembling. "I also never deserved the pain and abuse I endured before. I thought... I thought...." Garrett's gaze softened, his voice milder this time. "Nicole, I don't doubt your strength or your resilience. But sometimes, the choices we make have consequences we can't foresee. I just want to protect you, to protect the pack."

Tears trickled down Nicole's cheeks, her emotions spiraling within her. The conflicting desires to follow her heart and fulfil her responsibilities tore at her soul, leaving her feeling torn and broken.

"I appreciate your concern, Garrett," she managed to say, her voice choked with emotion. "But I need to figure this out for myself. I can't deny the connection I feel with Liam, no matter the risks."

Garrett's features melted just as he was beginning to see reasons and resignation settled upon his face. "I can't force you to do anything, Nicole. Just promise me that you'll think about the consequences, about what's at stake.

We're in the midst of a war, and the choices we make now can make or mar our future. As I said earlier, I don't doubt your judgment or your ability to make your own choices. But please, be cautious. Protect yourself. I can't bear to see you hurt again."

Nicole nodded, a mix of determination and sadness coursing through her. "I promise, Garrett, I will be cautious. I won't let my guard down completely. I'll consider everything and make the best

decision I can. I have to give it a chance, for my own sake."

Garrett's shoulders sagged as he spoke, getting weary of the conversation. "I understand, Nicole. I truly do. I just hope that you won't have to pay a heavy price for your choices."

Nicole's heart ached at the weight of his words. All she wanted was a chance at happiness, a chance to heal from her past and embrace a future filled with love and acceptance.

"I don't want to cause any harm, Garrett," she whispered, her voice expressing vulnerability. "But

I also can't deny whatever this is. I hope you can understand."

Garrett's expression softened with a hint of sadness in his eyes, "I do understand, Nicole. I hope I'm wrong about Liam. I hope he can prove me wrong."

Nicole reached out, placing a hand gently on Garrett's arm. "Thank you for looking out for me, Garrett. I value your friendship and your concern. Just trust that I'll do everything I can to protect myself and the pack."

Garrett's expression softened slightly, a glimmer of compassion shining through his hardened exterior.

Nicole nodded, her tears now mingling with a renewed determination. "I promise, Garrett. I won't take this lightly.."

With that, the weight of their conversation hung heavy in the air, leaving an unspoken tension between them. As they exchanged one last glance, Nicole turned away, retreating back into the safety of Liam's chambers. The war in her head was waging greater than it did before.

~

Liam approached Lilian's chambers with a growing sense of annoyance and weariness. He longed to spend more time with Nicole to revel in their newfound connection.

But it seemed that fate had other plans, constantly throwing distractions in his path. His wolf was on the edge, its agitation fueling his own short temper. He silently hoped that no one would dare to rile him up further, especially his sister. As he made his way to Lilian's room, he could already hear the echoes of her tantrum reverberating through the halls. The sound grated on his nerves, intensifying the tension that had built up within him. He had to address the situation. He couldn't ignore his responsibilities as the Alpha, no matter how much he wished to be elsewhere. Determined to maintain control, he reached out through their mind link and contacted James.

James, accompanied me to Lilian's chambers, he conveyed— his mental tone clipped and curt. I could use some support.

James's response was swift. Of course, Alpha. I'll be there in a moment.

To his relief, James appeared at his side in a matter of moments, his presence easing some of the tension coiling within him.

They exchanged brief pleasantries, engaging in small talk as they walked through the corridors toward Lilian's room. Liam appreciated the distraction. It was indeed a momentary respite from the mounting frustration he was feeling.

James, always perceptive, seemed to sense his state of mind and offered a few lighthearted anecdotes, attempting to lighten up the mood. As they walked, their conversation shifted to the pressing matters concerning the pack and the imminent full moon. The air was heavy with anticipation and the knowledge that their preparations for the upcoming witch attacks needed to be flawless.

"So, James, how are the preparations for the full moon coming along?" Liam inquired, his voice tinged with concern and determination. He was trying to dismiss the panging need to ignore the world and go back to Nicole.

James straightened his posture, his gaze focused and alert. "We're making progress, Alpha. The pack members have been training rigorously, honing their skills and fortifying our defenses.

The idea of introducing sentinels was perfect. The sentinels chosen have been diligent in scouting the perimeter, ensuring that we're aware of any potential threats. It also helps that they are less susceptible to magic,"

Liam nodded with a glimmer of satisfaction in his eyes. "Good. The safety of our pack is paramount, especially during these uncertain times. We need to remain vigilant and prepared for anything the witch may throw at us."

Liam knew he was creating a distraction, and James bought it— he had always taken everything concerning the security of the pack seriously. James's voice took on a serious tone as he continued, his dedication to his role very evident. "The

warriors have been practising their combat techniques, particularly those aimed at countering the

witches' magic.

We've also been working on strengthening our mental shields as well to resist their mind control and manipulation."

Liam's eyes narrowed as he mulled over their strategy. "That's crucial. We can't afford to let the witches infiltrate our ranks or weaken our resolve. Make sure everyone understands the importance of maintaining their mental defenses." James nodded in agreement, a sense of determination and responsibility emanating from him.

"I've emphasized the need for constant vigilance, both in physical combat and mental fortitude. The pack is aware of the risks and the sacrifices we may need to make to protect our home." Liam's expression hardened, "We can't let them win, James. We won't let them destroy everything

we've built. Our pack is strong, and we'll face these witches head-on."

James responded, his voice laced with an unwavering loyalty, "We stand with you, Alpha. We won't back down. The pack is ready to fight, to defend our territory and our way of life."

A brief moment of silence hung between them, filled with the weight of their responsibilities and the collective determination of their pack. The impending battles loomed before them, but their unity and resilience fueled their resolve.

Liam's voice broke the silence, resolutely, "We'll face this full moon with steadfast courage,

James. The witches won't know what hit them." James nodded, a flicker of admiration in his eyes.

"Together, we will emerge victorious. I know what you're doing, Liam."

Smirking, Liam shrugged, and they had already arrived at Lilian's door.

"Well played, my friend. Well played."

Liam would have laughed if they hadn't been at Lilian's door. The commotion within grew louder, and Liam's patience wore thin. He gritted his teeth, willing himself to maintain composure in the face of his sister's tantrums.

James stood by his side as a silent pillar of support just as Liam raised his hand to knock on the

door. Before his knuckles could make contact, however, the door swung open, revealing Lilian in a state of disarray, her eyes filled with tears and anger.

"What took you so long?" she snapped, her voice dripping with disdain. "I demand to be returned to my pack immediately!"

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