

In Love With My Best Friend Chapter 31

Astrea

I didn't know how much time had flown by. I was left in the mysterious darkness for a long time. At times I felt that I was falling, while other times I felt like I was floating. There were times that I couldn't remember at all. Perhaps those were the moments I lost consciousness or fell asleep. My tears were useless and my pleas disappeared into the vast expanse. After many tears were shed, I grew tired of begging and screaming. It was meaningless.

There was nothing I could hold onto for comfort. Not even my wolf. She was gone. All I heard in my head was an eerie silence. It was strange. Ever since I turned sixteen, Ash has been with me. I felt so lonely without her. I cried for her to come back at first, yet, as time passed, I accepted the fact that she wasn't with me. I was on my own, in the unfamiliar world of gloom.

Feeling despair, I let the bizarre world devour me until, eventually, I saw a light. It was hazy at first, yet gradually intensified. Gasping for breath, I ran towards it. I didn't know what to expect. All I wished for was to evade the dark expanse I was put in. I felt myself being pulled towards the light.

I gulped as I prepared to meet my destiny, whatever it was. I squeezed my eyes shut as the light engulfed me. It was too bright for me to keep my eyes open.

"Astrea?" I heard Ash's voice for the first time ever since I was stuck in this dimension.

My eyes flung open and realised that I wasn't covered with darkness anymore. I was now in a white room. The walls, the ceiling and the floor were completely white. There wasn't any furniture. I knew I was still in the other dimension, but where was Ash?

I frowned.

"Ash?" I tried to link her, yet I didn't receive a response.

"Astrea," Ash's voice startled me and this time I knew that I didn't hear her inside my head, but from behind me.

I turned around and found a large bipedal wolf who was standing on her hind legs. A little scream escaped my lips as I jolted backwards. My heartbeat jogged as I gulped down hard.

“Astrea,” the wolf spoke.

Wait...

My eyebrows knitted together. That was Ash’s voice. Frowning, I gazed deeply into her eyes and gasped loudly when I realised that this bipedal wolf was none other than Ash.

“Ash! What...what happened?” I asked, shocked.

“I think this is what the vial did to me. I don’t remember anything that had happened. All I can remember is being confused and lost,” she told me.

“You too? And why aren’t you in my head? Why are we separated? Are we... Are we separated forever?” Frowning, I voiced my deepest fear.

Sighing, “I hope not,” she mumbled. “Apparently, we are in another dimension,” she added, placing her paws on my shoulders.

Suddenly, our surroundings started to change. The white room dissolved and I lost sight of my wolf. A gasp of despair escaped my lips as I screamed at the top of my lungs.

“Ash!”

She wouldn’t be gone so soon. Our meeting couldn’t be so brief. I needed my friend. I needed my wolf, although we were separated and in a different dimension, I needed her with me.

I felt that I was being sucked into a vortex. My eyes darted around, trying to grasp what was happening. Nothing in the vast chasm of darkness made sense to me. All I knew was, this was a place compressed with turmoil. I opened my mouth to scream. However, my voice didn’t come out of my mouth. I knew that I wouldn’t be able to fight against what was about to happen. It would reach me and when I did, I hoped to meet my wolf once again.

I squeezed my eyes shut and tried my best to take even breaths as I braced myself to face my fate.

Soon enough, the turmoil ceased. I took my time to analyse my surroundings. My eyes were still closed as I chose to relax before seeing what was waiting for me. Perhaps another odd location.

I felt the presence of several individuals, yet the atmosphere was dense with silence. I was certain that I wasn't alone. An alluring scent started to pull me into a comfortable trance. Mmm... What was that?

I opened my eyes only to realise that I wasn't in control of the body I was in.

Wait... was I in Ash's body? My lips stretched as my heart skipped a beat.

"Ash?" I breathed out expectantly, hoping to hear her reply through our link.

"H...hey," she almost moaned out her reply as though she was being pleased.

My forehead creased. Was someone licking her fur?

I froze when I realised that we were in someone's embrace. And not just anyone... someone special. Sparks were erupting where our bodies were contacted. I stiffened, dreading the possibility of being held by Calvin. Because of the bond he had forced on us using dark magic, tingles erupted whenever our skin made contact.

However, these sparks were soothing. It felt good, unlike the ones inexperienced in the past.

"Ash!" I exclaimed, yet she was too immersed in pleasure.

"That's enough, Zoro," a familiar voice stated, adding to my amazement.

Zoro? My heart skipped a beat. And was that the Queen who spoke?

Ash whimpered when she lost contact, yet did not protest. She humbly obeyed the Queen's command. She turned around. My breathing caught in my throat as I glimpsed the most handsome lycan I had ever laid my eyes on. With lustrous fur as dark as the night, he was a handsome fellow. My heart was racing. Was this Zoro? Leo's Lycan? Our gazes met.

He was so... enchanting...

When the Queen ordered us to shift back, we did it without any delay. I was fascinated and delighted to see the faces of those I loved surrounding me. My family and friends.

There was one particular scent I couldn't resist. I sniffed the air. A short gasp escaped my lips when I realised that the scent was coming from Leo, who was standing in front of me. He avoided making eye contact with me. His cheeks were flushed. Was he embarrassed? Anyway, I thought he was looking and smelling great. Yet why wasn't he looking at me?

I stared intently at him until he finally stole a glance at me. I went completely rigid when Ash screamed the words I had been yearning to hear.

"Mate! Mate!"

My jaw dropped open. Was he my mate? My eyes glossed.

"Mate?"

I managed to whisper despite finding it hard to speak.

His eyes darkened as his muscles bulged.

"Mine!"

He growled, making me shudder. That was all I needed to hear. I could have sworn that his declaration was enough for me to melt into a puddle.

"Mate," I breathed out, as a smile curled on my lips.

My legs started to move and before I knew it, I was in his arms. He wrapped his arms around me and buried his face in the crook of my neck, inhaling my scent. I loved the way he squeezed my body against his. Laughing and crying at the same time, I held onto his torso with trembling hands, like I would hold onto dear life.

Mine. He was mine and I was his. What could be better than that?

"Mine," he whispered into my ears and started to pepper kisses on my marking spot, sending shivers throughout my body.

"Yours," I agreed. Tears of joy streamed down my cheeks. He was my mate, the love of my life, my heart throb. He was the one meant for me.

We were lost in our own world until someone cleared his throat. I froze and so did Leo. Right... our friends and family were also here. I had forgotten about them. Ever since Ash screamed out the magical word, all I could observe was my mate. It was as though we had traveled to a place where only we existed while everyone else vanished into the thin air.

I felt my face heat up when I faced Sir Elliot and the Queen. When I saw that they didn't seem to be disappointed, I relaxed... a little. Sarah was grinning from ear to ear and so were the rest of our friends. When my eyes landed on our parents', my eyes widened. My mom was already walking towards me, followed by my dad and Leo's parents.

"Well, s**t," I groaned mentally. Biting my lower lip, I lowered my gaze.

To my surprise, my mom pulled me into her embrace.

"I was so scared, Astrea," she whispered, her voice quivering.

"So you're mates," I heard dad state. Gulping down the lump in my throat, I glanced at him. Thankfully, he didn't seem to be upset.

"Well, it looks like we are family now," Leo's dad chuckled.

Once again, my cheeks heated up. I hastily hid my face on my mom's shoulder and groaned. She laughed.

"Yup. We are family now," she agreed as she stepped away. Leo instantly snaked his arm around my waist. A sigh of relief escaped my lips.

Perhaps my life was finally perfect.

We went back to the palace and, as usual, I went to my room. It felt good to be back. I had missed everything so much. I threw the dirty shirt on the floor and jumped into the shower. The cool water felt so good on my skin. It was rejuvenating.

After washing away the dirt and the blood off my body, I wrapped a towel and stepped into my room, hoping to pick up some new clothes before going downstairs to have some food. Everyone had gone to their rooms to freshen

up while the chefs prepared something to eat. The sun had just peeked over the horizon, but since we had returned from a battle, we were going to rest during the day.

Suddenly, a hand grabbed me and pinned me against the wall. From the sparks and the scent, I knew that it was him.

A smile curled on my lips as he buried his face in the crook of my neck.

“Leo,” I chuckled. “Aren’t you hungry?”

“Hmmm. I am,” he mumbled against my skin. He had one of his arms placed on my waist, while he sandwiched me between him and the wall.

“So go and eat,” I mumbled, squirming in his arms.

“I am going to eat,” his husky whisper sent shivers down my spine. There was something about his voice that made my core tingle.

He started to run his tongue on my neck. I gasped. I felt a pleasant jolt tremble my entire being with every flick of his tongue.

“But I think I want something different.”

I shuddered. What? My heart was erratic and my breathing was now ragged. I wanted to ask him what he wanted, but before I could, he claimed my lips in a desperate kiss.

I couldn’t resist. How could I? He was my mate. Our lips and tongues danced in synchronisation as I grabbed his shoulder and realised that he was topless. My eyes widened when I realised that the only thing that separated us was the towel that I had recklessly wrapped around me.

Breaking the kiss, “you are shirtless!” I gasped.

He didn’t seem to bother. Without replying, he started to suck on the skin of my shoulder. Droplets of water were still on my body, since I hadn’t wiped them well and his gestures were making me feel emotions I never experienced in the past. Gasping for breath, I glanced at the closed door of the room. He must have sneaked into the room when he saw that I hadn’t locked the door. I smirked, celebrating being held by my mate.

However, my enjoyment was short-lived. I soon remembered that our parents were expecting us downstairs to have some food.

After mustering up all the courage I could, I pushed him away, yet it wasn't enough. He didn't budge. Digging his fingers into my waist, he continued to trail kisses and run his tongue over my collar bone, at times deliberately grazing his teeth over my marking spot.

Damn this guy.

I gulped, trying hard to control my ragged breathing. What would my parents say if we didn't go downstairs to eat with them? Besides, I still needed to wipe my body and get dressed.

"L... Leo..." I stuttered. "Please.... I... I'm wet," I managed to tell him and he paused. He gradually looked up, a mischievous smirk plastered on his face. His eyes twinkled as he gazed deeply into my eyes. He raised an eyebrow, making me frown. My emotions were going haywire. Did I say something stupid?

"Oh?" he whispered.

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Astrea

"You are what?"

His cheeky grin told me that he was up to some mischief. He was still holding me in place. I squirmed trying to break free. Not that I wanted to. I didn't. I desired to be with him. I wanted to spend the whole day with him, in his arms, in the warmth of his body.

However, I believe that we should.

"I'm still wet..." I trailed off when I realised what I was saying. My lips parted and my heart raced as I gazed into his eyes. His grin didn't falter as he kept on staring at me.

"Umm..." I gulped. Ignoring my frantic heart to the best I could, I ran my tongue over my lips.

“I mean,” I breathed out. “I need to wipe my body. I... still haven’t wiped the water off properly.”

The palpitations of my heart were violent. I could literally feel it thumping in my chest. His grin slowly vanished, and his eyes darkened with lust as he eyed the exposed part of my shoulders and chest.

“Hmm... but I like it when you get wet,” his low toned voice did something to me. My chest heaved. Apparently, my body wanted him... no... needed him. My body needed my mate. We needed his touch.

My mouth watered. Yes. Our parents could wait.

He ran his index finger on the side of my face, down my neck, over my collar bone, and on the chest where I had tied my towel. The sparks of the mate bond were exploding like fireworks and his scent was pulling me into a reverie. I had stopped fighting against them and slowly I was consumed by the incredible mate bond.

It was what my body and soul needed.

“Me too,” Ash purred. “I was worried that he might give in and leave,” she admitted.

“Our parents...”

“Oh, come on. They know what we are. They most probably would be expecting this to happen,” she rolled her eyes.

My inner conversation with my wolf was interrupted when Leo grabbed a fistful of my hair, making me look into his eyes. His face was mere inches away from mine. I thought he was going to kiss me again, but he was taking his sweet time.

His other hand slowly moved towards my bum. I jolted, and our bodies squeezed together when he gave my a*s a little squeeze.

Both of us were breathing heavily. Our hearts were pounding together. I gazed into his face and realised what it meant to be soulmates. We were one. We were a fraction of each other. I rested one hand on his rock-hard chest, involuntarily tracing his nipple. He sucked in a sharp breath as I did so.

Oh, so that affected him. I smirked. I liked that he reacted to my touch like that. My lips stretched further, as I brushed my fingers on his nipple again. His jaws clenched.

“Woman,” he let out a low growl. “You will be the death of me.”

He pulled me closer, making me gasp as I felt his need poking my lower abdomen.

“Don’t you want this, Rea?” his whisper was powerful enough to quake my core. I shifted on my feet and realised that I was wet... for real.

His gaze burnt into mine. I felt bold. Determined, “is that even a question?” I asked and let go of the towel I had wrapped around my body. I dropped it onto the floor. Just when I thought his eyes couldn’t turn any darker, it did.

“Damn,” he inhaled.

He eyed my breasts, slowly inclining towards them. He didn’t touch them and I was dying to feel his hands on them. Anxiously licking my lips, I wondered why he was taking his time.

“Just touch them already,” I moaned, unable to remain silent anymore.

He obeyed at once. One of his hands cupped one breast while he started to suck on the other. The hair on the back of my neck rose.

“s**t!” I wheezed, resting my head against the wall. I never thought it would feel so good. My nervousness gradually decreased.

He felt so good... so right...

I had only heard stories of how pleasurable it was. If he felt so good up here, I wondered how good it would be down there.

I had my eyes closed, enjoying the blissful moment while he swirled me around so that I was leaning against him while he used his hands. His other hand soon found its place in between my legs and his fingers started to work their magic on me. My eyes flung open. Where did he learn how to do that? I wondered.

“Don’t. Say. A. Word!” Ash’s warning resounded in my mind, before I voiced my query. “Save the questions for later,” she added, and retreated to the back of my mind.

I bit my lower lip as he fondled my core. I didn’t want to moan loudly. I wanted to be as silent as I could, but it was hard.

“You’re right, mate. You’re wet,” his husky whisper made me shudder in his arms. I arched my back. When his fingers brushed over a certain bundle of nerves, waves of pleasure coursed through my frame. I squeezed my eyes shut and let the wonderful surges course throughout my body.

I wouldn’t lie. I did touch myself in the past. But that felt nothing like what Leo did for me.

“f**k, Leo,” I gasped, as beads of sweat formed on my forehead.

“Do you like that?” He asked, nudging my ear lobes using his nose.

Gasping, “hell yes!” I managed to whimper.

I looked at him.

“You are so hot,” his eyes were still darkened with passion. He crashed his lips on mine, devouring them in a hungry kiss. When I least expected, he inserted one finger inside me.

I winced, but he didn’t allow me to break the kiss. It was painful, but nothing I couldn’t handle. Soon, the pain died down. He broke the kiss and scanned my face.

“L... Leo...” a breathless whisper was all I could utter.

“Sorry,” he whispered into my ear, holding me against him.

I gulped. “No. It’s okay... I want this,” I told him.

My thoughts suddenly drifted back to the dreadful nights I had to spend in Calvin’s lair. He had attempted to mate with me, yet thankfully, he was unsuccessful. Either I kicked his crotch, or he had to leave sooner than he wanted to because of his followers.

If I was going to lose my virginity, I wanted to lose it to Leo, my mate and the love of my life.

“Are you sure?” He asked.

I nodded.

He stroked his fingers inside me, making sure that I enjoyed it.

“Mine,” he growled, as he kissed my marking spot, sending my emotions into a frenzy. My breathing was ragged and my legs started to feel like jelly. Perhaps he realised that I wouldn’t be able to walk on my own. He picked me up and carried me to bed. I glanced at the bulge in his shorts. It had been poking my back for a long time. He had done so much for me and it was my turn to make him feel good.

“Wait,” I told him. He watched me scoot over to the edge of the bed, his lecherous gaze burning into me.

“What are you going to do?” he asked when I tugged at his shorts.

Smirking, “you’ll see,” I mumbled.

I was right. He was aroused. I gulped down my anxiousness and closed my eyes as I took his length into my mouth.

“Fúck...” he hissed as I took as much of his shaft into my mouth.

I almost gagged, but I was determined to make him feel good. He groaned. Was it working? I hoped it was.

I quit when I felt like choking. Embarrassed, I climbed onto the mattress.

“That felt so good,” he voiced, surprising me.

“It did?” That wasn’t expected. I thought I had failed. Perhaps he liked it because he hadn’t had such an experience before.

“Yeah,” he said as he climbed on top of me. “Now I can’t wait to find out how you feel down there,” he whispered.

It was my first time and I was anxious, yet, I spread my legs, allowing him to enter.

I sucked in a sharp breath, as his length broke the hymen. I thought I had seen stars but soon the pain resided and was replaced with pleasure... a new kind of pleasure. A satisfaction only my mate can give me. He started to move, slowly at first, allowing me to adjust to his length. I groaned.

What was that feeling? So strange... So right... So good...

Every inch of my body was under his spell. My eyes rolled to the back of my head as I moaned. Leo was undoubtedly enjoying the moment.

“Damn it, mate,” he grunted as he pumped in and out.

“Fúck,” he hissed.

Waves of fulfillment flowed through my body. I was in another world with him. A world where only satisfaction existed.

I didn't realise that I was moaning a bit too loud when he crashed his lips on mine while plunging into me. After a brief kiss, he looked at me and chuckled.

“Are you trying to alert everyone?”

“Shut up,” I whispered in between my gasps of breath.

I can't be held responsible for losing control. My mate felt just too good. He picked up his pace, grunting. I winced. It was still painful... but not in a bad way. I liked it. I squeezed my eyes shut and bit my lips as I felt that I was reaching my climax.

“L... Leo... Leo!” I cried out. I couldn't hold it in. I just couldn't.

The sound of our skin slapping, moans, and grunts reverberated in the room.

“Damn it, Rea,” he groaned. I felt him lower himself on me and hold my arms. I was trapped under his weight. Not that I had any complaints.

But when his canines pierced my marking spot, my eyes flung open. Just like before, the pain was soon replaced with immense pleasure. He wasn't in a hurry. He took his time, making sure that his essence was injected into my system while he released his seeds.

He retracted his canines and licked the raw mark clean.

“Mine,” he asserted.

My lips curled in a smile. I was his. We sealed the bond.

He pulled away and sat on the mattress, gasping for breath. We did it. I let out a breathy chuckle. I never thought anything could be sensitive and pleasant at the same time.

“That... was the most... painfully pleasurable thing... ever...” I wheezed.

He remained silent for a while, satisfaction radiating from him. However, his countenance changed.

Wincing, “s**t,” he breathed out, making me glance at him.

“We forgot to use doms.”

I blinked. “Doms?”

Scratching the back of his neck, “condoms,” he mumbled.

“Where did he take you?” Leo asked. He kept tracing my shoulder blade as I lay in his arms on my bed.

After mating for the first time, and accepting the fact that neither of us remembered about contraception, we decided to rest for some time. We didn’t need to get to know each other. We grew up together and we knew everything about each other. Even the most embarrassing secrets... well, almost everything.

“He called it his lair. I don’t know its location. He had told me that no one would be able to find it because it was concealed using magic,” I looked at him.

“So is that the reason why we weren’t able to locate you?” He asked.

Shrugging, “maybe,” I replied.

He paused for a while. “I... I saw an infected mark on your neck...” he trailed off, as though he was reluctant.

I pursed my lips. The nasty memories of that night flooded back. I shuddered.

“Yeah,” I gulped. “He... he had formed a bond with me using blood and magic... and on the night of the blood moon, he tried to claim me...”

I trailed off, flinching.

Leo growled. I felt his arm wrap tighter around me, making me sigh.

“But my wolf rejected that mark,” I told him, “and now I’m yours... forever.”

I glanced at him. He seemed to relax, yet he wasn’t completely satisfied.

“Of course. You’re mine and I trust you. But how and when did he make a bond with you using blood?” He was frowning.

“Umm... I kind of...” I heaved a deep breath. “There is something I didn’t tell you about.”

He went rigid.

“Okay,” he sounded solemn.

“Months ago, before my eighteenth birthday, I... kind of ran into the forest against dad’s guidance. Rogues were sighted in the packland and they went to chase them away. I was adamant and kind of...”

“You followed them?”

I shook my head.

“I ran into the woods all by myself,” I told him.

Clicking his tongue, “Astrea! You could have gotten killed!” he exclaimed.

“Yeah... I heard a lot of words from everyone,” I laughed anxiously.

“But... but there is more,” I gulped. “I didn’t tell anyone about this. I got caught and...”

“They performed the ritual on you,” his eyes dilated as he finished my sentence.

I thought it would be awkward to face my parents after ditching the breakfast and coupling with my mate instead. It wasn't. Perhaps I should say that the circumstances weren't in favour.

After learning my little secret, Leo insisted that we should tell them everything. I was sure that my parents were forcing themselves to hold back from scolding me after hearing about what had happened that night.

I was foolish to keep it a secret. Ava tried to detect any traces of dark magic in me. However, when she didn't, she decided that it was clear. Perhaps the spell was broken.

At least I hoped that it was broken.

"I see that you have marked her. Wouldn't that be enough?"

Leo's dad, beta Nolan, started. I felt my face heat up, but I didn't hide behind my mate.

"Let's hope so?" Leo sighed.

It was already time for lunch and we were about to eat when the royal couple froze on their spot. Their eyes clouded and from their demeanour, we knew that they were receiving an urgent mindlink.

Sir Elliot looked at his wife, appalled.

"What happened?" Ava asked.

"Natasha has escaped," she uttered, and Leo laid a protective hand around me.

Escaped? Was she locked up?

Confused, I looked around. Everyone seemed to be alarmed.

"What's going on?" I voiced my thoughts.

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Astrea

I was shocked to hear what Natasha did. She tried to kill me and Arnold saved my life. He intercepted the blow and received the silver blade, protecting me from her attack.

“Where is Arnold?” I gasped.

I couldn’t believe that they didn’t tell me about his state earlier. Worried about his safety, I looked at the Queen and then at my parents for answers.

Their lips pulled into a grim line as they exchanged glances. My heart plummeted, fearing for his life. The looks on their faces were dreadful. It gave me the creeps.

A shiver ran down my spine as I glanced at Leo, who seemed to be looking for answers as well.

“He was taken to the infirmary at once. Please tell us that he is fine,” he begged.

The Queen heaved a deep sigh.

“I think you should eat something first. We could...”

“No, please... your Highness. Tell us,” I pleaded.

Nothing should happen to him. He must be fine...

The palpitations of my heart picked its speed.

Please, please be okay.

The seniors’ silence was deafening. Each passing moment boosted my anxiousness. The palms of my hands were sweaty. Attempting to calm my erratic heart, I inhaled a deep breath as I wiped my sweaty palms on my jeans.

The Queen glanced at Leo’s mom and then at her husband. Her lips twitched as Sir Elliot intertwined his fingers with hers.

“Please,” I pleaded, sensing hesitancy from them.

“I need to know. He is my friend and he saved my life,” I croaked.

Sighing, the Queen stepped forward and collected my hand in hers. Her face contorted painfully as she ran her tongue over her lower lip.

“Astrea... I... I don’t know how to tell you...” she trailed off.

No.... No, no, no.

I chanted in my head. This didn’t look good.

“He... he is fighting for his life. The healers are trying everything possible... but...”

She heaved a shaky breath and gulped.

“But what?”

I felt like crying.

“We went there in the morning. We were told that the dagger had punctured one of his lungs and, since the blade was of silver, the wound isn’t healing. On top of that, the dagger was poisoned and it had spread throughout his system within a matter of minutes.”

A gasp of despair escaped my lips.

No.

On shaky knees, I grabbed onto Leo’s arm for support. “No, please no...”

Leo was quick to offer his support. He turned towards me so that I could incline against him.

“We need to go there, now,” he firmly stated.

“But you haven’t eaten anything,” his mom reminded us.

The elders didn’t let us go to the infirmary before we had anything. I forced the food down my throat. Leo, too, seemed to be disturbed. He barely ate anything.

We rushed towards the infirmary as soon as we could. The royal couple and the elders went to check on the news about the lockup where Natasha was detained.

My heart thudded hysterically as I dashed towards the Intensive Care Unit. Rafael and Elena were sitting in the foyer, holding hands as though to support each other.

I had never seen Rafael so miserable. He had always been the goofball in our group. All the life in his face had drained, while Elena, too, didn't look any good. Her bright eyes were now hollow. They looked as though they hadn't been happy for a long time.

"Hey," I wheezed as I took the seat in front of them. "How is he?"

I asked the dreaded question, silently praying to hear something positive.

Forcing a smile, Elena shook her head.

My throat tightened. This can't be happening...

Soon, Sarah and Alan arrived at the lounge, looking equally crushed.

Was Arnold's condition that bad?

I glanced at Leo for support, who laced his fingers with mine and squeezed it a bit.

"I... I need to see a healer," I forced myself to speak.

"They must be at the healers' lounge," Rafael sighed.

My heart broke. Seeing the grim faces of my companions spoke volumes. Arnold was on the brink of death. Nonetheless, I couldn't lose hope.

I refused to relinquish. He couldn't leave us so soon. Especially not after saving my life. If only we had healing powers.

I stood up to find a nurse, with Leo on my tail. I wished to see him. Perhaps they would allow me to step inside and meet my friend.

Thankfully, they did and soon Leo and I were beside his bed. Pursing my lips, I forced myself to remain strong while I wrapped my arms around me. Leo

held my waist. We didn't know what to say. Our friend showed no signs of life except for the beeping heart rate monitor.

There were tubes connected to his mouth and nose. The cannula on his hand was attached to an IV. His face was drained of colour, and to my dismay, I noticed that his lips had turned blue.

He looked so... lifeless.

I was scared to say anything. Yet, I didn't want to give up. There should be something we could do.

A healer peeked into the room and smiled when she saw us. I watched as she checked every machine that was connected to him.

"Is he going to make it?" I couldn't help but ask. When I received a grim sigh, my heart plummeted to my stomach.

"All I can say is, we are trying everything we can," she mumbled.

Frowning in worry, I looked at his face, which was now as white as a sheet.

Allan, too, was on the brink of death, but his mate's mark saved him. Biting my inner lips, I closed my eyes in despair.

Arnold hadn't found his soulmate yet. I shook my head.

"Isn't there anything we can do? You know... something... anything," I knew I sounded despondent, but I didn't care. I was grieving. I desperately wanted Arnold to come back.

"We have already done the surgery on him. A wolf from his clan who was in your team had volunteered to donate blood, but nothing seemed to work," she lowered her gaze and then glanced at Arnold.

"The poison in the dagger seems to be different. It spread fast, attacking all the vital organs all at once. The antidotes we have for well-known poisons are useless," she gave a tragic glance.

"I'm sorry, but we are trying absolutely everything we can," she mumbled and left the room, leaving us speechless.

Minutes of silence ticked by until I managed to muster up enough courage to walk up to him. My chest constricted as I scanned his frame. It was painful to watch someone who used to be so full of life lying motionless.

“Arnold... you didn’t have to,” my voice quivered. With a trembling hand, I touched his limp fingers.

Oh, how I wished that he had found his mate. Maybe then, we would have been able to save his life.

Gulping, “are you going to leave us so soon?” I uttered, barely above a whisper.

“Please don’t, we need you.”

A single tear rolled down my cheek as I spoke to him. I saw no response. There was absolutely nothing.

Wrapping his arm around my shoulder, “we should let him rest,” Leo muttered.

“Don’t lose hope,” he added, heaving a sigh.

I wiped my face and nodded.

“I won’t.”

I would never lose faith.

When we returned to where the gang were, we saw that the elders had also arrived at the hospital.

“We have informed Arnold’s pack. His parents and alpha are on their way here,” Sir Elliot informed us.

The silence and the sour mood that hung in the air was hard to handle. While we grieved in silence, my mind drifted to the woman who had caused this damage. I found myself sneering as I thought about her.

Things would have been perfect if it hadn’t been for Natasha and her ridiculous envy.

“Where is Natasha?” I finally asked after sitting silently for a considerable amount of time.

“She is gone and we have dispatched a group of warriors to look for her. It raises a lot of questions nonetheless. She was locked up since we needed to investigate. She had stabbed an innocent wolf, so she had broken the law. Whatever the reason was, it isn’t acceptable. And she wouldn’t have been able to escape if someone didn’t help her. Now the question is, who?” Sir Elliot replied.

I squinted while I thought over the matter. He was right. It did raise a lot of suspicions.

“The nurse did say that the poison used on the dagger was different. The antidotes they had weren’t effective,” I told them what I had learnt.

“That’s strange,” the Queen mumbled. “Where did Natasha get her hands on such a thing? She is young and a new recruit who joined the army recently. I’m wondering where she got that.”

Everyone was shocked. She was right. She couldn’t have gotten her hands on a new kind of poison unless someone gave it to her. A poison that the healers of the lycan kingdom weren’t aware of.

It should be formulated in a place other than the lycan kingdom. Perhaps...

My eyes widened as a crazy thought crossed my mind.

Could it be that she somehow was in contact with Calvin?

Despite my efforts, I couldn’t stop my heart from racing. I shook my head. No, she wouldn’t do that. She may have animosity towards me. Her grudge could be against me, but she would never betray the Throne.

I told myself not wanting to accept the theory.

Staring at my ice-cold fingers, I shifted in my seat uncomfortably.

“Ash,” I finally called my wolf. I needed to get it off my chest.

“Do you think that Natasha might team up with Calvin?”

“I’ll be frank, girl. We don’t know Natasha much. She was just a green-eyed monster who sounded like she might do anything to have what she wanted. I mean, from what we heard, she attempted to kill us, thinking that a lame excuse could get her off the hook. So I don’t know what to say. The poison

isn't a common one that can be easily obtained. It surely sounds like something that's cultivated by an expert."

I nodded. Ash was right. Perhaps Calvin wasn't the only deranged individual we were dealing with. Maybe there was more.

"What are you thinking about?" Leo interrupted my thoughts.

Glancing at him, "Could the poison be a new development... like newly formulated in a place like a... a lab?" I uttered.

"Maybe," he responded.

"Sounds like the work of an insane genius, so yes. That's a great possibility," Sir Elliot replied.

I shuddered. Insane genius.

"Umm... are there labs in the kingdom?" Anxious to hear the reply, I squealed.

Chuckling, "even if there were, they wouldn't develop such a thing in a local lab. They would do it discreetly," Leo pointed out.

"He is right. But to be on the safe side, we must survey all the local labs. There are just a few. If none of them has anything suspicious, we have to look for any secret..."

"Calvin has one," I whispered, and everyone went rigid.

The Queen studied my face, the creases on her forehead deepening.

"So, you mean to say that Natasha could have a connection?"

The atmosphere in the aisle got dense yet I forced myself to face the royals, for the sake of my friend who had saved my life. That was, in addition to the safety of our kind and the protection of the throne.

"I'm not accusing her, since I don't have solid proof. But I'm telling you, he has a well developed lab. He took me there once," I winced at the dreadful memory.

"Can you tell us about it?" The queen asked. I felt all the eyes on me.

I shuddered and Leo leaned forward, placing a supportive hand on my back.

I glanced at him. He was also eager to learn what I saw in the lab. He nodded his head, pushing me to tell them what I had seen.

Gulping, “okay,” I whispered.

I forced a smile. Perhaps if they knew that it wasn’t a pleasant memory they wouldn’t be so eager to hear about it.

I glanced at my mom and closed my eyes.

“It’s okay, Astrea. We shouldn’t keep any secrets,” Ash reminded me. Nodding my head, I prepared to tell them what I had seen.

In Love With My Best Friend Chapter 34

Astrea

I leaned against my mate for comfort since I knew that I would need it. Heaving a deep breath, I started to relive those memories. Leo squeezed me against him. Perhaps he felt my discomfort through our bond.

“Umm... all of it?” I asked, letting out a humourless laughter.

“Yes, all of it,” the Queen nodded her head. I squeezed Leo’s hand and gulped.

“Okay, here goes,” I breathed out.

I was shackled in silver after my attempt to escape their lair failed. It drained my energy and weakened my wolf in addition to burning my skin. It restrained my movements, and I was reluctant to use my energy much because Ash was getting shaky as time passed.

On the third day, they injected their vial saying that it would strengthen my wolf. However, as soon as they injected it, I stopped hearing from Ash and I lost consciousness.

When I woke up, I wasn’t bound by the silver chains. I was glad. However, I was still locked up in a room where I couldn’t see the daylight. I wasn’t aware of how the time passed by. The only means of knowing if it was day or night

was when they brought food for me. In the morning, they brought some bread and eggs while in the evening I would get a plate of rice.

After three days, Calvin returned. I dreaded seeing him again, because each time he paid me a visit, he forcefully did something unpleasant. The first time, he forcefully marked me, and the second time his followers held me down while he injected the vial causing me to lose my consciousness.

I was scared that he might have assaulted me while I was oblivious, but when Ash confirmed that the hymen was intact, I was able to breathe in peace.

I huddled in the far corner of the room, glaring at the crazy demon who had entered the compartment. I wasn't expecting anything good. I knew that Calvin meant trouble.

"Hello, mate," he snickered.

Scoffing in annoyance, I rolled my eyes. We weren't fated together, but he kept addressing me as his mate. Even the mark he had forced on me was rejected by my wolf, yet, that didn't stop him.

When I didn't respond, he sauntered over to me. After crouching in front of me, he yanked a fistful of hair making me wince.

"Look at me!"

I had no desire to obey his command. Despite my determination to rebel, he grabbed my chin and forced me to look at him.

"Obey my command. I don't like to force myself on women."

The stench of his breath made me gag.

"I choose you as my mate. Imagine how powerful you will be after we take over the Lycan kingdom. I'll be king and you'll be queen. I'll shower you with all the wealth in the world. I'll give you everything you want. Just agree to be my mate," he offered.

My lips crooked a bit. He must be delusional if he thought that I was like him. He sure had an absurd way of getting consent. Mentally ridiculing him, I sneered. I didn't utter a word, yet my wolf was throwing insults at him one

after the other. My silence seemed to have offended him. Growling, he tightened his grasp on my hair.

“I said. Be. My. Mate! This isn’t a request!”

His threatening demand resounded in the blocked room, but I didn’t care. I was never going to agree to what he had said.

Despite the discomfort he was inflicting by pulling my hair, I sneered at him.

“You can’t force relationships on anyone. You can’t coerce anyone to be with you against their will,” I said.

His face hardened as he let go of me and stood up to pace around the room.

After a few minutes, he halted and glanced in my direction. Narrowing his eyes, “I can and I will!” he asserted.

I gulped. I didn’t like the determination on his face. Nonetheless, when he left without doing anything else I was relieved. I thought it was just an empty threat. But I was wrong.

Later that night, three armed females entered the room. One of them approached me with a white cloth while the other two pointed their guns at me.

“No bright ideas. Those guns have silver bullets in them,” she warned and shoved a dress at me.

“Wear this!” she ordered and I rolled my eyes in response.

“How about a no?” I wasn’t in the mood to do anything. However, she chuckled and took a syringe from her pocket.

“We knew you wouldn’t obey so easily. So,” one of them pointed the needle at me and smirked.

“Would you do it the easy way or the hard way?”

I was scared of what might happen to me if they pushed the contents of the syringe into my bloodstream. So I hastily wore the flimsy dress they brought. It barely covered anything.

“What is this? You call this a dress?” I grumbled.

Snickering, they proceeded to do what they had come for. The female who approached me took a red cloth from her pocket and prepared to blindfold me.

Moving away, “what are you doing?” I asked.

She chuckled as her companion strolled over to me and pressed the barrel of her pistol against my temple. The cold metal of her gun made me shudder.

“No questions. Just do it, or else...”

Her colleague tied the blindfold and they started to lead me out of the room.

I smirked internally, thinking that I would finally be able to find a way to escape. It was the first time they were taking me out of the room I was confined in. However, if I wanted to succeed, I knew I had to be creative.

“Ash, be ready,” I called my wolf who responded at once. I used my sense of smell and hearing to evaluate my surroundings. Besides the three sets of footsteps excluding mine, which I assumed to belong to the three female rogues, I heard nothing. No one spoke, not even in the distance.

Our footsteps echoed, indicating that we were inside the building. Their distinctive smell of burning rubber was central. I was in their lair, so it was rational. I tried to catch a whiff of fresh air, trying to grasp an opening like a window, but there was nothing.

The atmosphere was still, much to my disappointment.

A door creaked. I knew we walked inside another room. Not knowing what to expect, I remained silent. I shuddered when they pressed the metal of their gun against my temple once again.

“Don’t you dare move,” the female growled out her warning and started to tie my hands using some cloth.

Frowning, “what are you doing?” I asked. I received a sharp whack to my face in response. I felt a warm liquid trickle down my cheek, but soon the wound healed – thanks to my accelerated healing power. Anyway, the blow wasn’t bad enough to knock me out.

“No questions!” she pressed her gun under my chin.

I grimaced. I hated being held hostage. Especially by a bunch of absurd rogues.

From the sound of their footsteps and the door closing I knew they had left after tying me up.

“Now is our chance!” I linked my wolf and started to yank the cloth that tied my wrists when the door opened again.

I froze. From the heaviness of the footsteps, I knew that it was him. My heart raced as Ash paced in my mind uncomfortably.

“Calvin is up to no good,” she warned.

Our instincts were right. He untied my blindfold. Grinning like a maniac, he eyed my curves, his lecherous gaze burning into me. I felt corrupted because he was staring at me like a piece of meat. I hated being put on display. Although I was a werewolf and nudity wasn't new to us, I chose to live a respectable life. The moments we shifted from wolf to human were brief and no one dared to look at me like Calvin did.

And I loathed every moment of it.

“Beautiful,” he whispered, cupping my cheeks. His hands started to move towards my chest when I kicked his abdomen, making him stagger backward. Too bad, they didn't tie my legs.

Coughing, he stood up. As soon as he managed to catch his breath, he dashed towards me and grabbed my hair.

“My mark... it's not healing,” he mumbled. I supposed that he noticed it. My eyes widened when I saw his canines elongate. My heart raced as my breathing caught in my throat.

I wasn't going to let him do that again.

My claws extended and a loud growl erupted from my throat as I pulled at the cloth they tied my hands with. Being an alpha, destroying a fragile piece of fabric was nothing to me, especially since I was fueled with rage.

I grabbed his collar and bent my knees, landing a mean blow to his groin. He hollered in pain and crouched as he held his crotch.

“Finish him!” Ash howled in my mind. I would have gladly finished him off if his pathetic guards didn’t barge in and shot a tranquilizer dart at me.

Despite my efforts to stay awake, I couldn’t. I lost my consciousness and this time, when I woke up, I was lying face up, my limbs stretched out and tied to four poles. Soon, I realised that I was lying on a hard surface, like a tabletop.

I looked around and saw nothing but darkness. I tried to break free, yet it was ineffective. This time they had used something stronger than cloth. Something like stainless steel. I knew that it definitely wasn’t silver because it didn’t burn my skin. I tried to destroy the chains but they were strong and from the position I was bound, I could only make minimal movements.

I grunted, frustrated at my helplessness. Suddenly the lights turned on, making me squeeze my eyes shut.

The sound of him clicking his tongue made me freeze. I sneered. Of course, he would be around. Why wouldn’t he be here to taunt me or try to take advantage of me?

I suddenly recalled that I was wearing next to nothing. Gasping, I looked at my body. Someone had changed my clothes. It irked me that someone had seen me naked without my knowledge and part of me hoped that it was one of the females. The thought of being touched by anyone without my consent was unsettling. Anyway, I wasn’t barely dressed anymore and that was a relief... I guess.

I looked at him and was relieved to see that he wasn’t alone. His pathetic followers surrounded him.

“I tried to make you mine before your next dose, but I guess we don’t have a choice. Darling, it’s time for your medicine,” he told me, making me frown.

What was he talking about?

My unasked question was answered within a matter of moments. A rogue stepped forward with a familiar syringe in his hand. I gasped in a breath.

No! Not again!

“No! I don’t want this!” I screamed, but my cries fell on deaf ears. None of them cared. Four rogues held my limbs when I started to thrash while the fifth one plunged the needle into my vein.

It burnt. Slowly, the burning sensation spread throughout my system. My breathing had laboured and I was drenched in sweat by the time they were done. My eyelids started to get heavy and I felt like I was being pulled into exhaustion. I had to fight to stay awake.

I knew Calvin moved towards me. The sound of his chuckles sounded faraway, but I knew that it was me who was drifting away.

“Ash,” I called my wolf after gathering all the strength I could muster, tears stinging my eyes. “Please... don’t leave me,” I was scared to lose her.

To my dismay, she didn’t respond. All I heard in my head was an eerie silence.

They didn’t release me since that day. I had to do all my business on that tabletop. They didn’t even let me use the lavatory. Calvin didn’t trust me. His followers cleaned me whenever and however they pleased. The only time they cleaned me well was when Calvin wanted to approach me... alone.

Over the next three weeks, he tried to assault me a couple of times. However, thankfully his stupid followers interrupted him. Sometimes because they needed to use the laboratory and sometimes because it was time for my next ‘dose’.

Every three days, they injected the vial, and each time I passed out. This continued well into the fourth week until finally Ash completely stopped responding to me.

“Ash!” I screamed, trying to hear from her, but she didn’t respond. Heck, I didn’t even sense her presence in my head. I was scared. I thought I had lost her and cried my eyes out.

“Now, now, my darling. Don’t cry. Are you crying because your wolf isn’t responding?” Calvin spoke, making me stare at him in disbelief. So he knew that it would happen.

“You monster!” I shrieked, but he simply chuckled.

“Not really. And your wolf will be back. She is just resting until her transformation is completed.”

My anger was at its peak. I wanted to believe that she would come back, but at the same time, I didn't want to show even an ounce of adherence to him.

“f**k you!” I screeched.

Laughing, “I would love to, but only if you would let me,” he winked, making me shudder in disgust.

They removed the chains that bound me. I lunged at him as soon as they did, but without my wolf, I couldn't do much damage. His female followers restrained me while I struggled to break free.

“Ah, ah, ah, my love. Let us complete the transformation, shall we?” He snickered.

He snapped his fingers and the rogues lit the whole place up.

I felt myself soften as I scanned the exquisite equipment. Apparatus that only a well developed laboratory would have was all over the place. There were solvents of various colours, some of them boiling in the flasks.

“So, dear. I want to show you my little secret before anything else. After all, since you are becoming the Queen, you should see this.”

He walked forward and halted in front of a large transparent round bottom flask. A violet liquid was inside it.

“This is my laboratory. We have conducted several groundbreaking experiments and made numerous discoveries. We develop solvents... new solvents...” he glanced at me and flashed a broad grin that made him look like a lunatic.

“The vial is one of them. It will change a wolf,” he mumbled.

I thrashed in anger, but it was useless.

“Now, time for my friend to do his charm on you, while your wolf takes her time to return,” he gestured to a rogue.

All I could do was stare helplessly while a stranger dressed in all black walked inside. He drew a circle and a star on the cement floor and sat down. When he started to chant bizarre words, the females forced me to sit in front of him.

“No! Let me go!” I screamed. I dreaded looking into the gloomy eyes of the weird magician, but the rogues forced me to do it. After much resistance, our gazes met and that was the last thing I remember.

By the time I was done narrating everything, they were gaping at me, flabbergasted.

“That’s all. I remember being in another dimension. I met Ash there. She had changed but it was her. I was stuck there until I woke up to see that I was surrounded by everyone... in Zoro’s arms,” I ended my story.

Leo wrapped his arms around me and kissed my temple. My parents looked miserable and so did my friends.

“That... that is... I don’t know what to say...” the Queen trailed off.

Just then, an urgent shout made us glance at the frantic healer who was rushing towards the cubicle Arnold was kept in.

“What happened?” Sir Elliot asked a healer who was rushing past us.

“The boy, Arnold... he is going into shock.”

In Love With My Best Friend Chapter 35

Astrea

Just as we scampered towards the cubicle, Xander came rushing towards the unit where Arnold was kept.

“I... I just finished my classes. How is he now?” he gasped for breath. Leo, and Rafael went with him towards his cubicle with the rest of us in tow. When Xander saw the hysterical healers rushing about, he glanced at us. A mixture of confusion and fear was evident on his face.

“He...” Xander trailed off.

Our solemn faces seemed to have answered his question before he asked it. Gulping, he turned around to watch the healers work.

Since none of us were allowed inside, we helplessly watched them through the window as they struggled hard to revive him. The healers did everything they could, yet he showed no signs of life. Feeling despaired, I leaned against the cool glass. No one uttered a word. Everyone was dead silent. The atmosphere was dense with fear and suspense.

My heart pounded in my chest. I didn't take my eyes off him. I couldn't. Sarah squeezed my right shoulder in anticipation while Elena hung onto my left arm. All three of us clung to each other while the rest of us huddled close, eager to see the outcome.

Arnold, you got to come back.

I didn't voice my thoughts, yet held on to the tiniest ray of hope that he would make it. However, that hope diminished completely when the healers suddenly stopped working. All of them glanced at the heart rate monitor which was constantly beeping a while ago.

I held my breath as I glanced at the screen of the monitor. My lips parted as I stared, dismayed at the blank line it displayed. I blinked a couple of times, just to make sure that I wasn't seeing things. Sarah's grasp on my shoulder tightened while Elena whimpered painfully. My vision started to get blurry as tears of sorrow gathered in my eyes.

I shook my head. I didn't want to believe that we lost him. However, when the healers lowered their gazes in defeat and covered his face with the white sheet, a gasp of despair escaped my lips.

I felt as though the earth shook underneath my feet. He was gone. He was truly gone. Trying my best to hold my sniffles back, I glanced at my friends. Sarah was already weeping silent tears and Elena's eyes were puffy and red.

Rafael was stunned. He didn't cry, nor did he show any emotion. He kept solemnly staring at our friend's motionless corpse that was covered with the sheet.

"He... he is gone...." Ash whimpered in my head. She sounded broken-hearted.

“He saved our life and now he is gone,” Ash’s painful whimper resounded in my head.

It was the bitter truth. He had sacrificed himself for me. He had chosen death over life... for me. Perhaps he didn’t assume that the blow would result in his death. I suppose no one did. Yet, that was the unfortunate consequence of his heroic deed.

I could no longer hold back my tears. They streamed down my cheeks. I covered my mouth, as the girls huddled close to me. From the corner of my eye, I saw Allan standing on one side with his head lowered. His lips were pulled into a grim line as he remained silent.

Our parents and the royal couple were gazing through the glass window, their faces filled with sorrow. A healer walked out of the room, her head hung low, dejected.

“We’re sorry. We tried our best,” she whispered.

Nodding her head, “you tried,” the Queen responded.

While we remained outside the cubicle, mourning our loss in silence, an employee walked up to us and bowed down to his Queen.

“Your Highness. The alpha of the Silver Moon pack is in the lobby. He is saying that he was informed that one of his pack members is injured and that you had requested his presence.”

It was evident that the queen was trying her best to remain strong as she faced the worker. After sucking in a shaky breath she nodded.

“Is anyone accompanying him?”

“Yes, your highness. A male and a female from his pack,” he answered.

“They must be Arnold’s parents. Bring them here,” she instructed.

Soon enough, the worker returned with them. The one leading them was buff and tall. His countenance was solemn and the aura that surrounded him told us that he was the alpha. Behind him were a man and a woman. The man was well-built, yet not as buff as his alpha. His posture reminded me of Arnold while the woman’s features reminded us of him.

They were undoubtedly Arnold's parents. How were we going to tell them that he was no more? My heart plummeted as I forced a smile.

"Your highness," the worker bowed down, and so did the alpha and Arnold's parents.

The Queen waved her hands, dismissing the worker. Pursing her lips, she strolled up to them and licked her lips.

"Alpha Tyler," she addressed the alpha.

"Your Majesty, this is Jon and Helena, Arnold's parents," Alpha Tyler introduced them.

"Where is he?" Helena stepped forward followed by her mate. "He is gone, isn't he? I... I can feel it..." her voice reduced to a mere whisper as tears streamed down her cheek.

Jon instantly wrapped his arms around her, while he visibly battled against his emotions and persisted. He gulped a couple of times, holding his mate close to him.

"Umm... maybe that pain is something else..." he whispered, trying to comfort his mate.

I tried to gulp down the discomfort in my throat but in vain. Did his parents feel it?

"Ash. Can a parent feel the death of their pup?" I consulted my wolf. She might know more than I do since the wolf spirits live for a long time. Once we die, the wolf spirit is reborn in another body.

"Yes, they could. When your own pup dies they would sense the pain of that bond breaking. Even when a mate rejects their soulmate, a bond breaks and it is painful as hell. Similarly, the bond we share with our children and parents is unbreakable. However, death separates us and it is agonising. Which means that they must have felt the pain of losing him," Ash whispered in my head.

The Queen glanced at Sir Elliot who nodded.

"Please come with me," she led them towards the entrance of the cubicle where Arnold's corpse lay.

I covered my mouth as I watched through the window. I didn't know if I could handle it. I was about to witness a mother and a father confirm the death of their pup. I felt Leo hold me from behind. His presence gave me a sense of comfort. Perhaps he also was looking for solace. I turned around and wrapped my arms around him. I saw that Sarah and Elena also had their mates beside them, holding them in their arms, caressing their hair, and offering support for each other.

Heaving a shaky breath, I glanced at the scene unfolding in front of us.

The Queen and her husband took them inside. At first, they followed without any hesitation.

However, Arnold's parents froze at a distance when they saw the body was covered with the sheet. Their alpha walked forward and halted beside the bed.

Sir Elliot slowly removed it to show them his face. Alpha Tyler's face remained rock hard. He didn't counter while he waited for the parents to respond.

Minutes ticked by and his parents persisted in their stunned state for a while. They glanced at each other. Their sorrow was evident on their faces. It took a moment for them to acknowledge that the body truly belonged to their son.

Trembling, his mother hobbled towards her son's dead body and started to caress his face with tears streaming down her face. His father looked as though he was completely destroyed. Yet, he approached his son and saluted, as a warrior would.

Perhaps Arnold came from a family of warriors. It didn't matter. What mattered was that he was gone.

His parents walked, no, staggered out of the room. Undoubtedly they were shattered. Nonetheless, their resilience was commendable. His mother, though broken-hearted, didn't complain about her loss. Tears were shed, yet, only words of wisdom were uttered from her lips.

"I'm proud of him," his father commented. "When he was little, he used to say that he wanted to be like me – a fearless warrior. I used to tell him that he would be better than me," he inhaled a shaky breath.

“Indeed he is better than me. He is a martyr. What is better than dying while protecting others? If only I could attain that rank,” his voice trembled as he spoke.

My throat tightened. “He... he saved my life,” I couldn’t hold back my tears, and honestly, I no longer had the desire to fight against it.

His father held his chin high and sighed. “That’s my boy,” he whispered, smiling as though he was proud of his son and turned towards the Queen.

“Your majesty. We would like to take him to our pack to hold his funeral procession with the rest of our family and pack members,” he humbly requested.

Smiling sadly, she nodded. “Of course, you can,” she permitted

“Can we... can we see him... one last time?” I stammered as I forced myself to speak.

“Sure,” Sir Elliot nodded.

I stepped inside with the others and took my time to pay my last respects to him.

Leo wrapped his hand around my shoulders and gave me a little squeeze. He most probably was trying to support me and I needed every bit of it.

Losing a friend was one thing, but knowing that he lost his battle for life after saving mine, was just something else.

“I’ll never forget you,” I swore.

“Me neither,” Sarah and Elena agreed.

“I’ll dye my hair pink for you, dude,” Rafael mumbled. It was a comical statement, yet none of us laughed. All of us were hurting. Nevertheless, Rafael could be affected the most.

Among the guys, he and Arnold had been the closest. Though they weren’t related, they were more like brothers. Hence, he must be mourning the loss of a brother from another mother.

“At least he seems to be at peace,” Allan commented.

He was right. Arnold seemed to be peacefully sleeping. I smiled. Perhaps he would want us to. He surely wouldn't want us to grieve for him forever.

As I walked out of the room, I thought about Natasha. I gritted my teeth and clenched my fists. She was now a murderer. Her blow had killed Arnold. If he didn't intercept that attack, it would have been me who lay dead on that bed.

Her prey wasn't Arnold and most probably, she would never intend to kill him. However the circumstances had changed drastically.

"That murderer!" I growled under my breath.

"We must get her!" Leo agreed with me.

"We will," Sarah conceded.

"I wonder if the warriors Sir Elliot sent had found anything," I commented.

"I don't care if they don't find that bitch. If they don't, I'll find her and detach that pathetic head off her body," Rafael was agitated.

"We can't do that. We can't do anything that might cause a dilemma," I pointed out.

"But you're right. We will make her pay," I vowed.

Days passed. The gloomy mood among us slowly declined. Yet, we felt a part of us was missing. A part called Arnold.

The surprising thing was Natasha couldn't be traced. She had disappeared into the thin air.

"She couldn't have just vanished," Leo scratched his head.

"She sure wouldn't. But she could be hidden using magic," I mumbled, remembering how Calvin concealed their lair.

I squinted. My notions were getting worse. The more I thought about the situation, the more I was convinced about the possibility of a connection between her and Calvin.

Still, the question was, would she truly betray the throne?

