

## Chapter 118-1

Seth leads me to the car and we make our way to the location of the challenge. My heart feels heavy at the gravity of the entire situation, but especially knowing the dangers we will face personally should Stephen not win. The car pulls up to a clearing that's deeper in their pack territory. I know we're still on their property, but it's closer to the border with the Buck Moon Pack... and farther north which is definitely not the direction I want to be.

My stomach lurches and I'm unsure if it's caused by the baby, the drive, or my fears. Honestly, it could be from all of it. I close my eyes and take a deep breath, trying to will myself to not be sick. When I open my eyes, I see Seth looking down at me, his face showing his deep concern.

"I'm fine," I tell him with a weak smile. "Just a little nausea."

He squeezes my hand, looking around outside the car. "I have such an uneasy feeling."

"I do, too," I tell him, watching people walk up to the clearing, forming a circle.

"Remember, stay with Albert if anything happens," he tells me, still surveying the area. "Benjamin will be close, too."

I smile at that, knowing that the man who had already done so much, and given up so much to protect me is here, ready to jump in and continue to protect me if needed. Truly, he's had to give up too much, but he's continued to push back his feelings and pride to be there when I need him, no matter how uncomfortable the situation is for him.

Seth finally steps out of the car and walks around, stepping in front of Albert to open the car door for me himself. I take his hand and step out and he gives me room, but continues to block me from view. He reaches up, adjusting the ruffle on the top of my dress and I look down, smoothing out the silk fabric.

"You look amazing," he tells me quietly, leaning down and placing a gentle kiss on my forehead. "Ready, Princess?"

"Yes, Prince Seth," I tell him with a small smile. He looks as handsome as he always does, wearing a black suit with a white shirt that he left unbuttoned, leaving his mark on display. He left his hair down, which has become more rare for him in the past few weeks. I do note, though, that he hasn't been shaving his facial hair off completely, and had been trimming it, just because I said I like it.

Albert closes the car door behind us and I catch our reflection. We look good together. Really good. I'm wearing a black silk, tea-length dress with a ruffle up top that is off the shoulder and drapes in a way that's really flattering. Thankfully, it has tiny straps to hold the dress up, because this material is flowy and clingy and I'm not sure how it would stay up without them. It's not something that I would have ever bought myself, but it really does look good.

Seth offers his arm to me and I take it, as we walk across the ground to our places. I look around at everyone in attendance. Most are wearing their normal, everyday attire, though I note that a few did wear some nicer clothing. Probably because they knew we would be in attendance and that makes me smile. I look down at the ground and wonder if all alpha challenges are just outside in clearings, or if larger packs have better places that would warrant the Princess wearing 4 inch heels, because it feels ridiculous to be walking in them here.

We approach an area with four chairs. Peter and Audrey are seated on the two outside chairs, as opposed to the inside ones, as you would assume. Seth leads me to sit next to his Mother, and then takes his seat next to me.

I look to Audrey but before I can say anything she smiles. "You and Seth are officiating this one. You are the head royals in this situation."

Head royals? I don't know what that even means. I furrow my brow in confusion. "You look lovely, Molly. Truly. You two are picture perfect."

"Thank you," I tell her and she takes my hand.

I hate these. She says through the link. They're barbaric and disgusting. Remain stoic, don't let your facial expressions betray you. Look away if it's too much and you feel sick. Just don't leave.

I nod to her, understanding. This is my first official event as Seth's mate, and I must act the part properly.

If Alpha Stephen loses, you can NOT heal him. We'll remove you as quickly and safely as possible, but you can not use magic.

I nod again, knowing that she's right. It seems she knows me fairly well, because while I'm not planning to even think of using magic, there's a chance that I would do something impulsive.

Benjamin walks up and stands next to Audrey, though neither of them acknowledges the other. He looks at me and smiles. "You look lovely, Princess," he says and bows to me.

"You look very nice, too," I tell him with a smile and his eyes almost twinkle. Looking at him outside now, in the sunlight, he looks even better. Maybe being marked and removing my adoption really did give him his strength back, because looking at him, he looks to be one of the strongest wolves here.

I look around, finally locating my parents next to Alpha Stephen and Luna Daphne. That seems odd, but before I can ask, Alpha Thomas approaches the clearing. He stands at the edge, looking at Stephen and removes his shirt, stepping into the clearing, making his way towards the middle.