

Owned by the Alphas 2: Claimed by the Alphas |

The City

LORELAI

“Check.” Anetta grinned, and I rolled my eyes, looking over the courtyard we were playing chess in out the back of the mansion.

I sucked at chess, and I didn’t care for it. Anetta made me play it all the time, and she always won, so I didn’t see why I had to keep suffering just to boost her ego.

Her grin was wide as she waited for me to make my move. I looked over the board, finding a piece that could make a move without being stolen, then leaned back in my chair.

Everything this side of the mansion was boxed in by trees and foliage that I wanted to explore but was apparently not allowed to.

At least it was warm today. With winter coming fast, it was rare to get a morning that didn’t try to freeze my limbs.

Anetta moved again. “Check. You suck at this game.”

She chuckled, and I nodded.

“I told you that when you insisted we play it. But I know when I’m being babysat, so I’m not going to take it out on you. I’ll save my irritation for my alphas,” I huffed.

She laughed. “They have a council meeting. Not exactly something you can gate-crash.”

“Maybe not, but I want to be there. They already tried to ditch me when they went to the vampires, and now they go to this without me?”

“The council is a little...old school. They’re not fully convinced this new winter born heir thing is as good for the pack as we think it is.

“They appreciate the border magic, of course, but from the whispers I’ve heard? The alphas have had to do a lot of convincing on your behalf,” she said, moving more chess pieces in an aggressive way meant to dominate.

It was working. I knocked over my king and smirked.

“Boom, game over, you win. Congrats.”

Anetta gave me a droll stare. “You’re a sore loser, you know that? You took away half the fun of winning by doing that,” she said grimly, starting to pack away the pieces.

I shrugged. “I just gave myself the power. If I lose on my terms then I steal half the power in my dignity. Knowing when to forfeit, that’s a skill,” I teased, and she laughed.

“Wow, you could talk your way out of the fucking noose, girl.” She shook her head, snickering.

I grinned at that, then looked around the courtyard, at the enclosed space. It made me feel clammy and claustrophobic.

I shrugged out of my coat and blew out a breath, wishing I had decided on some less wintery fabric. The wool of my dress was heavy, and I dabbed my face with the back of my hand, a hot flush making me grab some of the waiting water and gulp.

“Are you okay?” Anetta frowned, and I nodded, putting the cup down.

“Yeah, just warm. And I’m sick of being in this mansion. Can we go for a walk?” I asked.

Anetta chewed her lip, looking over her shoulder toward the mansion before standing up.

She was in leather pants, a muslin shirt, and a leather vest, the same as the men wore but more fitted, and she had a sword strapped to her.

Not sure why she needed a sword with the werewolf in her, but I wasn’t going to question her about it. She was probably as good with that thing as she was at chess.

"We're not meant to. You're meant to stay close to the mansion so the alphas can keep an eye on you."

"Isn't that your job for today?" I taunted, and she shrugged.

"Maybe."

"Then maybe you could babysit me as we walked through the city?" I tried again, and she sighed.

"Fine. I don't know why they want to keep you locked up here anyway. After what the pack saw at the border, they're very much on your side," Anetta said, and I smiled.

That made me even warmer, and I rubbed my stomach as I stood up, the flutters in there making me a little breathless.

I wondered whether I should change into something lighter first but didn't want to risk one of my overbearing alphas finding me trying to sneak out of the mansion.

Instead, I tugged off the woolen overlay dress I had put on to come outside. Anetta frowned at me as I dumped it on the back of my chair, taking a deep breath as the flowing white underdress blew lightly against my skin.

"I can't take you into the city like that if I value anything in my life, and you know it," Anetta scolded.

I rubbed the soreness out of the bottom of my stomach and smiled.

"Well, when they have to carry around an extra life and feel how hot and clammy it gets, they can have a tantrum. Until that time, they can shut up and let me be comfortable," I said, but Anetta folded her arms, not budging.

"They don't have a problem with you being comfortable, Lorelai. They will have a problem with you wearing your undergarments in the city."

"It's a light dress, and I don't think they can have a problem when I let them get their giant cocks out all over the damn place whenever they shift," I snapped, not meaning to get annoyed with her, but it was too hot.

My body felt like it was getting slowly baked.

The life that I carried came with many other inconvenient symptoms, like frequent peeing that was much easier without the overcoat, and I didn't want the heavy fabric on my stomach when I felt like I was suffocating already.

Not to mention the constant ache attached to the fact that they rammed themselves inside me every other hour of the day.

I wasn't complaining about that one so much though. For the last few days, I had been the one demanding sating, they just obliged.

"You like driving them insane, don't you?" She snickered, and I nodded. She shook her head. "Fine. Let's go, but if they ask about it, I'm throwing you under the bus."

"I'll throw myself there." I grinned, knowing they wouldn't be angry at me for long when I saw them again. Not if I could help it.

Anetta led me around the side gate of the mansion, across the lawns, and down onto the neat cobblestone path that made its way through the city, spreading off in random directions everywhere.

The wind brushed over us lightly, kissing my exposed arms, and I savored the feeling on my hot skin that just wouldn't stop clamming up.

The flutters inside me got stronger, and my shadows stirred. I held my stomach, not sure why it felt like they were trying to give me some kind of message, an instinct or something that I couldn't interpret.

I rubbed lightly as we walked, the slight pressure of my hand on the roundness making a little bit of the ache go away.

"Is it painful?" Anetta asked, looking down at where I held my stomach with a frown.

I shook my head. "Not with the potion I have to take and the alphas' toxin. A few aches and pains creep through, but it's more how it feels inside, like...heavy."

I laughed, and she smiled.

"My mate wants one, but I keep putting it off. I like being a full member of the pack."

“Once us females start having our litters, things change. We get less called on for tasks, and we lose time for training, for fucking. I enjoy both of those things.”

I laughed at that. “I hope I don’t lose time for that. I quite enjoy it too.”

I smiled, and she returned it, then turned to look ahead through the rows of house. Wolves passed, sometimes in beast form, sometimes human, mostly naked or shirtless, but all of them nodding in respect.

“I think the pain would be quite worth it. I’m good with pain, but there’s a war coming. No offense, but I don’t want to bring a baby into that until we know it’ll be safe,” Anetta said, and I nodded.

I understood that more than she knew. I wanted to revel in the idea that I was pregnant with my alphas’ baby, to enjoy it, but at the moment, every feeling of joy we stole was borrowed from the darkness of what was brewing in the background.

It wasn’t fair. If we had known it was an issue we might have been able to prevent it or change when it happened, but we didn’t.

Whether the timing was shit or not, we had been given this for a reason—maybe because it needed to be during these times, or maybe because we fucked up and should have looked into the conditions of the link better.

Either way we had to deal with it now, and despite it being in the middle of some pretty shit times, I was glad for it.

If only Kai’s mark was gone too, then I could be a little more excited.

“I understand,” I breathed, then followed Anetta around a corner, more houses of wood and stone lining the street. “Can I ask you a question?”

“You just did.” She grinned, and I smiled.

“Has a mate ever been rejected? To the point the mating mark was removed?” I asked, and Anetta frowned, thinking hard.

That, or she knew why I was asking and was deciding whether to disappoint me.

“Not that I know of, sorry,” she whispered, and I swallowed hard at the truth.

“What happens if Kai rejects whoever he mates with?”

She sighed and paused, turning to me. “As far as I know, Lorelai, he won’t be able to. Once that connection hits, he won’t be able to survive without his mate. Their souls will connect, and it’ll be done.

“Turning it down will be ripping out his own heart. I can only speak from what I do know, and I know that if my mate tried to leave me, I would not survive. His heart, his soul, everything that exists within him is a part of me,” Anetta said.

I nodded, refusing to cry. I had known it was the case; I shouldn’t have asked. My stomach ached, my skin flashing with heat, and I blew out a breath, turning away from her.

“Where are we going?” I asked, ignoring her truth because it hurt too much to continue the conversation.

“I thought you’d want to see the community gardens that have been set up to replace the produce we will no longer be receiving from the humans.”

She smiled, and I nodded.

I followed Anetta past the pub, rowdy with wolves even in the middle of the day, then found the gardens a couple of blocks away.

They were alive with produce, fresh, beautiful produce that was greener than the humans had ever given them.

The herbs were filling the air with so many scents it was almost overwhelming. Even the flowers were in full bloom.

I frowned and moved through the planter boxes outlined in stone.

“This is amazing. How’d you get it to grow so healthily?” I asked, brushing my hand along the leaves of a lettuce.

“The alphas. Their magic has been insanely strong since linking with you. And now the border magic has been filtering through you, to them. It keeps our lands healthy.

“Your humans would have known that if they’d stuck to the plan. This year’s gifts would have been plentiful on both sides of the stone wall.” Anetta sighed wistfully.

I frowned at that and looked through the buildings to the wall of the city.

“Gifts. Why do you call them that? The humans said they were payment.”

She grimaced. “Kind of. We didn’t technically need their offerings, but the magic that comes from offering us those things helped us maintain the border outside of the virgin ceremony.

“It’s all about give and take. In the balance of things, we’re providing the magic it takes to keep their lands alive, as well as their protection.

“They are providing something in return for that, so I guess it is payment.” Anetta shrugged, and I froze, my eyes turning from all the gardens to her.

“Wait, the lands. They only prosper because of magic?” I asked.

She nodded sadly, and my breath hitched.

“So the word they said, breaking them off from wolf magic?”

“Will put an end to that prosperity.”

I gripped the edge of the stone, my heart racing. My mom relied on those crops and farms. If the magic really was gone out of the land where they lived then so were their food sources.

“I need to warn them,” I breathed, tears springing to my eyes.

“Trust me, they’ve been warned, Lorelai. The alphas and council have been corresponding with your father on these matters, asking him to see reason, but magic requires balance and he is refusing to offer anything in return, adamant he can look after his people on his own,” Anetta explained.

I rubbed my face, my skin hot and slick despite the light wind. Irritation grew in my blood. Why was Anetta allowed to know these things and I was not? Why was I always kept in the dark?

It was bullshit, and I was getting tired of it. If the alphas were talking with my father, even about werewolf things, then they should tell me, not wait for me to have a minor heart attack worrying.

“I am so sick of being the last to know all the time.” I gritted my teeth, and Anetta shrugged.

"You're not. My mate is on the council. I peek in sometimes." She grinned, and I raised a brow at her.

Now that was my kind of wolf.

"Really?"

"Of course. How else would I find out all the gossip of the pack?"

I laughed. "I had this image in my mind of the council and it was mostly all old people saying things like 'Back in my day.'"

She shook her head with a knowing smirk. "Oh, no way. The council is filled with hot-as-hell werewolves.

"They were the strongest of our kind once and their bodies show it. My mate is one of the oldest. He was never an alpha, but he came damn close."

She grinned, and I raised a brow at her in surprise.

"Wait, so he's, like, *old* old? Like 'daddy' kind of vibes?" I teased suggestively as she started leading us down another path.

She laughed at that and nodded. "Yeah, total hot daddy vibes. And he might be old to a human in years, but damn, he doesn't look it.

"In saying that, none of them show their age. Even Derik's parents still look like it wouldn't take more than a single muscle to snap you in half."

She shuddered, and that had me pausing my steps.

"Woah, Derik's parents are still on the council?" I demanded. Another piece of information that had been conveniently left out.

Anetta nodded. "Mm-hmm. They're some of the ones that don't shift anymore. They ran outta magic years and years back, just after Derik and the other alphas took over, but they're the only ones that are still alive.

"Usually once wolves stop shifting, they kind of waste away, the magic burning out, and eventually their bodies give up, but Derik's parents are...stubborn. They're a little intimidating actually."

She half laughed, and I pursed my lips. Pretty sure I should have met them by now if they were still alive. I had assumed they had passed on like Kai's and Brax's, and yet they hadn't.

"Derik doesn't have a great relationship with them. They're not the nicest of influences on the council. They believe in keeping wolves pure and prefer the savage side of them.

"They're also the most traditional there is."

Anetta sighed before she continued and let me have the truth of it. "They're the main ones he had to convince to let you stay. They are very against the idea of letting a winter born human anywhere near the city.

"They like the idea of an heir though, they just don't think you'll be needed once it's out of you."

I sucked in a breath, my mind spinning with the truth bombs she kept giving me. I clenched my jaw, anger coiling through me hot and tight.

His parents wanted my baby without me attached to it? He was arguing on my behalf without giving me the chance to do it myself? So many fucking secrets.

I shook my head and went to turn back, I was going to that fucking meeting, but Anetta grabbed my arm.

"Don't. Please," she begged quietly. "If you do, they'll know it came from me, came from my mate. We'll both be shamed.

"Please wait until the council have left the mansion to have a tantrum at the alphas for keeping these things from you?"

I hesitated, fighting with my want to go psycho and my affection for Anetta. My affection won out, and I nodded with a heavy sigh, following her again, albeit with a sour face the whole time.

"Why are you telling me these things if you're not meant to be?" I asked, and she shrugged.

"Because if it was me, I'd want to know. The alphas tell me not to mention all these things when I am to spend the day with you, and I think it's bullshit. How can you prepare for things to come if you don't know what those things are?"

“I also think Derik needs to just tell his parents to shut the fuck up, but then again, my mate hasn’t had much luck when saying that to them, so it probably wouldn’t even work.”

She snickered, and I let a small smile appear. It made me feel a bit better that at least somebody was being honest and straight with me.

I followed Anetta down path after path, frowning as the streets got quieter.

“Where are you taking me?” I asked, and she pointed ahead to a few buildings bigger than the others.

“That is Main Street,” she said, and I frowned at the buildings, trying to read from a distance with my annoyingly human eyes.

“Hospital. Werewolf training...and is that a daycare place?” I asked, and she nodded.

“Yeah, c’mon. I want to show you what being pregnant looks like for our kind.”

She grinned, and I was all for that, so I went with her past the streets where the houses turned into more commercial-like buildings.

We passed another bar and saw a wolf getting thrown out by a lady with a bandanna in her wild curls, an apron over her khaki dress, and a grin over her fangs. She winked at me as we passed.

“Luna.” She nodded in respect, then sneered at the wolf she had kicked out and walked back into the bar.

Anetta led me straight past with a grin. “Yeah, you’re full-blown luna status now if even Juniper is giving you her blessing.” She laughed.

“I thought it was the council’s blessing that decided that?”

Anetta scoffed. “Pfffft. Yeah, right. The council members all have mates. As much as the men like to show off all their muscles and act all high and mighty, we all know they’d be on their knees in a second for us if we asked. Which means us females really have the power.

“And Juniper? She runs a brothel for the wolves and a bar with booze. She has the most sway among all the non-mated wolves—male and female.”

She smiled and led me up the stone steps of the hospital. I smirked at that and knew she had to be right.

My alphas were just as devoted as that, maybe more so, but it worked both ways. I would be on my knees with them. I wasn't sure if that made me weaker or stronger.

Anetta led me through the hospital, the stone walls closing in around me, heat flashing up my spine. I sucked in a breath, my palms prickling with sweat.

Anetta caught it and frowned at me.

"Are you okay? Do you need to sit down or something?" she asked, her eyes flicking to my stomach again.

I held it with a gentle hand, cupping it before shaking my head.

"It's just hot in here. I'm okay." I smiled, fanning my flushed face, pulling at my dress to unstick it.

She frowned a little at that, her step faltering as she stared at me. She looked like she wanted to say something but decided against it and went to the nursery.

I thought it'd be scary to see, but it was actually just cute as fuck.

Mothers sat in a big room, their babies to their breasts and in their arms. They were talking, laughing, eating. Like a commune or a village.

Like mine when I was human.

Now I was something different, and I didn't think I would have anything but my mother from that part of me, but looking at how similar that was to what the wolves had reminded me so much of home I was almost sick with it.

My heart clenched, and I smiled tightly. I didn't need to see any more.

"This is where I will come when the baby is born?" I asked, and she nodded.

"Most actually choose to birth at home but come here during the day for support and help. Our pups get a little demanding, so there's always hands to help."

She smiled, and I gave her one back, the idea of being a part of whatever community thing they were sharing making me even warmer.

A bead of sweat trickled down my brow, and I wiped it away, clutching the wall as we made our way out. I blew out a breath, trying to cool down. It was just too hot.

I was dangerously close to saying fuck it and ripping my dress off too. My skin tingled at that, but I ignored it and chased after Anetta, who was already leaving.

“C’mon, there’s someone I want you to meet.”

I followed her to the training building and then behind it, where there was a huge field and a whole lot of wolves fighting in human form. They were training, and they looked lethal.

It was sexy as fuck. So many bodies on display, sweating, breathless. I chewed my lip as my skin tingled again, heat chasing down my spine.

I hoped Anetta didn’t notice how I was affected. I tried to walk with my thighs closer together. Damn, I really missed my alphas.

If she noticed, Anetta didn’t say anything. She led me to a training mat where a woman fought a male, taking him down easily, grinning as she pinned him.

I grinned at how easily she had won, a small gasp escaping my lips as she stood up, a big swollen bump on her. She was pregnant too.

“Demi. This is Lorelai.”

Demi nodded once. “I know who she is,” she said, and I didn’t miss the sneer in her tone.

“She’s pregnant. I thought you could give her some tips on being pregnant with a wolf,” Anetta said, and Demi scoffed.

“The only tip I have for her is don’t keep pretending to be one of us when you are clearly not.”

I sucked in a breath at the tone and frowned at her. Why would Anetta want me to meet this girl who obviously hated me?

"I have never pretended to be," I said back to her, and she rolled her eyes.

"Sure. That's why you have our alphas pussy whipped and carry our future heir, poisoning it with your winter born blood," she growled, and I raised a brow, a flare of heat rushing through my blood.

"Demi," Anetta snapped before turning to me. "Sorry, Lorelai, I thought my sister had learned some manners by now, but it turns out, she got dropped on her head one too many times."

"It's okay. She can have her wrong opinion. I can't do anything about it, but it will make it that much sweeter when I prove her wrong." I turned to Demi with the sweetest smile I could manage, and she glared.

I went to talk, to tell her that I was there for the pack and I wasn't going to fuck everything up, but my words were stolen when a searing heat flared under my spine and under my skin.

My stomach twisted, my throat ran dry, and my pussy clenched. I sucked in a breath and gripped Anetta's arm, my eyes going wide as I realized what was happening.

"Lorelai?" She frowned, holding me up as my knees buckled.

Demi frowned too, sniffing the air before cursing, a slight moan on her breath before she released an earsplitting howl.

"The heat," I bit out through the tightening that burned even hotter.

I could barely breathe through it and whined as I relied on Anetta to hold me up, my nails digging into her arm as all the wolves started howling.

"Fuck," she bit, her own voice breathy. Her mating mark glowed, and I frowned at it.

"It does that every heat?" I snapped, and she nodded, her jaw clenched as she started urging me back the way we came.

"I need to get to my mate, and I have to get you to the alphas," she urged, helping me along.

All the wolves started shifting, racing to whoever they needed. Half of them clashed on the training field, their sparring turning to something entirely different.

The feeling of their heat hitting them hit me too, and I gritted my teeth against it. I needed my alphas.

My thighs trembled as the heat between them began to throb and ache. I was human, I wasn't even meant to feel it so deeply, but it was there, thrumming in my blood, and I needed it to stop.

"Where are you?!" I heard in my head and winced, moving through the chaotic streets, averting my eyes as clothes tore, teeth gnashed, and flesh met.

Anetta whined from next to me, her throat letting a small howl out before she clamped down on it, her cheeks flushed, her eyes wide and dilated.

"I'm sorry," I breathed, and she shook her head.

"Just move. The alphas are going to kill me for bringing you here. You're unmated and exposed during the heat.

"With Fractum in effect, that could mean the wolves lose their shit enough to risk losing their lives," she bit.

My heart raced at her words. I urged my aching body on faster, the desperation overwhelming me, but I had to ignore it.

"I'm in the city. I'm on my way back," I said back to Derik, who I felt panicking.

I felt Kai's anger radiate through me and grimaced. Fuck, they were pissed. I wasn't, I was terrified.

"That brand, it calls to your mate?" I said, and she paused, looking at me before nodding. I didn't miss the pity in her eyes.

"Yeah."

"So Kai's brand will hurt like a bitch the entire heat and he won't be able to stop it calling for his mate the whole time?" I confirmed, and she nodded.

I moved faster, tears springing to my eyes as I swallowed hard.

"Kai?" I breathed into the link, and he met my connection.

"Run faster, Little Human. I need you."

His voice was strained even in my head, and I regretted ever leaving the mansion.

I ran faster, ignoring the ache, ignoring my own desperation, knowing if his mate got there before I did, I was never going to forgive myself.