

## Owned by the Alphas 2: Claimed by the Alphas |

### The Witches

LORELAI

“Mom, is that tea ready?” I asked, and she nodded, pouring the freshly-boiled water in the cups.

“Boys, as much as we love you being here to protect us weak little females, we are about to talk childbirth, blood, and the afterbirth care that Ryleigh and Lorelai will need.

“How about you give us some privacy?” she ordered, and both of the men frowned at her request.

“The alphas will have my fangs if I leave her alone,” Lucas said, and I laughed.

“My alphas will have those anyway if I am talking about my privates with you in the room. You decide, brother,” I urged, and his eyes widened before he shook his head and opened the door.

Vaughn stood up, eyeing Ryleigh intently. “I’ll go and get some food for you from the human dining hall. You’ve got that long before Ryleigh needs her rest,” he said.

I bristled at the commanding tone. I didn’t like it, and I wasn’t used to it from Vaughn.

I frowned after him, watching as he walked through the door, leaving with my brother, talking about women being unreasonably hard to deal with when pregnant. That did not sound like a mate.

Even my brother nodding irked me. He was to marry Ryleigh, and he didn’t look concerned at all.

Or I was reading too much into it and they were being a vampire and a male with no clue how things worked when it came to women and childbirth.

"He's different," I whispered out loud, accepting my tea from Mom, who sat in the chair next to the bed.

I looked to Ryleigh, who shrugged.

"He is stressed about the baby." She gave an excuse, but the lie was still acid on my tongue.

"You don't believe that any more than I do. What happened?" I asked.

She shrugged again. "I'm not sure. He was fine, and then the pains started and everything changed."

"How?" I pushed.

She blushed like she was betraying him, and maybe she felt like she was, but if something was wrong, I had to know. That wasn't the Vaughn who saved me from the human cells.

"I can't say for sure. He just changed. He was my mate, sweet and loving, and I truly felt our connection, but now? We're not connected. We haven't touched in...so long."

She let out a breath, and I nodded along.

"Well, that could be why the pains are there. When I am not with my mates for extended periods of time, I feel pain," I tried.

"Maybe, but I *am* with him. He sleeps next to me, he holds me, he feeds me, all the things he is supposed to do, but I just don't feel the same with him. Like there is something blocking our connection.

"I wondered whether it was the baby," she admitted, her hand rubbing her stomach again, tears falling, but I shook my head.

"No, it can't be that. Surely the mating bond creating something like this would not put a barrier on it. If anything, it should strengthen things," I said, then chewed my lip, looking over my shoulder.

"Mom, lock the door," I said, and she didn't hesitate.

Ryleigh frowned. "What are you doing?"

"I'm going to check the baby. Is that okay?" I asked, and she gasped.

"I can't. I told him I wouldn't."

"And he isn't here. This is not the same rules as the village, Rye. This is your body, and you have control over what happens to it. He does not," I said firmly.

She hesitated a second before finally nodding.

"Hurry," she said, then lay back with our help.

I pulled her shirt up to her breasts. Then I listened to my magic.

I let it out, just a little, enough to cover her stomach. It brushed over the curve, tenderly touching her before seeping beneath her skin.

It flooded feelings back to me so fast it overwhelmed me, and I yanked my magic back, running for the bathroom.

I dropped to the toilet, throwing up, Mom rushing to hold my hair back.

I finished being sick, waiting for the nausea to pass and the cramps in my own stomach to stop.

"Sweetie?" Mom asked, then pushed some water toward me.

I took it and gulped it down before wiping my damp forehead and standing on unsteady legs.

I tried to filter through the feelings my magic was giving me, slower this time, like they were sorry for overwhelming me. As I did, I sat back down next to Ryleigh, who looked miserable.

"That means it's bad, right?" she cried, and I shook my head, swallowing to stop the nausea again.

"Your baby is alive and well, I felt that," I said, still not sure what the rest of it meant.

Nausea, pain, fear, wariness. Ryleigh was full of it, and there was something else in there, a taint inside her that my magic had sought out immediately.

It wasn't a lot, but it was enough to have me worried.

"I'm getting you moved back into the rooms with the humans," I said, and she frowned.

"But—"

"You need to be around the other humans. It'll make it harder for whatever is happening to happen with so many witnesses."

"Is it Vaughn? Is he doing this?" she asked, horrified, like the words were almost choking her to ask, but I couldn't answer it with specifics.

"I don't know. You say he's changed, and I can see he has, but enough to hurt you or the baby? I can't say."

"All I know is that there is something inside you, a darkness that is faint and not enough to kill but enough to make me sure that something is making sure you are bedridden."

"It's the reason for the connection not happening with Vaughn. And that is where I am confused," I admitted.

"Confused?" my mother prompted, and I nodded.

"Well, if this darkness is stopping you from connecting you with your mate, from what I understand from Kai and Derik, that could cause...issues. It could be the reason you are in pain."

"Since you are not connecting, your soul is yearning for it, punishing your body, making it weak for not being with your mate. It could also be the reason for the change in Vaughn."

"If it is the reason and not being connected is making him off, then it would rule him out since he wouldn't hurt the connection intentionally."

"He wouldn't be able to. It's a mating, your souls are linked, if you're weak or in pain then so is he. And vice versa," I explained.

Ryleigh frowned, nodding. "How do I get the connection back then? If it will fix everything?"

“Get whatever that darkness is out,” I said, but that was where my theories and answers ended.

I had no idea how to do that, and I couldn’t use my magic in her, not when it made me feel the way it did.

“How?” She trembled, her eyes filling again, and Mom grabbed her hand.

“I’m going to go check with Galen, he might have some ideas or herbs that could help,” she said, and I nodded.

“I’ll check with Cain. He might have an idea,” I said. “We’ll get this sorted, Rye. There’s no way you can stay estranged from your mate, we won’t let it happen.

“We’ll bring you and Vaughn back together, okay?”

“Thank you,” she whispered, and I smiled, kissing her forehead.

“Get some rest,” I said, and Mom stood up too, tucking her in, leaving her tea next to her.

We left the room, and I grabbed Mom’s elbow, urging her down the cold, stone corridor lit by torches.

“Mom.” I stopped. She turned to me with a frown, and I leaned in. “She’s being poisoned,” I revealed, and Mom gasped.

“There’s a traitor,” she breathed, and I nodded, urging her along the hall.

“Yes. Which we knew because of my tea, but it’s going after her now, I just don’t know why.

“I need you to go to Galen and get every antitoxin potion and herb brew you can make,” I said urgently.

She nodded, lifting her skirts. “And you?”

“I am going to find my alphas and Cain so we can hunt down the wolf in our henhouse.” I smirked, then lifted my own skirts and took off in the opposite direction.

I ran as fast as I could up to the top floor, hunting down Cain. It was easier with my magic making me stronger and keeping me moving fast.

Cain wasn't in his room, so I went to the next best thing. His mate.

"Beenie!" I demanded, bashing on the door before shoving it open and going in.

She scowled at me over her shoulder, dropping her paint tray on the table, and gritted her teeth toward me.

My eyes widened at her room.

It was covered in paintings, all stunning in quality but all dark and twisted. I sucked in a breath and stepped slowly in as Beenie stormed up to me.

"Get the fuck out, Luna," she snapped, but I ignored her.

She had charcoal over her face and down the apron she wore, on her fingertips. Most of the paintings were charcoal, but some were a mixture of oils too. They were so...terrifyingly amazing.

"These are yours," I stated, and she huffed.

"Obviously."

"They're amazing," I said, and she scoffed.

"Not when they are stuck in my head every time I close my eyes. Now what do you want?" she said, and started packing up her latest painting.

It was a creature, one of shadows and red eyes. It reminded me of Silas, and I stepped toward it.

"These are your nightmares," I realized, and she nodded.

I motioned to the one she was packing away. "He is mine," I said, and she swallowed, pausing her angry packing.

"You see him too?" she asked, and I nodded.

"All the time. Ever since I saw the destruction of our realm at his teeth. The border magic is telling me he is still a threat. And yet we are being directed toward a witch.

"It's confusing, and I don't like being confused. But your painting reminds me he is still very much a key in this. I just don't know how yet," I said.

She considered me for a minute before she huffed and put her things back down. She went to her bucket of water and rinsed her hands.

"My nightmares feel like warnings too," she admitted softly. "Cain is the only one who quiets them now."

"And before him, they were constant?" I asked.

She nodded.

"Which is why you stayed up here, refusing to come down to the pack," I said, and she swallowed, meeting my eyes as she nodded.

"Sometimes I have trouble knowing what is reality and what is still a nightmare. I need Cain and these paintings to help," she said before sitting at the table with me.

My heart tugged for her, and Kai hovered in our link, his pain, his regret filling me. I should've known he'd be listening as soon as I sought out his sister.

"Tell Kai to fuck off. I don't need or want his sympathy," she snapped.

I shrugged. "He's sorry he thought you were just being a brat."

"Everyone does. I don't give a fuck what they think," she replied, and I tasted the lie but left it alone.

"I'm here because I need help finding Cain. Any chance you know where he is?" I asked, changing the subject to make her more comfortable.

"He's my mate, of course I know where he is."

"I wasn't sure. I can't feel Derik or Brax when they are with him where he communicates with Tabby, so I wasn't sure if you could."

"I'll take you to them," she said, rolling her eyes like it was such an inconvenience before standing up.

She grabbed her velvety maroon coat and chucked it on over her black leather leggings and leather vest that was tight to her body, showing off the modest swell of her breasts.

She was a stunning woman, but I had yet to meet a wolf that wasn't. Something about the way they held themselves made me sure that every single one could hold their own against the males of the pack.

She led me out of her room and toward the end of the hall.

It grew darker and darker until I could barely see, but she grabbed my elbow and led me to a hidden stairwell, shoving the door open and dragging me up the stairs.

She knocked three times, then two, then one before barging in. She pushed me in, and Derik moved to get me.

"Beautiful," he said, lifting my chin to him, checking me over.

"I wasn't sure where you were," I said, and he nodded a thanks to Beenie.

"Keep her out of my room," she snapped, then moved into Cain, pressing her lips against his.

I turned to Brax as he came forward from the shadows, then looked around the room.

It was really dark, with a giant glass window in the steeple of the tower we were in.

There was a circle in the middle of the room lit by candles in five points of a pentagram, with a bowl in the middle that smelled sweet and almost sickly.

I held my stomach and curled into my alphas.

"Is this space protected? Nobody can hear us?" I asked, and Brax kicked the door shut.

"Now it is. What's wrong? Did your brother do something? Where is he? I'll tear his throat out," Brax snarled, and I shook my head.



"No, I just left Ryleigh's room. He left to get food with Vaughn, but she's been poisoned. It's stopping her mating connection with Vaughn's soul."

"She's getting sick and has pains from it, but he is changing. It's making him hostile. We need to get their souls connected again, but I've put Mom and Galen on that."

"We need to figure out who is here that is poisoning things. First me, and now Ryleigh," I said, and Derik looked at Brax.

"I may be able to get some answers. I'll talk to my mom," Cain said, stepping forward and sitting down at the head of the pentagram, his legs crossed, his piercings glinting in the candlelight.

His black hair shadowed his face, and his black vest was open, revealing his tattoos, but this time they moved.

I frowned and watched them before swaying a little when the dizziness came.

"Don't watch them, Spitfire," Brax whispered in my ear, then pulled me into him, but I shook him off.

I didn't want to watch them, I wanted to touch them. I stepped toward Cain, my hand out, but Derik grabbed it.

"No, beautiful. Cain is doing witch magic. He's connecting with Tabby again, so you need to wait," he said, but I shook him off too.

My magic wanted to touch the tattoos, like it was calling to them.

"I have to touch them, you'll see," I said, though I wasn't sure what they'd see because I had no idea why my magic wanted it, but they did.

Cain looked up and frowned at me as I knelt down next to him. My alphas hovered as Beenie came over and smacked my hand away.

"You're gonna lose a hand in a minute, Luna. You might share your mating bond with another, but I do not," she growled, and I shook my head.

"I am happy with my lot, Beenie. I won't disrespect you, but my magic is calling to his. I have to touch it," I said, and she clenched her jaw, looking at Cain, who was frowning harder.

“She’s right. My magic is doing the same. It’s luring hers,” he strained out.

Beenie glowered, but she backed up a single step. “Fine.”

I looked to Cain. He frowned again before laughing, and even I joined the others in looking at him like he was crazy.

“It’s Mom. She’s the one making us feel that. If you touch my magic, she can talk to you directly.”

He shook his head and extended his arm to me, his tattoos black and almost metallic as they moved, a snake wrapping around the skulls and roses on his arm, hissing as I put my hand on them.

I grinned as it took me to Tabby’s house.

Cain leaned against the bench, sipping tea as Tabby hobbled over with her walking stick and pulled me into a warm hug.

“Tabby,” I breathed, warmth and comfort filling me.

“Luna,” she said, and her eyes sparkled, her smile wide.

“How was the mountain?” I asked.

Tabby sighed, rolling her eyes before heading over to her wall of potions and mixes.

“Enlightening and frustrating, as always with the witches. They are not happy with the events and are entertaining the idea that our witch is the rogue witch they exiled.

“Adrenna was a wonderful witch before she was exiled, and I do miss her how she was. She was quite supportive of my situation when I became pregnant with Cain.

“Of course, I decided to live here with him, and she couldn’t understand why the witches would be angry with me for it.

“I didn’t technically break the rules, so they couldn’t exile me but if I stayed, they could keep me from my son once he was born. I was not going to let that happen.

“Because of how Adrenna supported me, they were quite hesitant to give me information,” Tabby explained, handing me a tea and sipping hers as we sat at the table.

Cain just listened, keeping our connection there.

“How powerful is she?” I asked, and Tabby shrugged.

“She has always been as powerful as the rest of us, but the issue doesn’t lie in her power. It lies in the fact that she is playing by her own rules.

“You and I even are governed by laws and rules. We are also caged by our own morals and desire to do good, but she has no such will anymore. She will hurt or kill anyone that gets in her way.

“I’m afraid being locked in a shadow realm for decades will do that, and she has been fighting for her life every second of it, so that survival instinct has probably made her crave power like nothing else,” Tabby said.

I nodded, understanding the feeling of helplessness.

“And the creature?” I wondered.

“Good news there. The creature has been designed, programmed through magic to only want her. It won’t kill other things here; it won’t even recognize them as the enemy unless they stand in its way to kill her.”

“So that is why she wants power? To beat the creature that is after her?” I asked, and Tabitha nodded.

“Yes. That would be my guess. The creature hasn’t broken through the shadow realm into this one yet though, and by the way the witches avoided my questioning around it, I would say it won’t get out in time to let it take care of Adrenna for you.”

She sighed, emptying her cup. I sipped my tea and looked at the dark liquid.

“And how do I take care of her?” I asked quietly.

“That I do not know. All I can say is have faith in the balance.”

“I’m trying, but I keep getting this feeling like she will still win, she will still get what she wants.”

“Then it means the fight is not over,” she said cryptically, and I huffed, emptying my tea and standing from the table.

“The witches won’t help?”

She shook her head. “They will only step in if you and the wolves fail.”

“But by then it will be too late.”

“Have faith. I do. Trust your magic, and it will provide,” she said, and I leaned down to hug her.

“And the baby?” I asked, looking down at my stomach.

She smiled down at it, but her smile faltered.

I frowned. “What? What’s wrong?” I demanded as she stepped forward and touched my stomach.

I let her and tried to wait for her to respond, but my magic yanked at me, tugging, trying to take the connection.

I looked at Cain, who had a tight grip on the bench, frowning as he stared at his mom.

“Mom,” he warned, “we’re getting pulled back.” His voice was tight with tension.

“No,” she whispered, holding my stomach.

She looked up at me, her eyes wide, and just as I went to ask her what the hell she saw, why fear covered her face, my magic yanked me back.

I flew back from Cain, Brax catching me as my head spun.

“No!” I cried, shuffling back over to Cain through my haziness.

I grabbed his arm and latched my hands on it, tears in my eyes as the look of horror on Tabby’s face played in my head over and over again.