

## The Billionaire Alpha's Contract Lover

### Chapter 31

With a wry smile, I said, "It seems like I misunderstood. However..." I paused. "I asked you before if I could have a boyfriend, and you said it was up to me. Since I have a boyfriend, it's normal for me and him to have sex, don't you think?"

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Griffon was stunned, and his face became even darker, his eyes glowing even brighter with his wolf.

Before I could stop my hand, before I could think about what I was doing, I reached up and ran my fingers over the furrows between his eyebrows as if trying to smooth them out. Trying to erase the anger on his face.

This was the man I had loved for five years. How could I bear to hurt him like this?

But he didn't love me-not even a tiny bit of "like". Why couldn't I let go? Why did I care if I managed to hurt him one tiny sliver of what he'd made me feel?

He grabbed my wrist.

"Don't touch me!" he growled. "You're filthy now."

I knew he would react like this, but hearing him say I was dirty again made me ache. Belonged to him, it was tarnished, dirty, filthy...

Unfit for the all-powerful Alpha Knight.

Gritting my teeth, I suppressed my emotions and looked at the hand that was tightly gripping my wrist.

"If you hate me this much, if I'm so filthy, why don't you let go of me?" I cocked my head to the side, once again unable to bottle in my hopeful thoughts. "Or...do you not want to let go?"

Everything before this felt like an act I was putting on. And now... Now, I was the most authentic version of myself. The woman who was desperate to receive SOMETHING from him.

Griffon seemed to have seen through. The killing intent in his eyes faded away and was replaced by indifference.

Without any hesitation, he pushed me away, snarling, "Get out!"

I fell out of the car as Griffon opened the door that I was leaning against. My tailbone banged against the sidewalk as I landed in a sprawled heap, dressed only in my

underwear and bra, my hair and makeup a mess.

A second later, my bag and the tatters of my clothes were tossed out, landing beside me.

But I didn't care. I tucked my tangled hair behind my ear, picked up the torn clothes, and put them on again.

I grabbed my purse and stood to walk down the sidewalk,

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mustering all the bravery and composure I could, praying no one had seen.

Just as I took my first step away from the parked Town Car, Griffon stopped me.

"Taya," he growled low.

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I turned around, a smile I didn't feel plastered on my face. "What? Can you not bear to part with me? Don't want to watch me walk away?"

Without even looking at me, keeping his focus straight ahead, Griffon threw a crumpled-up check onto the sidewalk at my feet.

"I've fucked you for five years, and I pay for what I use."

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I stood still for a few seconds, then quietly bent down to pick up the check.

Five years ago, this money was life changing. Five years ago, I'd desperately needed it.

But now, it didn't matter even a little bit.

Calmly, I took a step toward the car and placed the wad of paper on the car seat.

"Alpha Knight, you are too generous, but if I were to take your money, I wouldn't be able to marry Roman with a clear conscience."

It wasn't until then that Griffon realized why Taya didn't want a penny from him. It turned out that she had plans to marry a wealthy and powerful man.

As he looked up at her, all doubts in his heart dissipated entirely, leaving him numb.

"I never want to see your face again."

Taya smiled indifferently, and something flitted through her eyes, an emotion or thought he couldn't place. "You won't."

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At the gate of Griffon's private manor, Preston quickly got out of the car.

A Town Car drove into the garden when he was about to enter the villa to look for Griffon.

A man who was nearly 6'2" tall got out of the car.

He exuded an arrogant aura from head to toe, with a strong sense of command that made people dare not approach him.

Even Preston felt a chill run down his spine when he saw him.

He shook off his thoughts and walked up to Griffon.

“Griffon-” Preston started to ask where Griffon had gone after Nightshade, but he clamped his mouth shut when the Alpha’s look shot daggers at him.

With a low, rumbling growl, Griffon walked past Preston and headed straight for the villa. As the entrance, the servant, who had been waiting some time for him, greeted him with a bow. They’d expected their Alpha to be back much earlier, but they hadn’t dared to leave the door for fear of Griffon’s wrath should they not be in their proper places when he returned home. Griffon removed his jacket and tie, handing them to the servant.

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Then, he walked to the wet bar and grabbed a decanter full of caramel-colored liquor.

He casually picked up two tumblers and poured a glass for each of them. He turned and handed one to Preston.

“What brings you here?” Griffon asked.

Preston rarely came to the pack manor. He must have something to tell him, especially at such a late hour.

Preston took the tumbler, sniffed, and then took a swig. Bourbon. The good stuff.

He looked Griffon up and down. Seeing the Alpha’s expression, which wasn’t as grim as before, Preston mustered up the courage to speak.

“Did Ms. Palmer offend you somehow before tonight?”

The Alpha’s actions tonight were completely out of character for him.

“It’s none of your business.”

Preston remained unfazed and probed further. “Is she the woman you keep?”

He knew that his cousin had a secret lover, but he had never seen her before. Something about the way Griffon had treated this woman made Preston think there was something more at play between them.

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Griffon raised his head and clenched his jaw. “What are you implying?”

4/5

Preston planned to probe a bit more, but when he saw the hairs on the back of Griffon’s hand get longer, he decided not to beat around the bush. He didn’t have long before the wolf took over and Griffon became all sharp edges and teeth.

“Griffon, have you fallen in love with Ms. Palmer?”

In Nightshade, when he saw how Griffon had targeted Taya, he’d already guessed that she was the woman who had been his secret lover for five years.

When he first saw that Taya looked like Tara, he thought Griffon had just regarded her as a substitute while he was unable to have Tara.

But then Griffon had lost control of the tight reins he held on his emotions.

Strong emotion from an Alpha never led to anything good, and Griffon had always been able to maintain his rigid composure, never let anyone see what he was truly feeling.

Until tonight.

Until an emotion Preston didn’t even think Griffon was capable of showed its face.

Jealousy.

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Griffon slowly, deliberately set down the glass he was holding.

His claws were starting to come out now, and his fingers were clutching the glass so tightly,

Preston was afraid it would just disintegrate into a thousand pieces under the pressure.

Griffon looked at Preston. "What do you think?"

Preston decided to push forward. "I think you like her a little, don't you? Otherwise, why would you be so angry when you heard she had slept with Roman?"

Griffon snarled, "It's in poor taste to flaunt one's promiscuity. With a Beta no less. So I decided to put her in her place. Is that love?"

Ah, so there it was.

Taya had moved from a man as rich and powerful as THE Alpha Knight, to the "lowly" Beta Starke. That made sense to Preston. Griffon didn't want people thinking that he and Roman ran in the same circles, close enough to have access to the same women. He didn't want to be associated with someone like

Roman.

Moreover, as soon as Tara returned to the country, Griffon broke things off with Taya, which was enough to show that Taya was not important and didn't take up any room in Griffon's Chapter 33 heart.

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Preston didn't say anything more. He raised his head and drank up the rest of the bourbon in his glass. Then he got up and said goodbye to his cousin.

Griffon didn't reply. He just nodded indifferently.

Preston was used to his cousin's indifference. It had been Griffon's primary emotion and attitude since he was a child, so Preston didn't take it to heart. He simply picked up his coat and turned to leave.

It was raining heavily outside. His driver was waiting for him, and when he saw Preston, he rushed over with an umbrella. Once in the car, Preston directed him toward downtown.

While stopped at a traffic light, he saw Taya, who was only wearing a dress, hailing a taxi in the heavy rain.

Her petite body was thin. The dress, soaked by the rain, tightly clung to her body, making her seem even more fragile.

Her curly hair was plastered to her head and stuck to her face.

Somehow, despite how broken she looked standing there forlornly in the rain, it didn't affect her beauty one bit.

Preston saw taxi after taxi zooming past Taya, but none of them stopped.

After hesitating for a moment, he ordered his driver over to he

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I covered my eyes with a hand and vaguely saw a man walking toward me with an umbrella. When the umbrella covered my head, I was stunned for a moment, slowly raising my eyes to look at him...

It was like looking at Griffon from five years ago...

It was raining that day, too. I'd knelt at the nightclub door and begged passers-by to buy me for a night.

Many men came in and out, touching, teasing, and laughing at me, but not a single one was willing to pay for me.

And then a mountain of a man, who I could immediately tell was a wolf shifter by the gleam in his eyes slowly approached. When he covered the top of my head with the umbrella in his hand to shield me from the storm, it was like I was looking at a god.

In the dim glow of the streetlights, I'd crawled to his feet, grabbed the hem of his pants, and begged him to buy me for a night.

The man looked down at me with no contempt or ridicule in his eyes. He just asked coldly, "Are you clean?"

I'd blushed and nodded, and then the man stretched out his large, strong hand to me.

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When I placed my hand in his broad palm, I'd sealed my fate. I would be tied to him for the rest of my life, and I hadn't a clue.

"Get in the car. I'll take you home."

Preston opened the car's back door, and his warm voice washed over me, mixed with the rain. Only then did I come to my senses.

It wasn't that night five years ago, and it wasn't Alpha Knight standing in front of me. It was Preston, Griffon's cousin.

But Griffon and I were over. And even when we had been... whatever... I'd never been around his family. He would probably be enraged if I were associated with his family in any way, spent any time with Preston.

The catch? My phone was dead, so I couldn't request an Uber. And taxis in this town were the worst. They never stopped, or they already had a passenger. Any of the nearby stores or businesses were well past being closed, so I was left with walking home in the pouring rain, continue failing to get a taxi...or let Preston drive me.

Goddess, I wished I had a wolf so I would have a fourth option to shift and run home.

I hesitated for a moment and got in his car.

Water dripped everywhere off me, and the seat was soaked in

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seconds, water pooling on the floormat beneath my feet.

3/3

All I had in my purse were a couple of tissues, and I grabbed them and tried to wipe up the seat. It was no use, though. They only made more of a mess, leaving white bits behind as they disintegrated under my vigorous wiping.

Embarrassment flooded me, and my face burned. "I'm so sorry. I got everything all wet and dirty."

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Preston quickly turned to face the back seat and stopped me, his voice low and gentle. "Don't worry about it. It's just water. It'll dry."

For a moment, I almost forgot that the person sitting in the passenger seat in front of me, who had rescued me from the rain was related to Griffon, was part of the powerful Knight family and pack. A pack known more for its ruthlessness and power than its kindness.

I shoved the remainder of the tissues in my bag, then looked at Preston uneasily and whispered, "Thank you."

Preston waved his hand casually. "Where do you live?"

I gave him the address, and the car quickly started and drove in the direction of my home.

Glancing at Preston, I felt a little less embarrassed when I saw him looking out of the window, his attention elsewhere. All I had to do was get through this short car ride. And thankfully, he wasn't sitting in the back seat with me. I wasn't sure why he was sitting in the front seat, but I

hoped it was because he was trying to be polite and give me space...not because he would have been disgusted to sit next to me.

I'd had plenty of shifters in my life who'd wanted nothing to do with the human girl raised by wolves.

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2/4

Preston looked at the thin figure in the back seat through the rearview mirror.

It was a cold day for a human, and she had no coat. Yet she was still out in the rain trying to hail a taxi, which made Preston curious. Why hadn't she called someone or tried to find shelter until the rain passed?

"Ms. Palmer, why didn't Beta Starke take you home?"

A look of confusion crossed her face for a second before she erased it.

My wolf knew she was coming up with a lie...he could smell it in the pheromones coming off of her.

She clenched the purse in her hand and said casually, "We had an argument, and he threw me out of the car."

Preston nodded slightly. "I see."

He noticed she was shivering, so he turned up the heat and didn't ask any more questions. She clearly wasn't going to tell him the truth anyways.

The temperature in the car rose, and Taya gradually stopped shivering-while Preston was burning up. Wolves ran hotter, and he couldn't wait to turn the A/C on once she was out of the car.

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3/4

She gave a grateful look to Preston and explained in a cautious tone, "I was originally planning to call an Uber, but my phone died. Everything was closed, so I was trying to get a taxi. I'm really sorry to trouble you, but I'm thankful you stopped."

Preston looked at the embarrassed Taya again in the rearview mirror before saying gently, "It's okay."

Only then did Taya seem to relax. She leaned her head against the car window and closed her eyes wearily.

She soon fell asleep.

Not long after, the car stopped at the gate leading to Taya's neighborhood.

Preston said without looking back, "Ms. Palmer, we're here."

After a few seconds without a response or hearing any movement from the back seat, Preston turned to look at Taya.

His eyes widened slightly when he saw her leaning against the car window and sleeping soundly.

How utterly careless. How dare this little unprotected slip of a human sleep in a strange wolf's car so easily?

Did she think just assume that he was a good person?

Frowning, Preston gave his driver a meaningful look.

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I was jolted awake by someone pushing me, and I struggled to open my eyes. All I could see were dark shadows, making it difficult to determine where I was.

I knew my illness had worsened due to being drenched in the rain, but thankfully my thoughts were still clear, and I remembered that I was in Preston's car.

Quickly, I sat up straight, thanked Preston again, then pushed open the door and exited the car. "Ms. Palmer..."

Preston stopped me, took an umbrella from the back seat, and handed it to me. "It's still raining. Take it."

The logo on the umbrella was designer, and there was no way I was taking something so expensive from him. Especially since I didn't know if I would have the chance to return it. I softly declined, "Thank you, but it's only a few steps away. I'll run."

Preston seemed stunned for a second. He seemed to have read my mind, and he threw the umbrella at me. "You don't have to return it."

I hated being in this position. I hated taking things from people, and I really hated that it was Griffon's cousin who was being so nice to me. But as a human of lower standing, the last thing I

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2/3

could afford to do was offend a man from such a powerful pack.

"May I please have your contact information? I'll return this to you tomorrow."

Preston looked at me with a raised brow and a bit of a frown on his handsome face. "I don't like it when people show up uninvited."

But...all I wanted to do was return his umbrella. I didn't want to visit him, and I wasn't look for anything more. Hell, I didn't even have to see him in order to return the damn thing. "I didn't mean-"

"Ms. Palmer."

Preston interrupted me abruptly, his eyes full of warning and glowing a bit with his wolf. "It does not matter what you mean. I brought you home out of kindness. If you have any other ideas, put them out of your head immediately."

His words made me uncomfortable. I didn't say anything more. Just put down the umbrella and turned to leave.

After two steps in the rain, I felt dissatisfied and turned back to look at Preston.

"Mr. Knight, thank you for bringing me home, but I require nothing more from you. The last thing I want to do is take something that belongs to you without returning it, and I don't want to be indebted to you."

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3/3

Looking at the petite figure as she ran into her neighborhood, Preston was a bit stunned.

In his experience, women like Taya would do everything they could to seduce rich powerful wolves from dominant packs such as the Knight pack. And if Taya wasn't like that, she wouldn't have started dating Roman immediately after things ended with Griffon.

Taking the umbrella would have been a perfect opportunity for her to work out a way to see him under the pretense of returning it.

Perhaps Preston had misunderstood the little human girl...

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After I ran home in the rain, I removed my dress and the diamond necklace and threw them into the box they'd come in.

Tomorrow, I would send them back to Roman. His "gifts" disgusted me, and I would never accept them.

After closing the box, I went to the bathroom and turned on the faucet in the bathtub. I desperately needed a hot soak to warm me up. The chill from the rain had set deep in my bones, and my illness didn't make it better.

Once the tub was full, I sank into the water with a sigh.

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I held the bath ball and scrubbed my face and body, rubbing my skin red before looking at myself in the mirror, sans of my armor of makeup. My face was left with a sickly pallor, devoid of any vitality or energy, and my eyes were dimmed to the point of lifelessness.

I couldn't see the light, couldn't feel the warmth.

Tonight I'd been treated as if I were no better than the dirt under someone's shoe. But I was a person, dammit. And I deserved to be treated with dignity.

"Dignity."

I snorted and gave myself a self-deprecating smile in the mirror.

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2/3

From the moment I'd sold myself to Griffon, I had lost whatever little bit of dignity I'd possessed.

I dried my hair and lay down on the bed, extremely tired, and fell deeply asleep again.

After getting drenched in the rain, my condition worsened significantly. I buried my head in sleep until the afternoon of the next day.

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Harper had been on duty all night, so she slept from morning to afternoon. When she got up and prepared dinner, Taya was still asleep.

She had no choice but to knock on Taya's door. She called out to her, but there was no response. Only then did she realize that something was wrong.

Harper quickly pushed the door open and walked in. When she saw Taya's flushed face, she quickly reached out and touched her forehead.

She was burning up!

Harper quickly lifted the quilt to help Taya up. "Taya, you have a high fever. Get up quickly. I'll take you to the hospital."

Taya, in and out of consciousness due to the fever, resisted when she heard the word "hospital."

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"We're not going to the hospital..."

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Harper didn't allow Taya to refuse. Thanks to her wolf's added strength, Harper was easily able to carry the small woman, get her into the car, and drive to the hospital.

As soon as Harper carried Taya into the emergency room, staff rushed over.

"She's not a shifter," Harper hurried to tell them.

Harper knew that Taya had congenital heart disease, and if the hospital assumed she was a shifter, they wouldn't give her the proper treatment. It was easy for her to run short of oxygen if she caught a cold or fever, and her body wouldn't work to heal itself the way a wolf shifter's would.

Taya was quickly settled into a room, given an IV and oxygen, and monitors were set up to keep an eye on her.



It wasn't until midnight that Taya's high fever slowly subsided.

Harper sighed in relief, picked up her phone, and took two days off. Then she leaned against the bed and silently waited for Taya to wake.

They'd both been dropped off at the orphanage when they were about a year old, within days of each other. They had become each other's everything, and the only other person they'd had any relationship with growing up had been the orphanage

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director.

2/3

Harper raised her hand, touched Taya's pale face, and sighed.

Taya was unlucky in every way. From the orphanage, to never getting her wolf, to her heart issues.

And the two men she had met and fallen for were both scumbags.

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fell in and out of a fevered sleep.

In a daze, I saw a young man reaching out his bloody hands to me.

His face was full of pain. He opened his mouth as if he had said something, but I was too far away to hear him.

I subconsciously walked toward him. "What did you say?"

The young man suddenly stopped talking. His clear eyes were fixed on me.

It suddenly rained heavily from the night sky, washing the youth's blood-stained face clean.

Only then did I see his face. I rushed forward and shouted, "Silas!"

The scene changed, and the young man disappeared. I saw

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myself kneeling at the door of a nightclub.

A man with a black umbrella walked up to me and asked condescendingly, "Are you clean?"

I nodded with a blush and shyly put my hand in his palm.

When he held my hand, I saw that the hand holding mine turned into a pair of bloody hands.

3/3

The man in front of me also turned into that ferocious young boy. His eyes were red with the ire of his wolf. He grabbed my neck, squeezing, and roared at me.

"Taya! Why did you sell yourself to him? Why did you betray me? Why did you do this?!"

I shook my head desperately. "No, no, it's not like that..."

I shouted and explained, but the man still pushed me away and turned to leave.

I managed to catch up with him and grabbed his clothes, crying and shouting, "Silas, don't go!"

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"Taya! Taya, what's wrong?"

I felt someone nudging me awake.

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Gradually, I came back to my senses. I slowly opened my eyes, only to see that Griffon and Silas had disappeared, leaving only a worried Harper standing over me, a distraught look on her face.

Only then did I realize it had just been a nightmare. It wasn't real, and I wasn't with Silas and Griffon. I was safe.

At least, I had to be if Harper was here, right?

I cleared my mind and swallowed my saliva. I raised my hand to get some water, only to find an IV attached to it.

"You had a high fever, so I brought you to the hospital."

Seeing that I was in a daze from the fever, Harper spoke softly, explaining, then picked up the glass of water next to me and helped me drink it.

After a few sips of water, I slowly regained a little life.

"Harper..."

"I'm here," Harper responded gently. She lifted the hair on my

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forehead that was wet with sweat, put it behind my ear, and asked softly, "Are you hungry?"

2/3

I shook my head-slowly and with difficulty-and asked, "Did the doctor tell you anything?"

I still hadn't figured out how to talk to Harper about what was wrong with me. Now that I'd fell ill and Harper had to take me to the ER, I was terrified she would now know everything.

"The doctor didn't say anything. When he saw that you had a high fever and were in and out of consciousness, he gave you fluids and antibiotics. They've done a blood draw, and we should have the results any time now." Harper got up and looked around. "Actually, I think it might be in your chart in here already."

I quickly stopped her. "I'm a little hungry. Can you get me something to eat first?"

Harper nodded. "I'll go see what they have for you. Maybe some Jell-O."

After watching her leave, I struggled to get up, looking around the room.

There. At the foot of the bed. My chart.

Maybe the results would be in it?

I slid the IV pole over enough to give me room to reach the folder and picked it up.

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3/3

The blood test would show my heart failure, and the last thing I wanted was for Harper to see it. She would be devastated. We had grown up together and relied on each other for survival.

If Harper knew I was about to die, she wouldn't be able to bear the blow.

I wanted the rest of my time with her to be happy...

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I tore the blood results into pieces without looking at the paper, then threw it into the trash can so Harper wouldn't see it. I'd make up something to tell her about why they weren't in my file if she asked. Hopefully, getting me food would distract her from it.

I turned around to push the IV pole back to the spot it was in before I'd moved it, glancing out the window as I did so. The window in this room looked out over the parking lot, and I saw a few luxury Town Cars driving in and heading toward the ER entrance.

When they came to a stop, a group of wolf shifter bodyguards in black suits exited the cars and escorted Griffon out.

He hurried into the hospital with Tara in his arms.

When I saw his anxious look, my heart sank.

I'd come to the emergency department because of a heart attack when I was with him.

What kind of reaction did he have then?

I remembered him standing by the bed and looking down at me while I was curled up in pain.

He'd thrown an AMEX Black card at me as if I were a beggar.

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He'd thought I was pretending to be sick to gain his sympathy and get more money from him.

There was a clamor of footsteps coming down the hall, getting closer and closer to my room.

Since this was the ER ward of the hospital, the rooms weren't private. The walls facing the hallway were glass, and Griffon would be able to see me as he passed.

But when Griffon rushed by my room, he didn't even look my way.

Harper chose that moment to come back, holding a tray with red Jell-O on it. When she saw that I had moved around in bed, sitting up at the edge of it, she hurried over.

"You just recovered from a high fever. You should be laying down, not trying to get out of bed."

Harper set the tray down and then came over to gently push me to lay down again. "Don't be so careless with your health right now."

Warmth spread through my heart at her concern for me, though all the concern and care-taking in the world wouldn't help me get any better. I pursed my lips and smiled.

Harper peeled the top off the Jell-O and said, "I'll go see if your blood test results are in. Why were you trying to sit up? You weren't going to get up and get it, were you?"

When I hemmed and hawed and didn't answer, she furrowed her eyebrows, and I could see her nose wrinkle up a bit as she sniffed.

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Damn her wolf's abilities to scent out my nerves and know I wasn't telling her something.

3/4

"Where's the report? Show it to me," she demanded, putting her hands on her hips.

Shit. I didn't want to lie to her, but...it was for her own good. "I was going to find the doctor, but then he came in and told me the results."

"And?"

"It's just a blood test. I'm fine," I replied calmly.

Harper stared at me, a serious expression darkening her face. I rarely saw the super protective nature of her wolf take over, but it was written all over her right now. "You're different from everyone, Taya. You've had a heart attack before, and you're not a shifter. You can't just get better like most people can. You have to take this seriously."

For the millionth time, I wish werewolves could be created like they were in books. You mated someone and they could turn you, make you like them so you could be together much longer than the average human's lifespan. It would be so much easier than...this.

I mustered up a smile I didn't feel. "I know. The doctor said that I was fine. My heart is fine.

Don't worry."

Harper's eyes narrowed a smidge more, and then what seemed

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4/4

like a look of relief touched her face. She handed the Jell-O to me. "I managed to find red for you, instead of gross lime green." She made a disgusted face.

I took the wiggly food and the spoon, then took a bite.

Crisis averted.

For now.

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Harper looked at Taya's pale face. She wanted to say something but stopped herself after thinking over it for a second longer.

She was pretty sure she'd heard Taya call out to Silas.

After so many years, it was the first time she'd heard Taya say his name. Harper wanted to ask about it, but she didn't want to reopen Taya's deep scars.

Especially now, when Taya was in the hospital. It was probably better to leave the dead buried...right where Silas belonged.