

Chapter 36 - Denying the Alpha

DECLAN'S point of view

The golden rays of sunshine are bearing down hard. It hurts my eyes as I try to blink away the darkness. But that's nothing compared to the burning I can feel in my hands, ankles and waist. Only one thing could cause me so much unimaginable pain. Silver. I had to be chained in fucking silver. I'm still pissed that they did this. The wolfsbane would have been enough. Not only did it hurt, but it was making me weak, and that was exceptionally worse.

"Oh, my baby boy, look at what they have done to you." My mother sobs beside me. I don't have the strength for much, and so I let my head lol lazily to the side so that I could look at her. She looked tired, stressed, sad. I felt terrible for her.

"Hi, mom", I groan and stutter; it's hard to talk when my throat is so dry. She sits on the edge of my bed, careful to miss all the silver that's surrounding me. She slips one hand under my head and lifts it slowly off the pillow for me. Her other hand raises a small plastic cup to my lips and tips it's just enough for a sip at a time.

"Small sips", she warns me as the cool water trickles past my lips. It burns all the way down.

Needing my mother's assistance just to drink from a cup is humiliating. I would have declined the help from anybody else.

"When can I get out of these chains?" I stare down at my wrists. My sheets are covered in both dry and fresh blood from the wounds the silver has caused. I can't see my feet or my hips, but I could only assume they didn't look any better. They certainly didn't feel any better.

"I'm so sorry, baby. I tried. I told them time and time again that sedating you was enough. I begged them not to put you in those torture devices. I have pleaded every day several times a day for them to take them off. Your dad would say the same thing every time. Not until we see who wakes up, we may get Declan. We may get Grayson. We have to worry about the safety of the pack. Screw the pack, I said, what about my son." she fussed over me hysterically

“Mom, calm down. They are only a little uncomfortable, I promise.” so what I lied, I was just trying to spare her feelings.

“How long was I out for?” it feels like Grayson, and I have been walking in the dream state for weeks if that’s even what you could call it. I still can’t believe he kicked my ass the way he did, but in a way, I was thankful. Because of him, because of my near-death experience, I finally saw things in a new light. He helped me in a way that no one else could have.

“a few days. It's Saturday.”

A soft knock was at my door. My mother practically ran to answer it. I couldn't see who it was, and no one said anything.

My mother was back at my bedside in an instant. Her nimble finger began pulling on thick heavy gloves.

“I'm going to get you out of here, don't you worry.”

The gloves are thick, and she finds working the keys in the lock rather tricky. She cursed herself out a time or two as she accidentally dropped them.

“Mom. Calm down. You are hurrying too much, and it's making you clumsy.” I warn her.

She ripped the glove off one hand and used the key to twist the key into the locks. And the chains fell to the floor. Her fingers were a little blistered from the silver, but if it hurt, she didn’t complain.

You would not believe how uncomfortable it is being stuck in one position for days. My muscles don't even feel like they work anymore. I tried my best to stretch them out and sit up, but it was painful to do so. At least my werewolf abilities would slowly start to return to normal. I could use a little of that healing right about now.

“What exactly happened.” I could remember most of it. I remember arguing with Faith. I remember Grayson taking over. I can still see myself attacking Mitchell, but it's just that. Flashes of little pieces.

“She rejected you” my mother's lips were pursed distastefully. I mean, I knew that she had, but still hearing it all over again was like a slap in the face. I didn’t know that I could ever push her that far. And yet, that’s exactly what I had wanted. How could I have been so angry and stupid? None of it was ever her fault, but I blamed her, I hit her, worst of all was the way Grayson and I threw her down the stairs. I can still hear the way her hip

popped from its socket. That sickening sound played over and over again like a music box in my mind. I hope I never forgive myself for that. I went too far. Grayson and I both did.

“Okay, but how did I get from there to here.” I wanted to know all of it.

“You will have to stand a trial before the courts” my mother looked at me. Tears were streaming down her face. I placed my palm to her cheek and wiped them away with my thumb. I pushed the hair out of her eyes. There was a box of tissues on my nightstand. I didn’t typically use them for what they were intended, but she doesn’t need to know. I hand them to her, and she pulls a few out of the box and begins to dab at her eyes and then blow her nose. I toss the box lazily back onto the nightstand.

“Trial?” That was serious. We rarely have those.

“You killed two warriors.” The moment she says that, it’s like the pieces of the puzzles click and the whole fuzzy memory clears and clicks into place. I had killed two innocent men, well technically, Grayson did, but still, I should have done more to rein him in, but I was in shock from the rejection.

“When?” I asked. They didn’t typically wait long. I’m sure it will be in the next coming weeks now that I am awake.

“We don’t have a final date yet. We were waiting for you to wake.” She explains. It’s just as I thought.

“I’m so sorry she did this to you. I should have known. She destroyed this family once. I tried so hard to forgive her. I accepted her into the family as much as I could. I would have bitten my tongue and accepted her as your mate even. And yet, instead of being happy with her place. She does this. Now, you are going to trial. Your wolf is weak. Just look at the state you are in. And it’s all because of that stupid little girl.”

I was used to my mother's rants about Faith. But I had let it cost me everything. I have finally had enough of just sitting back and feeling guilty about loving her. She was mine, and I failed to protect her. Even worse, I hurt her. I shouldn’t be the next Alpha. I couldn’t even be a good Mate. How was I supposed to lead when I hadn’t ever even stood up to my own parents. That’s changing. It’s all changing. Thanks to Grayson's help, I’m ripping everything from the ground up and starting again.

“Just stop it, Mom”, I snap. “She didn’t do anything”, I yell as my sheer defiance courses through my veins like a raging river. “she’s as innocent as she has ever been.” I leap from the bed and start to pace. I needed to move to realize some of the anger I was feeling.

“None of this has even been her fault. Yet, we expect her to carry the burden. A burden she’s not even aware of” I punch the wall, my hand goes straight through it, I retract it and little bits of plaster drop to the floor. I need to get this under control before I do something to Faith again.

“HE DIED PROTECTING HER. MY SON. AND SHE HAS DONE NOTHING TO PROVE SHE'S WORTHY OF THAT SACRIFICE.” My mother screeches. It’s so loud that it pierces my ears to the point I have to cover them to stop the ringing.

Is yelling at each other wasn't getting us anywhere.

“Mom”, I can’t keep the frustration to myself as I snap at her, but at least I’m not screaming anymore.

“She was two months old when Connor died. It wasn’t her fault. It wasn't Heather's fault either. She did her best. Your grief has blinded you, and my love for you left me the same way, blind to all the truths. I love Faith. I know that’s not what you want to hear, but I do, Mom. What happened with Connor would have happened if he had faith in his arms or not. It wasn’t his fault, but he was special. From the moment people saw his moon mark, he had a target on his back. He was a ten-year-old boy. He couldn’t shift, he couldn’t fight, once those rogues caught him, he never stood a chance.”

“If he didn’t have Faith, he would have been able to run faster. He would have stood a chance. He wouldn’t have been so desperate to protect her. She was all he cared about from the moment she was born. He didn’t even play with you so much.” She cried. I knew all of this, of course. My mother always talked about how she felt they were mates. No one could be sure, of course, until Connor turned 18, unfortunately, though he never did. Even if it was true, even if she was meant to be his, I wasn’t going to let that hold me back anymore.

“Mom. If Heather thrust me into Connor's arms that day and told her to run, and he died to protect me, would you hate me as much as Faith?” I have let this single fear eat me alive for years, but I have always been too afraid to ask her. What if she said yes. It could have been me that Heather handed over that day, but she didn’t.

“How could I ever blame you.” She looked offended that I asked, but it took her a minute to answer. She wasn’t so sure either.

“If that’s true”, I sigh because I doubted it and that hurt more than anything I have ever been through. “If that’s true, Mom, then why do you blame Faith?” I couldn’t wait for more excuses. I couldn’t endure arguing about this anymore. I stormed from the room and slammed the door behind me.

Wolves scowled at me in the halls as I passed them. I don't blame them. Many of them loved Faith. Especially the omegas. Many of us made the mistake of looking down on them but not Faith. She often went out of her way to help them with her chores. She never even asked them for a thank you. She was a betas daughter and was granted exemption from such tasks, but she never used that as an excuse like me, Samantha and all the other high-ranking children did. The ones who weren't upset with me about what I did to an innocent girl were angry with me because of the murders of their friends. If I was still allowed to be after Alpha this trial, then I was going to have a lot of convincing to do.

I walked and walked until I made it to Faith's favorite spot at the riverside. She doesn't know, of course, but I watched as she shifted that night. She was in so much pain, and I should have helped her. Instead, I mind linked the closest warrior to carry her back to her room like a coward. I would do it and a great many things over again if I could.

"I didn't think I would see anyone out here", I flinched in surprise before I scowled at Samantha. I wasn't really angry with her, but with myself for being caught off guard like that.

"What are you doing out here?" I walk to where she's sitting and plop myself down next to her. I find a few smooth rocks and skip one across the water. We both watch as it hits the water a few times before sinking.

"Thinking." She looked at me, I wish I could place the emotion in her eyes, but it was hard to settle on just one, pity maybe? Also, anger? A little sadness, I think.

"About" I probably ruined our friendship beyond repair too, but she hasn't run from it yet, so why not try my luck. Maybe one day I can fix things with her too.

"About you and me. About Faith and about" I tried not to bristle at the thought of her and me. That whole thing had been a mistake. Not that Samantha was a mistake, but what I did personally was a mistake. She was a little shallow and a little hopped up on power, but underneath it all, she was a good person, and I took advantage of her.

"And of Connor", that last one took me by surprise. My head whipped in her direction so fast my neck cracked.

"You know about him. Wait, you can say his name" I asked her in total disbelief.

"I have never brought him up because I know that we are not allowed to, but I can cause I was never commanded not to. I was only three. I'm sure they would have thought there was no point. That I would forget him quickly." She was right. That is exactly what

my dad would have thought. I'm glad. Now I can talk to someone who isn't my mom about it.

"And why were you thinking about Connor?" Was it something she often did, I wonder.

"I was mostly thinking about how it got here. Why it got this bad, and I think it all started with him."

I nodded. I felt uncomfortable with the brief silence as she collected her thoughts, so I skipped another rock and then another.

"I don't have many memories of him. I was so little. But I remember small things. There was this one time that Faith had to be only a couple of weeks old. She was crying, like nonstop. I was annoyed because, before the baby, the house was quiet, and my mom would have been spending time with me, not with Faith. Your mom and you and your brother all come over. You often did. My mom was stressed and feeling rather helpless; she had tried everything, and Faith hadn't stopped crying. Connor scooped her out of our mother's arms and took her, and sat on the couch. She fell asleep almost immediately. Your mom then helped lay her in her bassinet. It was at that moment that both of our mothers got the idea in their heads that Faith and Connor must be mates. He always wanted to be near her, and she was always calm around him. It was innocent. Of course, they were both children, but he used to fawn over her like she was his favorite toy or something."

My mom has never even told me that. Then again, even when she talks about Connor, she never really shared any stories, she would just talk about how much she missed him, or how he was born with the moon mark, and she knew instantly that he was special or about the day he died. I think I knew more about my brother's death than I did his life. Even Samantha seems to know more about him than I do.

I didn't know what else to say to her as I gazed out over the water off into the mountains.

"You know. I have seen how withdrawn you have become lately. I never imagined Faith would be your mate. Not after Connor. I think that it's unfair, and I understand why you would want to break away from her. But I think you were horrible. You used me. You hurt my sister. I get your pain, but that doesn't excuse what you did. It never will." She doesn't hold back, and I don't blame her. She was right, and I deserved their anger and their hatred. I even deserved this impending trial.

"Actually. I plan on fighting to get her back. I want to make up for all the wrong I did. I want to fix it."

I look anywhere but at Samantha as I swallow the lump in my throat.

“What?” She asks somewhat incredulously. I don’t blame her. I could see why it was hard to believe, why it would upset her even.

“She’s my mate, Samantha. I love her” I had been sprouting this a lot today, but I was sick of hiding it.

“I’ve always known that. Anyone who isn’t Faith has always known that. She loved you so much.” Samantha says sadly.

“What the hell are you talking about.” Faith didn’t love me. I would have known.

“Are you shitting me right now?” She raises her eyebrows at me. I don’t appreciate being spoken to like that like I’m stupid, but I’ll let it slide for now.

“What?” I frown.

“Did you really not see it?” She asks.

“See what?” I ask, a little frustrated.

“I mean, I knew my sister blind. But I thought you would have seen it. That girl loved you. Like loved you, loved you. Do you think she used to cut your hair for you because she had aspirations to become the pack hairdresser or something? Do you think she baked every single one of your birthday cakes from the time she learned how for extra practice? Do you think she really took all your notes when you couldn’t make it to school because she wanted to try her hand at being a secretary? No, she did all that because the girl thought the world started and ended with you.” She says, exasperated.

“I never really thought about it if I’m being honest with you.”

I always appreciated the little things she did for me, but Faith was kind, and I never let myself believe that it was for any other reason. It would only hurt me more when she pushed me aside the same way everyone I ever loved had.

“Why now?” Samantha turned her whole body to face me. I did the same. We mimicked each other. Our toes were pointed to the other, our knees were tucked up, and our arms wrapped loosely around the top of the bend. We leaned back casually and stared at one another.

“I spent days with Grayson. I was trapped in my subconscious with him, actually. At first, I didn’t want to talk about any of it. He almost beat me to death. When I thought it was the end, one more blow and it would have all been over. I let go. I thought, if I’m going

to die, I'm going to indulge in a bit of weakness. All I could see, hear and feel was Faith. She was all that I wanted, even when I was dying. It also made me realize that I didn't want to die. I wanted to live.

So, I gave up, I admitted to Grayson all the things that were holding me back, and he helped me heal. Over the next few days, while I remained trapped, any time the insecurities seeped their way back in, he would kick my ass all over again. It seems cruel, but it was the only thing that was going to snap me out of it, and in the end, I guess it worked." She better never tells anybody about all of this. I am laying all my feelings out here like some dweeb.

"And what did you admit to Grayson."

I debated telling her for a while. Eventually, I decided why not. Maybe she could help me if she could understand me.

"My mom." I close my eyes and take a few deep breaths. It was still fresh, and that made it harder to talk about.

"My mom loved me. I know that. But she never really let herself get close to me. I was always held at arm's length. I grew to resent that feeling because it was always like I wasn't enough, you know. Like I was an okay substitute, but I wasn't Connor. As I got older and older, moms drinking got a little worse" no one but me knew about the drinking. So, the look of total surprise on Samantha's face didn't come as a shock, but I didn't stop to comment on it or explain. "And as the drinking increased her tongue began to loosen a little more. Eventually, she was always ranting about Connor. How she believed he was Faith's mate and that the stupid mate bond killed him. That little voice inside my head started talking, and all I could hear it saying was. Faith will only ever look at me the same way my mom does. Like I was a substitute, a piss poor version of the mate she was supposed to have. And when I found out she was my mate, that insecurity took over everything else. I couldn't escape that feeling of just nothingness, and I lashed out. But it's not Faith's fault. I let my own fear consume me. What if she could only half love me? What if because I wasn't her first mate, she felt that there was something lacking in me and eventually moved on." I quickly wiped the lone tear that rolled from my eye, hopeful that Samantha didn't catch it.

"I still don't feel like that justifies how much you hurt her. Your pain is never an excuse to cause others pain. But I am sorry that you have been going through all of this on your own. I can't even imagine how lonely that's been for you all of these years." She shuffled over to me and pulled me into a hug. I was hesitant to lean into it at first, but what the hell? I could use it, so why not.

“Do you think you can help me win her back?” I ask. We must have been sitting there for more than an hour just leaning into each other absorbing everything we have been talking about.

“No. I won't stop you, but I won't help you. That has to be up to Faith.”

“Can you at least tell me where she is?” I honestly could not think of a single place she could have gone.

I can see Samantha biting on the inside of her cheek nervously. I was about to give up and just leave when she finally responded.

“Can I ask? What exactly will happen when you find her?”

Fair question, I thought. I hadn't even planned that far ahead myself yet.

“Talk to her. That's it. I promise” I did a little cross over my heart.

“She's at our aunts place in Waning crescent.” there is no way I could have heard that right.

“Amys”, I blurt in utter shock.

Samantha simply nods quietly back.

“didn't your whole family cut her off for her refusal to have pups?” I always thought that was a horrible reason to cut someone off, but it wasn't my family, and I was in no position to judge.

“Not, dad. The rest of them, yeah, but we never did. Dad never told anyone he was still in contact with her, of course. He was going to, but Amy begged him to keep their relationship a secret, so he did. But we still visit her. It's actually where we go on our family holiday every year.”

Well, I'll be damned. I sprang from my spot. Waning crescent was almost a day away in wolf form. I better prepare.

“What where are you going.” Samantha jumps hurriedly to her feet and follows panicked behind me.

“Where do you think?” now that I knew where faith was, there was no time to lose.

“Don't you think you should wait” she grabs me by the wrist and spins me to face her.

“don't you think your rushing into this?”

No, I didn't. I think I was about seven months too late.

“No.” I cut her off.

“Look, Declan. I appreciate your journey to realization and all, but it's been days. There is no way you have let 18 years of pain go that quickly. Don't you think you should continue to work on that some more before you face her?” she made sense, but she didn't get it.

“No. I mean, I will continue to work on it, yes. But I'm not waiting. Every day I wait is another day she forgets about me. I can't let her move on.” I rip my wrist from her grasp and sprint as fast as I can towards the packhouse. I leave the moment I'm packed