

Chapter 0045

Charles

Grace's living room was bathed in the soft glow of the fireplace. She wasn't relaxing much, but it was better than the nervous energy from earlier. I met her gaze.

"I appreciate your willingness to talk about this," she began softly.

I shook my head. "It's not a secret, Grace."

She looked wary, and I sighed. "Should I just start from the beginning?"

She bit her lip and nodded.

"For lycans, the mate bond is supposed to be a powerful connection. It ensures our strength passes to the next generation. I'm sure you've heard that lycans never leave our mates... not even in death."

She nodded.

"It's mostly a lie," I said. Her eyes widened. A heavy sigh escaped me, and I ran a hand through my hair as I considered how best to convey my predicament. "To reject a mate is to sever that bond, and it's not a decision to be taken lightly. Yes, I've consummated by mate bond, but I haven't formally rejected her. In my case, it's not a matter of love or hope. It's a matter of survival."

Grace's brow furrowed her concern evident. "Survival? What do you mean?"

I took a moment to gather my thoughts before continuing. "As the Lycan King, I carry a significant amount of responsibility. There are those who would seek to exploit any perceived weakness – both within and beyond the Lycan community."

Her eyes widened in realization, and I could tell that she was beginning to grasp the complexity of my situation. "So, rejecting your mate would make you vulnerable?"

I nodded, the weight of my words hanging heavy in the air. "Precisely. The enemies I face would seize any opportunity to undermine my authority and endanger my people. Rejecting my mate would weaken me, and that's a risk I can't afford to take."

"When you say weaken..."

"Breaking that bond could change my dynamic, it could just cripple me, not much is known about lycan rejections because they're so rare."

She worried her lip. "So... if she came back?"

"She won't. We've been separated for years. We see each other maybe a handful of times a year at kingdom and clan events."

Grace's expression softened, her empathy evident as she looked at me. "Charles, I'm sorry for assuming things without knowing the full story. It sounds like you're in an incredibly difficult position."

I appreciated her understanding, her willingness to see beyond the surface. "Thank you, Grace. Has that perhaps... cleared the air, so to speak?"

Her gaze held mine. "You're certain she won't come back?"

"To be with me? Absolutely." "How can you be so certain?"

"She has no desire to be queen. It's too much work as she said. She doesn't want children, and she doesn't believe in fidelity."

She gasped, and I smiled as the understanding filled her gaze.

"Is she... using the bond against you?"

"No," I shook my head. "Keeping the bond keeps her safe and let's her be free to do what she wants. She's not broadcasting who we are to each other for her own safety. I keep a security detail on her, but she has no investment in our relationship."

She looked down. "Sounds... a lot like Devin. Was she... basically his mother?"

I laughed. "No. Devin's lack of fidelity is all his own, I imagine."

She nodded.

"Do you want to talk about it?" I asked. "Devin, that is."

She winced, but her eyes glimmered with unshed tears.

"I haven't been completely honest with myself about it," Grace admitted, her voice tinged with vulnerability. "I know he was unfaithful. I know that he's ruined so much, but I don't know if I just turned a blind eye or I was just fooled."

She scoffed. "It feels like I was... punishing myself in some weird way and this is just what I get."

Her words caught me off guard, and I could see the mix of emotions on Grace's face – a blend of pain, anger, and a hint of lingering hurt.

"I'm sorry to hear you feel that way, Grace." I shook my head. "A bit of advice."

She looked up at me. "Don't shoulder the burden of betrayal. The people who chose to betray you would have done so with as much or as much deceit as needed no matter how vigilant you are or how much your bond should have meant." 1

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She blinked and tears slipped down her face. She lowered her head, her gaze fixed on her hands in her lap.

"I'll try. For now, I just need to rebuild my life and regain my sense of self again."

I reached out and placed my hand gently over hers.

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"I have no doubt you will in good time." I smiled. "Devin's a fool. To have you and your children and throw it all away for something so selfish."

"I still can't understand how he could do this to his own children," I said, my voice tinged with a mixture of anger and disbelief. "And then think he was prepared to afford any sort of life for the child coming into this world..."

Grace sighed, her expression heavy with a mixture of sadness and frustration. "I've asked myself the same question many times. But right now, our focus should be on creating a stable and loving environment for Cecil and Richard."

I smirked and looked at her.

The mention of her children's names softened my anger as something warm and paternal filled me.

"Our?"

Her face turned red. "I meant--"

I squeezed her hand. "You said what you meant... It's been a long time since the Clans have had a proper princess."

Her eyes widened as I tucked a lock of hair behind her ear.

"Let alone a proper queen."

There was a flicker of heat and longing in her eyes, but I didn't act on it. Not now. Not when she was still unsure, still in dire straits. She had to come to me without burden, without stress. Only when she was completely free of Devin's fuck up could she really be mine, even if it was only in her mind.

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I drew back.

Just then, Richard's cries filled the air, prompting both of us to stand up.

"He's hungry," I said. "I'll get him."

Grace opened her mouth, but then she nodded and left. I headed up the stairs and lifted him out of his crib, growling softly at him. 1

Food is coming.

You're safe.

He shifted and grumbled. Father? 1

My heart clenched with longing. Before I could answer, Grace had returned and handed me the bottle. I eyed the color and cocked an eyebrow before looking at her. 1

"What?" She asked as I slipped the bottle in his mouth.

I licked my lips. "This may feel very personal, but it is important. What formula are you giving him?"

She frowned and looked a bit defensive. "What are you getting at?"

"You've had to feed him more frequently than you had to feed Cecil, don't you?"

She crossed her arms. "If you're about to tell me that breastmilk is better for him—"

"Most lycan women find it hard to nurse," I said off-handedly. "Near impossible."

Her shoulders slumped. "I... didn't know that. I just... well..."

She shuffled her feet. "Devin was... Well..." 1

"More and more I want to murder him. Don't worry. I'll get some lycan formula brought over; it's not something that would be available in the werewolf states..." I thought about it. "Though if you want to add that to Wolfe Medical's research, I don't think anyone would be upset."

She laughed. "Making lycan baby formula or figuring out why lycan women struggle with nursing?"

"Both."

Richard looked up at me with big curious eyes. He rumbled again. 1

Father.

Then, he closed his eyes and continued drinking.

"Mommy?" Cecil called, stumbling down the hall. "I'm hungry..."

"Ah," she said. "I'll get dinner going."

"I'll bring him," I said softly.

I followed Cecil downstairs. With Richard now calm, Grace went into the kitchen. Cecil rushed into the playroom and came back with her coloring book and a bunch of crayons. I took a seat beside Cecil and watched her flip to the page she wanted.

"Do you think I should use brown or green for the ground?" Cecil asked.

I hummed. "Well, in a real forest, the ground is brown."

She hummed and picked the brown before starting to color.

There was a pang of something familiar – a sense of longing for the kind of family that surrounded me now. How selfish was Devin that whatever

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he wanted was worth more to him than this simple peace?


Dinner was a quiet yet comforting affair, the three of us sharing a meal that felt like a small victory in the midst of chaos. As the evening drew to a close, Grace and I bid each other goodnight and handed Richard back to her.

In the privacy of my room, I picked up my phone and dialed George's number.

"Have a supply of lycan formula brought as well as groceries," I said. "And look into Devin's financial situation."

George snorted. "That kid better hide, or he'll end up skinned."

"There is no where for him to hide now. Richard is an alpha lycan."

George let out a low whistle. "I'll see you in the morning." 



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