

The One He Claimed Chapter 101

Chapter 101: Scouts

Margot

There is absolutely no grey area between how Joshua kissed me and how Ezra kisses me. Their kisses are as opposite as you can get. Joshua always kissed me as if he was reminding me that he was in charge, that he was in control. Ezra's kiss was... inviting. It was soft and warm, gentle and sweet. I had waited for him to push me, to take control and force his tongue into my mouth like I was used to with Joshua, but that wasn't how he kissed me at all. It was almost as if he was asking me to kiss him back. And once I did, it felt like I melted into him.

I wouldn't think that his scent of eucalyptus and cedar would translate to a taste that I desired, but it does. It's masculine and fresh, much like him. I had been teasing him when I said he needed a shower, not because he smelled bad, but because the scent of the dried sweat on his body from our sparring only increased his scent making it hard for me to think when he was that close to me. And my body had never, ever responded to Joshua the way it responded to Ezra's when he whispered in my ear. His deep voice, his warm breath, his scent swirling around. us had made my body feel alive for the first time in my life.

But I can't let that distract me. Ezra seems like a good man, a really good man. I know he lost a mate and that he blames himself for that, which is probably why he's trying so hard with me. But it's a lost cause. I can't give him what he wants and while I'm sad to know that what we could have had might have been able to turn into something positive over time, I won't be around to find out. I have no intention of letting Joshua live and

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I know that it will kill me. I may be getting stronger, but I'm not that strong, not yet and maybe not ever.

I know my ex-mate. He'll be doing everything he can to weaken me so that he can punish me for rejecting him. I may not be able to feel him cheating on the bond, but I know that my wolf, Reyna, should be healing faster than she is. Our bond isn't

completely broken so anything he does with another woman will weaken her.

I wonder what he felt when Ezra kissed me. That, more than anything, will bring him to Hunter's borders.

These are the thoughts running through my head as Ezra and I run across no man's land to get to Owen's old pack. Reynal loves the run, but I've realized that Ezra is right, not that I'll tell

him that. He somehow seems to know just how far to push her so that it works out the tightness in our muscles but doesn't overwork them.

When he slows, turning his head to give me a soft woof, Reyna slows as well.

'Reyna, what is it?' I ask her.

She lifts her head in the air, trying to smell what Ezra is smelling. His wolf, Thorin, is at full strength, so we take our lead from him. He would smell something, even if we don't. Ezra made a point to run closer to where I told him the hiding spot is at the top of the mountain. It may take us a bit longer to get to Owen's pack this way, but he was more worried about keeping me safe.

That's something else that feels different between Joshua and Ezra. Ezra is very protective of me, worried about me, constantly -thinking about me. In the last year, Joshua only seemed to care

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Chapter 101. Scouts

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about one thing, that I couldn't get pregnant. Little did he know, that was intentional.

Thorin sniffs around on the ground, beginning to run around, sniffing all over. Reyna lowers her head and I hear bones snapping as Ezra shifts. He kneels beside her, wrapping an arm protectively over her..

"Do you smell it, Reyna?" he asks.

We smell it, but I don't know what we're smelling. There are a lot of scents criss-crossing in this area. Ezra stands and turns, looking in the directions where the scents move off to, before looking back at us.

"Scouts. Do you recognize the scents?"

Reyna lowers her head and begins sniffing again. When she's done, I shift so I can answer him.

"Some are familiar. Some from my father's pack, some from Joshua's, but some I don't recognize," I tell him.

He's looking around, hands on his hips. It's hard for me not to notice how magnificent his body is, tall and lean, and very muscular.

"Margot, stop thinking whatever you're thinking," he growls. through gritted teeth before looking at me over his shoulder. His nostrils flare and I realize that I'm aroused by the sight of him, and he can smell it. That's something else that never happened with Joshua. My body never responded to him, not like this..

I feel my cheeks flame with embarrassment, and I look away quickly. I hear Ezra huff before he pulls the bag that he uses to

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Chapter 101 Scouts

1288 Vouchers

carry our clothes around to the front of his body. It's large enough that when he shifts, it fits Thorin. It's actually very smart. I'd consider getting one, if I wasn't planning on dying soon.

Ezra pulls out his phone and hits speed dial.

"Is everything okay, Ezra?" I hear Hunter ask.

"I found a scout trail. Margot says some of the scents are familiar to her father's or Joshua's pack, but not all of them."

"Koden," Hunter says.

"That's my take."

"I'll send some of my warriors. Where are you?"

Ezra looks around and gives him the general idea of where we are.

“They’ll know it when they find it. It looks like this is where they are congregating and then from here, they are spreading out to the other packs, Carter’s and Kayce’s as well.”

“I’ll call them, have them send warriors to check it out too.”

“If I can’t get Margot back before dark, I’m going to stay the night in Owen’s old pack. I won’t put Margot at risk with this many wolves in the area,” he says, looking at me.

“Understood. Let me know if you need anything.”

Ezra hangs up and turns to me. The moment he does, I see his very large length standing at attention.

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He comes over and cups my cheek, stroking this thumb over my cheekbone and practically making Reyna purr.

“I want you to know that I don’t mind you looking at me, and I’m thrilled that you find me attractive, but I would much rather drown in your scent when I have time to make sure that both of us enjoy ourselves. And out here, in the open like this, is not the time. What I said was not a rejection, it was me trying to get control of my arousal for you,” he says.

I nod, unable to say anything with his length pressing between us and his eyes dark with desire for me. I recognize the look, but with Ezra, it’s different. The heat of his desire, the care that he’s taking to explain himself to me, is making my own body heat.

“D***it, Margot, you’re doing it again,” he grits out, his nostrils flaring as he takes a deep breath,

“Sorry?” I say, but it’s more of a question. He raises an eyebrow at me.

“Are you?”

I decide to be honest. He’s been honest with me, and he’s been careful with me. It’s the least I can do to hopefully make things easier for him later when I’m gone.

"I'm not used to my body responding like this. I'm unaccustomed to feeling arousal," I tell him, keeping my eyes on his.

He leans in, kissing the corner of my mouth before running his nose across my jaw to my ear. "Someday, when you're ready, this will only be the beginning."

His promise sends shivers through my body, the anticipation of what he could do to make my body respond to him. But I pull back and look away.

I can't accept those sorts of promises. I won't be around to collect on them.

The One He Claimed Chapter 102

Chapter 102: Sophie's Lament

Hunter

As soon as I got off the phone with Erza, I call Carter and conference Kayce in.

"Hunter, I'm guessing there's a problem?" Kayce says.

"Ezra went to check on Owen's old pack today. He took Margot with him, and they came across what he called scout trails. He gave me general coordinates as to where they are, but he said it looks like they spread out to all three of our packs."

Kayce growls low in his chest. I understand the sentiment very well. My mate is pregnant too and the thought of anyone coming after her and my pup had my hackles up the moment that Ezra told me what he'd found.

"I think we need to include Dutton and Robin on this call," Carter says. "If Alpha Ezra says the trails were headed in our directions, it could be one or both of the packs in our area."

"That's a very good point, Carter, give me a moment and I'll try to conference them in," I say.

Once I've gotten the other two Alphas on the phone, I tell them what I told Kayce and Carter. Both of them snarl, just like Kayce did. I know from experience that if their mates aren't yet pregnant, it's only a matter of time.

"I'm going to check it out, but I can't cover all of the packs," I begin.

Chapter 102 Sophie's Lament

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"I'll join you," all four Alphas say at once.

"Good, that's what I was hoping. If they are checking out our packs, mine may not be the first one that's attacked. I expect Joshua will attack me, but we still have Aiden and Alaric who are a risk. And we don't know if they will plan a unified attack, or if they will attack separately."

I give everyone the coordinates, and call Lucas into my office, letting him know.

"I'm leaving you in charge of the pack. I have no idea what we'll find or how long I'll be gone, but I want to know where they've been and what they've seen in our pack before I come back. Keep the patrols tight and at current scheduling capacity. I know it's tough on the pack, but it's better than getting

awakened in the middle of the night by wolves crashing into our packhouse because they got through our patrols. Also, pull Penny in if you need help."

"I'll keep the pack safe, and our Luna safe as well," Lucas says.

"I know you will," I say, going in search of my mate.

When I find her, she and Kinsley are working on the safe rooms. I pull her to my side, wrapping my arms around her, and taking a moment to see what they are doing.

"It already feels warmer in here, cozier," I say.

"That's the goal," Sophie says, smiling up at me. When she sees my face, her smile fades.

"What's wrong?" she asks, and Kinsley turns, focusing on me as well.

"Ezra found scout trails. I've called the other Alphas and we're going to meet to sniff them out and see where they lead. I may not be back tonight, but I don't want you to worry about me," I say to her, already feeling her worry s**e.

I take her face in my hands. "I will be safe. I'll be with four other Alphas."

"And they want all of you dead!" she exclaims.

"Sophie..."

"Hunter," she says, tears welling in her eyes as she grabs my shirt, f**g it in her hands. From the corner of my eye, I see Kinsley silently leave to give us a moment.

"If something were to happen to you..." she says and a tear escapes, sliding down her cheek until I swipe it with my thumb.

"It won't. I'll be safe. And I need you to be safe too. I won't let anyone hurt you, but if they attack while I'm gone, you get in the safe rooms."

My mate wraps her arms around my waist, pressing her face against my chest as she fights her tears. I wrap my arms tightly around her.

"I can't live without you, Hunter. I can't. I don't want to. I didn't know that love could feel like this, feel this good. Please, Hunter. You have to be safe. You have to come home to me. Promise me, Hunter. You've never broken your promises to me, and I want your promise that you'll be safe and come home to me. Promise me!" she says, getting more and more worked up.

"Sophie, honey, calm down. You're getting worked up and it's not good for our pup. I love you," I say, kissing her tear-streaked face. "I hate the thought of not sleeping beside you tonight, but I need to know that you, our pack, and our allies are safe."

She looks up at me and I see the fear in her eyes. It makes my heart hurt to see her sad, but it also tugs at my heart that my mate loves me this much. "I didn't know love could feel like this either. I didn't know that you would become more important to me than my own life. Not because I'm an Alpha, but because you are such an incredible woman, and I love you so much that it hurts. But right now, the pack needs you, Sophie. They will look to you as much as they look to Lucas while I'm away. I need you to be strong."

"I can't be strong if I don't know that you will return to me," she says fiercely.

"I promise. One way or another, I'll find my way home to you. I don't expect anything to happen, but if it does, I'll make my way home to you," I say, giving her what she needs.

I watch as she takes a deep breath. I truly don't expect anything to happen, but if it does, I better make good on my promise.

She slowly calms herself, taking deep breaths while I kiss forehead, her eyes, her cheeks, and finally her lips.

"I have to go. The others will beat me there at this rate, but I need to know that you're going to be okay, Soph. I need you to help lead this pack while I'm gone.

She nods, taking another deep breath before opening her eyes. "One more kiss."

I smile and lean down, her arms come around me and I take precious moments to deepen the kiss, giving my mate what she needs. I pour my love for her through the bond, feeling her relax in my arms.

"Take care of my mate and my pup," I say to her.

“You take care of MY mate, or you’ll answer to me, Alpha.”

I smile. There’s my tough girl. “Yes ma’am,” I say, walking to the back of the packhouse. I quickly strip, keeping only a pair of shorts before shifting.

Shaw turns his head to grab my shorts, only to find Sophie holding them for us.

“I love you, my mate and wolf,” she says, Hedda’s voice mixing with hers.

Shaw purrs at them, then licks Sophie from chin to forehead, making her sputter.

“SHAW!” she complains, pulling back and wiping her face. He chuckles before turning and racing in the direction that Ezra gave us.

‘What was that for?’ I ask him.

‘She needed levity. I don’t like our mate crying.’”

‘Neither do I.’

The One He Claimed Chapter 103

Chapter 103: Scout Trails

Hunter

We run hard to be the first ones there. We’re the closest to the mountain, with Kayce a close second. Carter and Dutton are on the opposite side of the mountain from where we are going, so it will take them a bit longer to get there. Robin is on the other side of Kayce, so unless they come together, he’ll be behind Kayce.

As we run up, I hear the sound of pounding paws coming from the direction of Kayce’s pack. Shaw lifts his head and howls a challenge, in case it’s not Kayce. Rodion, Kayce’s wolf, answers the challenge and the two of us meet at the spot where Ezra found the scout trails.

I shift, as does Kayce. “I take it your mate didn’t like you leaving any more than mine did?” he asks me, realizing we were both delayed for the same reason..

“I left a very unhappy and upset mate behind,” I say, looking around.

“As did I,” he says, turning around and sniffing the air like I am.

“Well, not that I didn’t believe him, but Ezra is right. These are definitely scout trails. I caught one that came much too close to my pack for my comfort. I’ve got my Beta

checking them out and I wouldn't be surprised if Robin has the same. I found a trail that veered off toward his pack as well.

I sniff, finding the scents that Margot must have found.

"Margot said some of these scents are from Joshua and Elias' packs, but I also smell Koden's scent, so I guess he's working with Joshua now."

We turn as we hear another set of pounding paws, seeing Robin's dark brown wolf, Derric.

He shifts and gracefully stands, nodding at both of us. "Aiden's pack's scent is up here too, so he's definitely working with Joshua as well," he says immediately, having heard our conversation. "I followed his trail from just outside my pack to here. I have Nikki making sure there aren't any other trails around our pack," he says, looking around.

He sniffs the air and begins following one particular scent.

"What is it?" Kayce asks him when he begins to growl low in his chest.

"Alaric's Beta, Camden, the one who wanted Nikki. His scent is here as well."

"So, they're all working together," I say.

Kayce frowns. "I don't smell Zahn."

"He's closer to Calvin's pack," I say.

"Did you hear Zahn's mate woke up?" Robin asks.

"No, how did you hear that?" Kayce asks him.

"Nikki has friends all over. We're using her connections to keep in touch as best we can with what's happening in those packs."

"I was hoping Zahn would come around," Kayce says as we hear two more sets of paws pounding against the earth. We all turn to see Carter and Dutton coming up the side of the mountain.

Dutton's wolf, Orion, is snarling before he even gets to us. When they shift, I can see him seething.

"Alaric has been scoping our packs," he growls.

"With Aiden's assistance," Carter says, leaning over and gasping for air.

"You okay there, Carter?" I ask him.

"I'm not as young as you three, give me a minute," he says, panting.

"So, Aiden and Alaric are working together," Robin says, focusing on Dutton.

"What do you mean?" Dutton asks.

"His Beta's scent is up here. I recognize it from when he was at Hunter's pack, looking for my mate," he snarls.

"And Aiden wants my mates, but he's not going to get them," Dutton snarls.

"Well, thank goodness no one wants my mate, but they do seem to want my pack," Carter says standing. He's showing his age. If he'd had a son, he would have retired by now. Instead, he's still running a pack with no end in sight. I realize that I need to talk to Calvin. We need to find a way to make sure that Carter's pack stays strong until one of our pups can take it over. I should get Sophie and Amelia involved in that conversation as well.

"So, they're coming after all of us?" Kayce asks, looking around.

"It looks like it, but the question is, will they all attack at the same time, or will they wait. We may have to rethink sending warriors to each other's packs for the time being. I don't want to say that we're on our own, but if Joshua attacks me and the two of you send warriors to assist, it leaves you open to Aiden and Alaric attacking your packs," I say to Kayce and Carter.

"If that were the case, then my pack would support Kayce, as I'm sure that Dutton's would support Carter's," Robin says, and Dutton nods. "Your pack is the most at risk, Hunter. You have separation on both sides, gaps between your pack and Kayce's on one side and yours and Carter's on the other."

"Yes. I still think you're the most at risk," Carter says.

"Well, me and Ezra right now. He's got a small contingent of warriors in Owen's old pack. If they attack there, it would be easy to overpower them and could weaken his pack. His Beta is strong, but not strong enough to go against a full contingent of warriors," I say.

"And while he's in your pack, it's not his Beta that's leading Owen's old pack, right? It's his G**a?" Robin asks.

I look at him. "Does Nikki have friends in that pack as well?" I ask.

He smiles. "My mate is a wealth of information. Your mate is the legend, my mate is the information hotline."

"So, what do we want to do here?" Dutton asks, looking around.

"We could ambush the scouts, kill them off, delay the attacks," Kayce says.

"They may already have what they need," Carter says. "By their scents and the scent trails, I'd say they've been scouting for at least a week, probably since the last Committee meeting."

"Joshua definitely has. Margot rejected him as soon as she got to our pack lands. I'm guessing he sent warriors out right away. to find her while he took over Elias' pack, but if she's any indication, he's close to being back to full strength, and he has the warriors from two packs now," I tell them.

"Carter's right then, Hunter. Your pack is most at risk. Joshua isn't going to loan out his warriors to others until he has Margot back. I know if it were one of my mates, I'd do the same, but for much different reasons. He wants to possess and probably punish her for rejecting him," Dutton says.

"We need to be careful. I don't want any of you losing warriors because you helped me and your packs were attacked at the same time," I say.

"Then let's come up with a plan. If Kayce and Carter send warriors to your packs, Dutton and I will send warriors to theirs, to help support their packs while they're helping you. Our packs are close enough that they'd be s** to try and hit both our packs at the same time, but if they did, we'd either corral them in the middle of our packs and surround them, or we'd divide their pack warriors, weakening them as we stood back-to-back and fought them off," Robin says.

"That would definitely work," Dutton says as we hear two more pairs of paws, heading our way.

I lift my nose in the air as Kayce and Dutton howl a challenge.

"It's Ezra and Margot," I say as Ezra's wolf, Thorin, howls a response.

When they run up, Ezra shifts quickly. When he sees that Margot is also going to shift, he pulls a bag around his body, throwing her a shirt.

"I don't know what you've all been planning, but I think Joshua and-whomever he's working with are planning to take out my warriors in Owen's pack and use it as their home base while they attack your packs," he says with no preamble.

"Why do you say that?" Robin asks him.

He points to the ground that is heavily scented with scout trails. "Because this scent is nothing compared to the ones we found surrounding Owen's old pack just now."

The One He Claimed Chapter 104

Chapter 104: Truly Understanding

Sophie

When Hunter left, I felt the shift in the pack. They feel safe with Hunter here. They know that they are protected. With him gone and war pending, it makes them nervous.

Kinsley and I spent the better part of the afternoon checking with pack members. We still worked on the safe rooms, but we needed to make sure the pack was calm and relaxed. Nervous wolves do spontaneous things, like start fights.

Lucas was great as I knew he would be. He was out with the patrols, making sure they saw his face, that they knew that he was in charge and was confident in that role. He's truly an incredible Beta.

I put my own fear and worry aside and focus on the pack. The day goes by very quickly, but after dinner, when I go to our room alone, time begins to slow to a snail's pace. I look at the clock every five minutes, unable to sleep, worrying about my mate.

Every once in a while, I'll hear a wolf howl in the distance. Sometimes Hedda would feel the pull and other times she wouldn't. I knew that Hunter and the other Alphas were letting us, their pack and family, know that they were okay. I was glad for it, but I wanted him home.

I'm not sure when I finally fell asleep, or when I felt the warmth of my mate slide into bed behind me, but I felt a peace flow through me when he did.

"You're home," I say, my voice heavy with sleep as start to turn to curl up with him.

Instead, he pulls my body against his, curling up around me, cocooning me in the protection of his arms and body, burying his face in my hair.

"I missed you," he mumbles and within a minute, he's sound asleep. I snuggle closer to my mate, feeling his arms tighten around me in his sleep before falling back to sleep with him.

The next morning, I wake up, still happily snuggled against my mate: As much as I just want to stay here and enjoy this moment, I know that he needs more sleep and I have work to do to get ready.

I carefully disengage myself from his arms, and quietly walk to the closet to get dressed. When I come out, he's lying on his back, rubbing his eyes. "Where are you going?" he asks, his voice thick with sleep.

"I was going to let you sleep. Why are you awake?" I ask, walking over and sitting on the edge of the bed. I reach out and stroke his hair, cupping his cheek as he opens his eyes and

looks at me.

"The bed got cold without you in it," he says, smiling up at me.

"How did it go last night?"

He sighs, leaving one hand on my thigh as he unconsciously strokes my leg, the other he pulls behind his head.

"It's a mess, Soph. The one pack we didn't smell was Zahn's. The others seem to be planning a targeted attack not only on

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us, but probably Robin and Dutton as well,"

"Nikki and the twins?" I ask, feeling a sick sense of dread.

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"That's what we think. I know Joshua is after Margot, but we all agree that he'd want to punish her, and I have a terrible feeling that his punishment would be something along the lines of killing me and taking you as his mate. We know Aiden wants the twins and we know that Alaric's Beta wants Nikki."

"What about Alaric?" I ask.

"I'm not sure where he falls in all of this except that he doesn't want us to win. But their numbers are weakened. We do have a problem with Owen's old pack though. Ezra said the scouts have really been watching that pack. He thinks they want to use it as their staging area for their attack on us."

“Do we have time to get everyone out of there?” I ask.

“That very much depends on when they attack. They still have a lot of women and children who are suffering the broken mate bonds from when they attacked us. We can’t afford to put any of our warriors in that pack because we’re planning for a three-pronged attack.”

“You think they’ll all attack at once?” I ask.

“Not at once. We think they’ll attack us first, and when we call Kayce and your father to come help, the second wave will attack Robin and Dutton’s pack, making the support they receive weaker.”

“What are we going to do?” I ask.

“We developed a plan, but the biggest issue is getting the families out of Owen’s old pack. We’re going to try and split them between us, Kayce, and Robin, so we don’t overwhelm our safe rooms. But you need to plan to have close to fifty more women and children in our safe rooms, Sophie.”

“FIFTY!” I exclaim. Kinsley and I would have probably said we could handle twenty, but not fifty.

“Kayce and Robin’s packs are smaller than ours, so I offered to take the most. We need to look at our injured and see who might be able to fight rather than go into a safe room. Some young mothers may be willing to fight if we have a plan to watch their pups.”

“I hate that idea, Hunter. What if something happens to them and we end up with parentless pups?”

“This is war, Sophie. If you weren’t pregnant, I’d have to accept that you’d be on that battlefield as well. We can’t lose this fight, Soph. I know that means that we’ll lose some wolves and I hate that as much as you do. But we can’t go back to how things were. We need to make a stand. We have to fight for what we believe in and that time to fight has come. There is always a price to pay for that, and it makes me sick to think that something could happen to you, but the alternative isn’t the life that I promised you and like you said before, I’ve always kept my promises to you. We have to fight Sophie and we have to win. Our future, the future of our pups, depends on us winning this war.”

The weight of what my mate is saying, of what we have to do, falls heavily on my shoulders. I knew war was coming, I knew we’d have a battle, just like we did with Owen, but this is bigger, this feels like a turning point in our lives. We either win now, or things go back to the way they were and that’s not an option.

I lay down beside my mate, his arm coming around me, my head on his chest, listening to the sound of his heart, strong and sure.

"I didn't truly understand until this moment, Hunter. I didn't realize what this would truly mean, but I do now." I pause, letting my tears come here, in the privacy of our room with only my mate to see. "I'm scared, Hunter."

He kisses the top of my head, wrapping his arm around me more tightly. "I am too. But I would rather die fighting for what I believe in, fighting for a better future for our pups, than to do nothing at all. We may not survive this Sophie, others that we're close to may not survive this, but we have to fight."

We lay there, just holding each other until the sun begins to rise.

My mate rolls over me and makes love to me, slow and beautiful, his eyes never leaving mine as he slides in and out of me. I gasp, holding on to him tightly as he brings me up and over before finally allowing himself to release inside me.

He holds me while we both come down and this, more than anything makes me realize how much we have to lose, how much I have to lose. My mate is willing to give his life to win this battle. I'm not sure that I can say the same. I'm carrying his pup and I'm not willing to give up what could be the last piece of him. that I will ever have.

"I'm going to shower," he says, finally sliding out of me and kissing me once more before he heads to the bathroom. I watch him, thinking about everything that he said, thinking about everything that I'm feeling from him through the bond.

When I sit up, I know what I have to do.

I'm the f**g Legend and it's about time I started acting like it.

The One He Claimed Chapter 105

Chapter 105: Preparing for Battle

Hunter

I'm exhausted, but that doesn't matter. I'm the Alpha, it's my job to lead this pack and to protect them, so no matter how tired I am, no matter how tired Lucas is, we will push through. We both have way too much to lose now. Not just our mates, but our pups as well.

I'm late for warrior training, but it doesn't appear that anyone expected to see me here except Lucas who was alerted that I'd returned. The patrols who saw me come through the borders are off duty now, on shorter rotations so that we can keep everyone in the pack fresh and rested.

Instead of continuing warrior training, I stop to give the warriors an update on what I and the other Alphas found yesterday and overnight.

“You need to know that they are coming. Whether it’s today, tomorrow, or the next day, Joshua and possibly more Alphas will be bringing their packs to fight us. Starting this morning, the remaining members of Owen’s pack will be redistributed to the other packs. Ezra’s pack members will be initiating the move. which should start early this morning. If you see them or hear them and it sounds like they are being chased, you are to pass. our borders and help to protect them. But be careful, do not let yourselves fall into any traps where you let Joshua, or the other Alphas surround you. Lucas and will be taking turns to run patrols and we’ll be leading the fight when it comes.”-

I sigh and look over my warriors. “I know this is a hard time. I would love to tell you that every one of us will survive, but they aren’t coming here for anything less than blood and death. I expect that Joshua’s primary target will be Margot, but I also think he’ll push to kill me and force your Luna into a mate bond to punish Margot. If he succeeds in killing me, my mate will need protection, our pup will need protection, because I know that Joshua won’t hesitate to kill my son.”

There’s a lot of murmuring and some growling at the thought of Joshua killing me and my son and taking Sophie as his mate.

“We’re a pack, a family. As your leader, I am extremely proud of what our pack has accomplished and the type of pack that we’ve become over the last several months since I took Sophie as my mate. I didn’t know that our pack could be stronger, but it is now. I feel the cohesion between us, between all of us, and this fight is for all of us, not just the ranked she-wolves, not just for Margot, and not just for me and your Luna. This is about our future, the kind of future we want for our pups to grow up in, setting the standard that what we have here in this pack is the norm, not the exception. So, I’m asking all of you to risk your lives, not just for your mates and pups, but for all of our mates and pups, because that’s the kind of pack, the kind of family that we are. We serve and protect each other.”

I take another breath, feeling the weight of my words as they settle over the pack’s warriors. “Lucas and I will be right there beside you. We are the first line of defense for this pack and our families. And while I’m willing to die for each and every one of you, we need to make sure that we help each other, fight together, have each other’s backs. I want as few casualties as possible in this war. In a week, in two weeks, I want to look out over this group and see every one of your faces. So, when the war comes, fight together, protect each other, look out for each other, and let’s all survive this. Let’s show Joshua and any other Alpha that wants to come try and take what’s ours what happens when they threaten us, threaten our families.”

There’s a lot of howling, snarling, and growling as my warriors get pumped up, ready for battle.

When the noise dies down, I nod. “Alright, let’s get to it.”

Today's warrior training is the toughest, hardest training I think. we've ever had. Every one of my warriors feels the pressure of the pending war and they all want to win, win and survive.

Rather than going around and giving pointers, Lucas and I take the opportunity to train as well, fighting hard and not pulling punches. When we're done, I'm satisfied that Lucas is nearly as strong as I am and that his fighting skill is as keen as mine.

When we finally call the end of training, all of us are sweating profusely, but the feeling in the air is one of determination, a need and desire to win.

Lucas and I spend some time talking to our warriors, answering questions about how they can better protect their families, especially their pups, so we're the last to head inside for breakfast.

As I begin walking in, one of my warriors comes running out.

"Alpha, you've got to come see this," he says.

I look at Lucas before picking up my pace and jogging into the packhouse. When I do, I see all of the warriors that just left training standing around, watching the front of the packhouse.

I walk through them, hearing my mate's voice, strong and confident.

"Just because we are not able to be on the battlefield doesn't mean that we cannot fight. Any one of you who chooses to fight, may do so. Kinsley and I will make sure that everyone's pups are looked after and cared for if both parents are on the battlefield."

As I approach, I see that nearly every she-wolf in our pack, even those who haven't yet joined our pack, are here, listening to Sophie and Kinsley.

Their eyes all flash to me, and I put my hands on my mate's hips, leaning down to kiss the top of her head.

"Sophie, what's this?" I ask her.

She turns her head to look up at me and I see the same fierce determination in her eyes that I felt from my warriors on the battlefield.

"You're preparing for battle out there. I'm preparing for battle in here."

"Preparing for battle?" I ask.

"Yes. You said that we'll be taking in fifty women and children. It's more than our safe rooms can handle, Hunter. So we, the women of this pack, are making some decisions

about who will fight, who will be in the safe rooms with the pups, and who will be strategically placed around the packhouse to protect the safe rooms if any wolves get into the packhouse.”

I frown. “How short on space are we?”

“At least thirty and that’s if we cram the rooms to near bursting,” Kinsley says. Lucas has come up behind her and wrapped his arms around her, putting his hands protectively over her stomach.

“We could probably...” I begin, but Sophie turns and looks up at me, putting her fingers over my lips.

“I’ve got this, Hunter. You have other, important things to worry about. Let me handle this.”

I’m so unused to having a partner like this, having someone. other than Lucas who I have to trust to do the right thing for the pack. But I know that Sophie will, and that she was made to be a Luna, my Luna.

I nod, knowing she can handle it. “Okay. Let Lucas and I know if you need anything,” I say, seeing a lot of the new she-wolves that came asking for sanctuary looking at each other in surprise.

“And remember, Soph, you and Margot are going to be Joshua’s key targets.”

“Margot has already decided to fight, and I’ve approved it. And I’ m the Luna of this pack, Hunter. I will not sit securely inside a safe room while others fight to protect this pack that I love. I am a fighter, an Alpha wolf, a Luna. My job is to protect this pack just as much as yours is.”

“Sophie...” I begin. It goes against everything in me to let her be out of a safe room while the war is going on, especially knowing that she’s a target.

“I have no intention of dying, Hunter. So let me do what I need to do to make sure that those of us protecting the safe rooms can remain safe as well,” she says. “If we can make it work that there are enough fighters, Kinsley and I will be in safe rooms, but I won’t put another pregnant woman out to fight while I’m. tucked away inside one of those rooms. That’s not the kind of leader I am and it’s not the kind of leader you are either.” She says this last part softly, pleading with me to understand.

I have to fight back my fear, fight the overwhelming need to tuck her someplace safe right now, as I lean my forehead against hers.

“You and I need to begin sparring again, Sophie. If you’re going to fight, I’m d**n well going to make sure you’re ready.”

"I would expect nothing less of my Alpha," she says, leaning up and kissing me. I pull her to me, needing to feel her safe in my arms, needing to know that she's going to do everything she can to keep herself safe.

But I know she's right. I wouldn't want another pregnant she-wolf to fight because my mate was in a safe room. It's not who we are.

This, fighting for what we believe in, this is who we are.

The One He Claimed Chapter 106

Chapter 106: Decisions

Leah

Luna Sophie called us all to the packhouse during warrior training, every single she-wolf and omega in the pack who isn't a warrior. It's unheard of. Usually, warriors are called to meetings about war, omegas are called to meetings about upcoming events, but to call all individuals who aren't fighters or are currently out due to having young pups for a discussion about the upcoming war, well, it's not something I've ever heard of happening before. Of course, this pack is becoming known for doing things differently than all the others.

When she explains that we have more women and pups coming in today and that we need more space in the safe rooms, I know that I can give up my space. I've already lived longer than I expected and there are many others here who are younger than I am with long lives ahead of them, my daughter included.

"I'm going to start with volunteers. Those who are able to fight and are only down because you have young pups, I'm going to ask you to seriously consider giving up your spot in the safe rooms. We have omegas who are not trained to fight, pups who must be in those safe rooms. Kinsley and I are not able to shift and fight, but that doesn't mean that we haven't agreed to give up our places in the safe rooms as well if we don't have enough space. We only have three safe rooms, and we have fifty women and pups coming today. I don't know what state they will be in, but the pups take priority and the women who lost their mates will also need to be in a safe room."

I'm a bit surprised but also pleased when so many of us raise our hands to volunteer to come out of the safe rooms

"Luna, you know your mate will argue with me fighting, but I need to be out there," Luna Margot says.

"And you will be. But not all of us have to be outside. What I'm proposing for some of you, especially those whose pups that are in the safe rooms, is that we set up a line of defense inside the packhouse. If the attacking packs get past our warriors, they will

come here, hoping to destroy us, hoping to kill our most vulnerable population. We won't allow that to happen. We, this group, will be the second line of defense against our enemies to protect those who cannot protect themselves."

I watch as the others look at each other. There is a sense of relief among the young mothers, but also among those like me. My pup may not be young, but she'll be in a safe room, and I can stand guard and help to keep her safe like I should have always. done.

"I will also want leads in the safe rooms, those who can be the third line of defense if the attacking wolves get past us. We all have a part to play in this war. All of our lives depend on us winning this war.

When Alpha Hunter walks in, we all wait to see what he will do. In every interaction he's had with our Luna, I've been surprised, and today is no different. Everyone can see that he doesn't like what Luna Sophie is saying, especially if it means that she and his unborn pup aren't safe in one of the rooms, but he doesn't fight her and that, more than anything helps all of us realize the weight of what's to come.

"How much longer, Soph? The warriors, all of this pack's warriors, need to eat," Alpha Hunter says, looking at our group and including us as warriors. I feel pride at his words, at his recognition that we are fighters too, and almost as one, the group stands taller, happy to have pleased our Alpha.

"I'll go check," Beta Kinsley says.

"I'll go with you," I say along with a few others. "You have my preference, Luna."

"I do, thank you, Leah."

As I turn to walk into the kitchen behind Beta Kinsley, I see Brutus watching me closely. He and I have spent a lot of time together since I woke up after Michael's death. Perhaps it's because I had already left Michael, or maybe it's because he and I were never as close as mates should be to begin with, but my relationship with Brutus is moving much more quickly than I ever would have expected. The more time I spend with him, the stronger my wolf becomes, which was the second surprise to me. Not only did I not die after Michael did, but I still have my wolf.

I help get the food ready and just as we're about to set the food out, the rest of the omegas come rushing in to help, the meeting with Luna Sophie is over.

After setting up the breakfast buffet, I stand back, letting the hungry warriors go first. However most of them are talking to their mates, especially the ones who have young pups whose mates volunteered to stay outside of the safe rooms.

Since there aren't many people in line, I grab a plate and begin filling it. I smell him and feel his heat behind me before he speaks.

“Let’s find a private place and talk, Leah,” Brutus says.

I turn and see his intense eyes on me. Those intense eyes. burned like fire last night when I gave myself to him for the first time. Being with Brutus is unlike anything I ever experienced with Michael. Brutus is a huge man, but he’s so gentle with me and while he’s larger than Michael, rather than feeling pain during our lovemaking, I felt a fullness that I’d never felt before, one that has left me aching to be filled again.

I nod and we fill our plates, mine much less than Brutus’, before finding a table off to the side of the dining hall. I notice that there are many conversations going on, some with angry words. and gestures and some with hugging and holding on to each other.

Brutus doesn’t wait, he jumps right in. “I don’t want you fighting. I don’t want to worry about you getting hurt or worse....” he stops, looking down, pushing his food around on his plate.

“I don’t want to lose you, Leah. I just found you. I’m already so in love with you. Argus is so in love with you,” he says, looking up at me with fear and pain in his eyes.

I reach over and take his hand. “I don’t want to die, Brutus, but I do want to fight for what I believe in, for what is right. Too long, I stood by and let others rule my life. Now, I have a chance to stand up for myself, my daughter, for my pack, and make a difference, at least a small one.”

He shakes his head. “It’s not small. What you want to do is huge, Leah. You’re not a warrior. You’re not a fighter. These people, they’re coming to kill us. I don’t....I can’t...”

I watch this giant man try to hold back a **b. I stand, walking around the table and when he looks up at me, I sit in his lap, wrapping my arms around his neck. He pulls me to him, holding me tightly, burying his face in my neck.

“It’s not that I don’t think you’re capable. You’ve already proven how strong you are, Leah. It’s the thought of losing you, of not being able to hold you, like this, or in my arms at night. Last night...last night was one of the best nights of my life, Leah. I’m not ready to give that up, to lose that for some f**g Alphas who have a vendetta against our pack,” he says, growling the last part while his face is buried in my neck.

I run my fingers through his hair, holding him tightly. “We have to do this, Brutus. Both of us. We have to fight for a better tomorrow.”

He takes a deep breath and sighs, kissing my neck and sending waves of pleasure through my body. When he lifts his head, his nostrils are flaring, smelling the scent of my arousal.

“I want to mark you. I want to make you mine,” he says. It’s not the first time, but he’s much more insistent now.

“I’m the weaker one of us, Brutus. If something happens to me...”

“It would kill me anyway, Leah. Even if you weren’t wearing my mark, losing you would kill me. But if we’re going to die, I want to die with you as my mate. Will you let me mark you, make you mine in every possible way?”

How can I say no to this man? This incredible man who, in such a short amount of time, has shown me what true love is.

“Yes, Brutus. I would be proud to wear your mark.”

His answering growl is only m**d by his mouth attaching to mine in a very possessive, loving kiss which promises everything, even if only for a short amount of time.

The One He Claimed Chapter 107

Chapter 107: Brooklyn’s Role

When Luna Sophie asked for volunteers to come out of the safe rooms, I was one of many who raised my hand. I’m tired of standing by and letting others fight for me. I need to be strong and while I know I have only been sparring for just over a week, I’ve been practicing in my spare time and Cas has been helping me. He may not be a warrior, but he’s always participated in warrior training, so he’s strong and knowledgeable of how to fight.

As Luna Sophie ends the meeting, she makes eye contact with me and gestures for me to wait a moment. I can feel tears p**g at my eyes. I already know what she’s going to say. She doesn’t feel like I’m strong enough to fight.

I wait as others ask her and Beta Kinsley questions before she finally moves to me. I watch as Beta Lucas finds Beta Kinsley and pulls her aside. I’m guessing he isn’t any happier than Alpha Hunter about his mate being outside a safe room during this fight. I’m willing to give up my spot so one of them can be in the room, but I know Luna Sophie is about to tell me no.

“Brooklyn, I saw you raise your hand before, volunteering to come out of the safe rooms...” she begins.

“Luna, I know I’m not the strongest fighter, or even much of a fighter, but please, I want to fight for this pack who has done so much for me. Please don’t make me go into a safe room.”

She smiles at me and takes my hand in hers. “There are two reasons that I want you in a safe room, Brooklyn, and neither of them is because I don’t think you’re strong enough to fight for this pack. Hear me out, and then we can decide together, okay?”

I nod, now unsure of what she's going to say.

"The first reason that I want you in a safe room is because I know we're going to need you when the fighting is done. The warriors have done nothing but sing your praises since the last battle when you stitched so many of them up. We'll need that again after this war, probably more so. You can't help out in the hospital if you yourself are recovering from injuries."

I notice she doesn't say 'if you're dead' which makes me think that she means what she's saying.

"We're going to need you, Brooklyn. Everyone has a role to play in this pack, and yours seems to have become assisting in the pack hospital. That's where you're most effective and that's where I want you when this is done. Don't think I'm asking that because it will be easy. If you thought you worked hard during the last battle, it will most likely be worse this time and we have to consider that we'll have even more individuals who lose mates."

I hadn't thought of that, but she's right. Last time, they were so short staffed that they were thrilled for my help.

"And the second reason is that I'd like to ask you to be the Lead in a safe room. You're the only one in this pack who has ever shot a gun. If these wolves get past our first two lines of defense, I want you to be our third. I want you to stand in that safe room, in front of the pups, the infirm, and the pregnant she-wolves, and I want you to fight to protect them," she says.

I'm shocked. She's truly not asking me to sit safely inside the room and wait, she's asking me to be a third line of defense, to protect those in the safe room, and then to be ready to help those injured in the battle.

"Will you do that for me, Brooklyn? Will you do that for the pack?"

"Yes, Luna. I will."

"Thank you, Brooklyn. I knew I could count on you. I'll have Kinsley tell you which room you're assigned to. I'll need you here today to meet the new individuals coming in because you'll be responsible for closing and locking the door Brooklyn. That means that if the attacking wolves breach the packhouse and the safe rooms become compromised, you may have to close the doors without everyone inside. That's part of the responsibility that I'm putting on your shoulders and it's a heavy one. Those of us on the outside will be pushing stragglers into safe rooms, but ultimately, you are the one that will have to decide when to close and lock your safe room door."

I realize just how much responsibility Luna Sophie is giving me. It's not that I thought it would be easy, but I didn't realize that I might have to decide to lock someone out.

"I won't let you down, Luna."

"I know you won't, Brooklyn. I wouldn't ask this of you if I didn't you could handle it."

I nod and she squeezes my hand, turning to go talk to whoever else she needs to talk to in order to make sure we're all ready for this war.

I look around and I see Cas leaning against a doorframe, waiting for me. I walk up to him, and he pulls me into a hug, not saying a word.

I wrap my arms around him, feeling safe in his embrace. He and I have been working very close together at the hospital. I've

gotten used to having him around, to having him close. We're still taking things very slowly, but I know that I don't want to lose him:

"You're not going to be in a safe room, are you?" I ask him.

"No," he answers quietly, his face buried in my hair.

"You know you don't have to stay here. You can leave..."

"Not without you, I can't," he says, pulling away enough to look me in the eye. "I told you; I've waited a very long time to find you. I'm not giving that up and leaving you here to fight without me."

I reach my hand up to stroke his face. He closes his eyes, leaning into my touch, something that I love. When he opens his eyes, he slowly leans forward, watching me to make sure I don't flinch away. But I don't. I want to feel his lips on mine, want to feel connected to this man who is showing me what love and kindness were meant to look like.

When he pulls away from our kiss, he leans his forehead on mine.

"Will you stay with me tonight? I'm not asking you to have sex with me, I know you're not ready yet. I just want to hold you, to have you in my arms as long as possible before this war comes to us," he says.

"I would like that," I say, knowing that I'll feel safe in his arms. Most nights, I have nightmares and find myself searching for him anyway, needing to feel his arms around me so that I can feel safe. This way, I'll just start where I always seem to end up most days.

"Let's get some breakfast, we have a lot to prepare in the hospital before the war comes," he says, taking my hand and leading me into the dining hall.

“And I have to be here when the new people come from the other pack, so I can make sure they know what safe room they are assigned to, and I know who to look for in my safe room.”

I see my mother sitting on Brutus lap, talking quietly. As I look around, I realize the room is much quieter than normal, people, families, having quiet conversations about what’s to come.

As I look around, I realize that not all of these people will survive, but I also know that Cas and I will do everything in our power to make sure that they do.

The One He Claimed Chapter 108

Chapter 108: Fear and Anxiety

Lucas

When Luna Sophie said that she and Kinsley may be outside the safe rooms during the war, I felt fear like I’ve never felt before.

‘What the f**k, Hunter?’ I asked him in the mind link.

I had watched him battle with himself, listening to his mate and recognizing that while he doesn’t want her outside a safe room any more than I want Kinsley and my pup out, Sophie is right. How can we, as leaders, choose to leave another pregnant woman out of a safe room while our mates are tucked safely inside.

That doesn’t mean that my wolf, Dario, isn’t thrashing around in my head at the thought of our mate and pup being unprotected.

I hold my tongue, waiting while Luna Sophie finishes talking to the group and until Kinsley finishes talking to the people who have questions before I pull her aside.

“I know what you’re going to say, Lucas,” she begins.

“What am I going to say, Kinsley?”

“That you want me in a safe room.”

“You’re right, I absolutely do. You can’t shift, you’re carrying my pup, and for f**k’s sake, Kins, I just got you, truly got you,” I say, pulling her against me as I fight tears. I’ve worked so hard to overcome the problems we suffered from her public claiming. I can’t stomach the thought of losing her now, not after everything that we’ve been through to get here.

"I don't like it either, Lucas. I don't want to lose you or our pup. I love you, and I love him."

Him, my son. We only recently found out that we're having a boy. I haven't even had a chance to tell Hunter yet.

"I don't know how to keep you safe, Kinsley. If you're not in a safe room...." my throat tightens up. I'll be on the front lines with Hunter. I wouldn't want it any other way. We're the leaders of this pack and that's what leaders do. But I know there will be more warriors attacking than we can keep out of the packhouse and when they come, Kinsley will be here, and I'll be out there.

"I know how to fight, Lucas. Sophie and I have already begun collecting weapons for those of us who will be unable to shift, but you didn't see the number of young mothers who volunteered to fight. It was incredible. I hate it, because I don't want orphaned pups in our pack, but there's a strong possibility that I'll be in a safe room. It all depends on who arrives today and where we can put them. Sophie already told me that I get a spot in a safe room before her. She's asking Brooklyn to be a Lead in one safe room, and if I get a spot, I'll be the Lead in a second room. But just like Sophie said, how can I be a leader and push another pregnant woman out to fight when I'm tucked away safely behind locked doors?"

"I know. I know. I understand it with my head, Kins. But I hate it with my heart. Hunter's mind is swirling with fear and ways to make sure that Sophie is safe. Whatever he comes up with, I want you involved as well. And we need a word, something that you can scream into my mind to let me know that you need help. I'll get to you as fast as I can, and you'll just need to hold on until I can get here. Can you at least agree to that if you're outside the safe rooms?"

"I can agree to that," she says, looking up at me and running her knuckles over my cheek. "Have I told you today that I love you?"

I smile, nodding. "Yeah, but I wouldn't mind hearing it again," I say.

She lifts up on her toes, pressing her lips to mine. "I love you," she whispers, before kissing me again. "I love you," she says, kissing me again. "I love only you, forever, Lucas," and when she kisses me again, I take her mouth in a possessive kiss, pouring all of my love and fear into the kiss. She takes every bit of it, returning the kiss with her own fierce determination to keep herself and our pup safe.

When I finally pull away, both of us panting, I press my forehead to hers. "Let's go get some food, Beta. You and I have a lot of work to do today."

Ezra POV

I know Margot is trying to avoid me, but I'm not having it. I heard Sophie tell Hunter that she agreed to let Margot fight. She's stronger, but she's not ready to be on a battlefield yet.

When I see her ducking away from me again, I rush forward and grab her arm, pulling her around to look at me.

"Stop running from me," I growl at her.

She lifts her chin in the defiant way that I'm becoming used to with this stubborn woman. I honestly don't know how she survived Joshua, or more accurately, how he survived her.

"You don't get to tell me that I can't fight," she insists.

I release her arm and watch her carefully. "You're right, I don't."

That takes the wind out of her sails. She was ready to argue with me, but I didn't take the bait and now she doesn't know what to do or say.

"But that doesn't mean I don't want to," I tell her. "I want you to be smart about this, Margot."

"I am being smart about this, Ezra. I've told you my plans. Just because you don't agree with them, doesn't mean that I'm changing my mind."

I growl and begin prowling back and forth in front of her, running my hands through my hair in frustration. I haven't had enough time to let her see that I'm different, different from Joshua, yes, but also different than I was when I took Diana as my mate.

Finally, I stop, knowing that I'm probably glaring at her in my frustration. "Well, I'm not changing my mind either, Margot."

"What are you not changing your mind about?" she asks, haughtily.

I lean forward, getting into her face. "I refuse to lose another mate in this lifetime. So, you will stay by my side in the fight and when Joshua comes for you, I'll kill him myself."

I watch as sadness flutters across her face. "I know you would do that for me. But killing him won't save me."

"Then, I'll maim him. I'll rip his legs and arms off and leave him alive, so you won't die, Margot. I'm NOT losing you."

She lifts up onto her toes, pressing her lips to mine. I've stolen some kisses over the past week, loving that her body melts into mine more each time we kiss. Today is no

different. She lets go, kissing me like she's never kissed me before, as if she's surrendering to me. I take everything that she's giving me, pressing her against the wall and demanding more from her, demanding everything from this kiss. I want it all, her

acceptance, her submission, her love, her life, her future. Our future, together.

Her mouth on mine is hot and needy with desire and when she begins to moan, I don't stop, demanding more from her, demanding everything, demanding a life, her life. She surrenders, whimpering as I dominate the kiss, feeling her clinging to me as I demand even more from her.

When I finally pull away, I press my face against hers, both of us panting hard. I feel and smell the salt of her tears on her cheeks, and I turn my head, kissing them away.

"You are mine, Margot. I take that very seriously."

She looks up at me and another tear drips down her cheek. "Yes, Ezra. I'm yours," she says.

I pull her to me, holding her tightly. When I finally release her, she smiles up at me

"I have to go help with the families coming in."

I nod, leaning in to kiss her again, this one much gentler. I feel another tear escape her eye and pull back, wiping the tears away.

"I love you, Margot. I mean that with all of my heart."

She smiles at me and nods, before turning and rushing off.

As I watch her go, I understand exactly what that was. That was her way of saying goodbye to me, of giving me what I wanted and needed from her before she plans to die.

Well, I have no intention of letting her die. I guess we'll have to see who is the more stubborn of the two of us. There will be more than one battle going on when the war begins, her battle with Joshua and her battle with me to keep her alive.

The One He Claimed Chapter 109

Chapter 109: Fighting Differently

Sophie

After getting our pack members settled, and then having breakfast, Hunter finds me.

“Soph, come with me. Before the others arrive, you and Kinsley are getting a crash course on fighting together,” he says, and I see Lucas leading Kinsley in our direction.

Hunter leads me outside and Lucas and Kinsley follow behind US.

“Okay, here’s the deal,” Hunter begins turning to face us as several other warriors join us. “Lucas and I hate the idea that the two of you won’t be in one of the safe rooms. I understand your reasoning and I’m not going to fight you on it. However, I expect that the two of you stay together and fight together. Sparring with me and Lucas isn’t going to help. You won’t have one person coming at you face to face like we’ve been training you. So, what we’re going to do is have the two of you stand back-to- back, covering each other. That way, you only have to cover your front and sides, and you can help each other,” he says, looking at me then at Kinsley.

I look at Kinsley and we both nod

“Lucas and I are going to watch and give you pointers on how to protect yourselves better. These guys,” he says, pointing to the warriors, “are going to attack you from all sides as if we were in a real battle. You two are key targets, not just because Joshua will want to take you as his mate, Sophie, but because you’re ranked members. Injuring or killing either of you will destroy me and Lucas and it will weaken us enough that we’ll be easily killed.”

I reach out and take Kinsley’s hand, knowing that neither of us is willing to be the reason our mates are weakened or killed in battle.

“You guys,” Hunter says, turning to the warriors. “are my best warriors and that’s why you’ve been chosen for this exercise. You have the most knowledge, the most fighting strength, and the most control. Our mates are going to fight all out against you. You are only allowed to knock, scrape, or injure them to the point that their wolves can heal them within an hour. Anything more than that, and you’ll answer to one of us,” he says, gesturing to himself and Lucas.

He turns back to me and Kinsley. “I need it to hurt because I need you both to be prepared to continue fighting when you’re injured. But I’m not willing to risk either of your pups for a training exercise. Understood?”

Kinsley and I both nod.

“Do not hold back. Do not worry that you’ll hurt them more than they can heal. The goal is to prepare you to take them down and for the two of you to stay alive until Lucas or I can get to you. You’re both limited in your movements now which is why we need to practice this.”

He turns back to the warriors. "Chris, Nathan, you each take one from the front," he says, then looks at me and Kinsley. "Back-to-back you two," he says, crossing his arms over his chest.

"We're going to start with just these two, then I'm going to have the others attack so you can see what will happen if you aren't paying attention," he says. "Ready?" he asks, and Kinsley and I get into a defensive posture.

"Fight!" he says and Nathan, who is in front of me, charges at me. He pops me in the shoulder hard before I swing my arm about and smash him in the face, knocking him aside. He shifts into his wolf, coming at me again. When he leaps, I duck.

"STOP!" Hunter calls out and we all stand to look at him.

"Mistake number one, Soph. If someone comes at you straight on, you can't duck, or they'll take out Kinsley." I turn, seeing that Nathan nipped Kinsley in the shoulder. He didn't draw blood, but he tore her shirt. "You have to remember that you're protecting her back as much as your front."

I nod, looking at Kinsley, both of us getting more determined. I squeeze her hand again, before turning around, our backs pressing more tightly together.

"Again. Fight!"

This time, I stay upright, making sure to protect Kinsley's back. Nathan comes at me again and I'm doing pretty well holding my own but still taking hits when I feel a nip in my backside.

"STOP!" Hunter says and I turn to see that a third warrior entered the fight without me realizing it. Kinsley and I have moved apart, and this wolf didn't even need to rush to get me. If we'd been in a fight, he'd have taken me down easily.

"Second mistake, Kinsley. Don't let the wolves pull you apart. They will try to draw you away from each other. One wolf is much easier to take down than two fighting together.

"Again. Fight!" he says, and we go through the motions, with Hunter or Lucas stopping us periodically to show us where we messed up.

"We're just getting to a point where they aren't stopping us but reminding us to be mindful of our situation when we get the notice that the she-wolves and pups have arrived from Owen's old pack.

"Nice job, you two. That was very good. We need to practice more and if we have time tonight, we will," Hunter says.

I turn and look at our warriors. "Thank you all. That was very helpful and also a great lesson on having to fight through the pain. I appreciate all of your control and that you were willing to take our punches and kicks at full force," I say to them, Kinsley agreeing.

"You pack a mean punch, Luna. My cheek is still swollen from that first punch you threw over an hour ago. Make sure your punch hard and fast like you did to me," Nathan says. The others agree, letting Kinsley know that her knee to the gut of a wolf was also very effective.

"You two go wash up and meet us inside. Lucas, Ezra, and I will go meet the women," Hunter says. As I turn to go inside, I see that there is a large group of warriors and women who are watching, some of them have also started practicing fighting two together with other warriors and Alpha Ezra giving them pointers on how to protect each other.

"Let's have everyone return this afternoon, Hunter. It's not just me and Kinsley that need to protect each other. Our young mothers and others who have volunteered to stay out of the safe rooms could also benefit from this training," I say to him.

He turns seeing the others, who have created their own training sessions. "You're absolutely correct," he says and begins to address the larger group. "If we aren't attacked before, meet here at four o'clock this afternoon so we can practice again. If you haven't already, find your partner. We'll have everyone pair off, so we learn to fight together and protect each other," Hunter says.

I can feel the relief from some of our pack members, especially ones whose mates have volunteered to be out of the safe rooms, but still have young pups, some still young enough to be nursing.

The One He Claimed Chapter 110

Chapter 110: Hunter's Request

Sophie

Kinsley and I rush inside to shower quickly before returning downstairs to meet with the new individuals needing our protection. When we get downstairs, I can feel and smell their fear before I see it on their faces. Thankfully, Kinsley joins me almost immediately. I mind link Brooklyn, and the other two safe room leads to join us before addressing the group.

"Good morning, everyone. I am Luna Sophie, and this is Beta Kinsley. We know that a lot has gone on in your lives in a very short amount of time. Many of you have lost mates, now you are being moved away from your homes, and there is a pending war. I see a lot of pups here and we want to make sure that we are able to keep everyone safe. We have bedrooms for all of you, but we need to know how many people in each

room. We will also need to know how many of you are able to fight and how many need to be in a safe room. We have already asked our own pack members to volunteer to fight, rather than stay in a safe room and we have many, but it's still not enough to accommodate all fifty of you," I say, seeing their eyes shift behind me as several of them gasp.

I turn and see Brooklyn walking in. I smile and open my arm to embrace her, feeling her shame that this group of women saw what she suffered in their pack.

"Many of you know Brooklyn. She and her mother, Leah, returned to our pack and have been living here with us under our protection. Brooklyn is a strong young woman who is making a name for herself in our pack hospital and is also going to be a Lead in one of the safe rooms. We will be putting together rosters for the three safe rooms and we will be running drills starting today. Our goal is to get to two minutes. That's for everyone's safety. The Leads for each room have been instructed to close and lock the safe room doors if the packhouse is breached by attackers. We do not want to leave anyone outside the safe rooms who needs to be inside, so while I know you all must be exhausted, we cannot wait until you are more rested to practice. We're going to get everyone settled first, get you something to eat, find out who needs to be in a safe room, get you assigned and introduced to your Lead, and then we'll begin drills. Any questions?" I ask.

I answer questions, then turn to the Leads and Kinsley. "Do you mind starting to filter through who needs to be in a safe room and who can fight? I need a final list so we can put them into a room based on number of pups in each safe room, and we need to make sure that we have enough supplies in each room if we have nursing and young pups still in diapers."

It takes most of the afternoon to make sure all of the new pack members have rooms and are fed. Kinsley and I, along with the three Leads, went around and tried to calm the women and pups, making them feel welcome. Many of our own pack members came to sit with them during lunch and talked to them. The feeling in the pack is nervous, concerned, and anxious and the pups are picking up on that, most of them becoming fussy and crying.

As expected, our first drill was a mess with the new pack not knowing where to go, pups running around and getting lost, but after the third drill, things were getting better. Kinsley and I did have to make some tough decisions, telling some new members that they needed to stay outside the safe rooms and help to fight. That was tough, but not all of them have lost mates or have young pups, and those individuals were not given the choice to stay inside a safe room. They balked at that until they heard that Kinsley and I would also not be in a safe room.

At four o'clock, we went back out for more training. I was already exhausted, but as Hunter said, war doesn't wait for you to have a good night's sleep and he needs to know that Kinsley and I can fight, even if it's the middle of the night. This time, all of the

women and omegas who will remain outside the safe rooms are out here. The new individuals are quickly paired up and our warriors are fantastic at helping them to learn to work together to fight. I see Leah and her partner practicing with Brutus guiding them in the fight.

I have a moment to be proud of our pack, before Hunter tells us to get ready. We have Nathan and Chris coming at us again, only now, I get Chris and Kinsley gets Nathan head on. Their styles of fighting are different, and I can see why Hunter mixed it up. But Kinsley and I are fast learners and strong fighters. We remember what we learned this morning and stay back-to-back. I throw more punches since Nathan said my punch was strong and this time, Hunter sends more than the three other warriors at us, having some remain in human form and some in wolf form.

We take a lot of hits, the warrior's careful to not hit our stomachs too hard, and by the time Hunter calls it, I'm aching all over, but I can tell that both Hunter and Lucas are happy with how we sparred and if the applause of the warriors is any indication, they are feeling good about it too.

"A couple more days and we'll be ready," I tell Hunter as he lifts me up, carrying me to what I hope will be a hot bath to relieve my aching body.

"Let's hope we have that long," he says.

He gets in the tub with me and we soak in the hot water, letting our muscles relax. His arms wrap around me from behind as I sit on his lap, my hands intertwined with his on my stomach.

"I need you to stay alive, Sophie," Hunter says, his forehead pressed to the back of my head, his voice thick with emotion. "No matter what happens, no matter how injured you might be, I need you to fight and to stay alive for me. Can you do that?"

I turn and look at him over my shoulder, seeing the shine of his eyes which is more telling to me than anything. Hunter is terrified of losing me.

"Hedda is strong, Hunter. Me and your pup will both stay alive."

"No matter what happens, Sophie. If Joshua gets to you, if he forces his mark on you..." I turn in his arms as a tear rolls down his cheek.

"Now you listen to me, Hunter Reynolds. There is only one man in this world for me and that man is you. No one is ever going to take me from you. No one. If Joshua comes for me, he'll see just how serious I am about that. I am not his mate. I will never be his mate. I am yours and you are mine. So, I'll say this to you. You better stay alive as well. I don't want to be in this life without. I would live for our son, but don't make me live half a life because you die on that battlefield. Do you hear me? I mean it, Hunter."

He reaches up, stroking his wet hand over my cheek. "Goddess, I love you so much Sophie."

"And I love you. So, when the fight comes, we fight, we protect our pack, and we live. That's the deal."

A small smile spreads across his face as he watches his hand stroking over my cheek. "What do I get if I keep my end of the bargain?"

"Hmmm, unlimited access to your mate in bed?"

"I already have that," he says, looking at me. I can feel him settling as we talk.

"Then, how about another pup?" ask him quietly.

His eyes burn with desire and fierce determination.

"Only one?"

I smile at him, stroking my fingers over his growing smile.

"An unlimited number of pups."

"Now that's worth living for," he says before showing me just how much he wants to fill our packhouse with pups.

I was hoping we'd have more time to practice fighting, but the next morning, before the sun had risen, we were awakened by the howls of alarm.

Joshua and his pack are here.