

# The One He Claimed Chapter 11

## Chapter 11: Injured

Sophie

Penny woke me up in the middle of the night and I took my shift, watching and making sure that we stayed safe while she slept. About an hour before sunrise, I woke her. I could see a train station coming ahead and we needed to get off this train before anyone spotted us.

As the train starts to slow, I strip out of my clothes and put them in my bag, shifting back into my wolf. I make sure that Penny is doing the same, then I grab my bag in my mouth and wait until the train slows as much as I feel I can let it before I need to jump. I find a spot with grass, and I leap, quickly turning to watch and make sure that Penny joins me and lands safely.

Her landing isn't as graceful as mine and it looks as though she might have twisted her ankle. I race over to her, sniffing her leg. I nudge her with my nose and wait. She puts weight on her leg and almost instantly, she lifts it again, a painful yelp escaping her lips.

I look around. We are very exposed here and as soon as the sun comes up, anyone close by will be able to see us. We need to get to the forest, and we need to do it quickly.

I shift and quickly take Penny's paw in my hand. I gently move my hand up to the knee joint where she flinched, whimpering as I touch it.

"I'm going to have to carry you Penny. We can't stay here, we have to move."

She shakes her head, pushing me with her nose, telling me to leave her.

"I'm not leaving you. I know it's going hurt to shift, but I need you to shift, and then you can climb on my back. I'll carry you. We've got to get to the forest before the sun comes up," I tell her urgently.

When she doesn't instantly shift, take her face in my hands. "We don't have much time. It's going to be hard enough for me to travel carrying you. We have to go, Penny. You have to shift."

She nods, and I release her face. She whimpers as she begins to shift and when her leg shifts back, she cries out before slapping her hand over her mouth. Her knee looks terrible. It's swollen and already bruising an ugly purple color.

"That's going to take some time to heal. Come on, we need to get going."

I help her up into a standing position, grabbing both of our bags and handing them to her. Once she has them over her shoulders, I turn, crouching down in front of her and help her

the good leg around my waist, and get onto my back. She wraps I carefully wrap my arm underneath the thigh of her bad leg. She whimpers softly as she bends her knee and lets it hang.

“I’m going to have to run Penny, so just hang on.”

“Okay, just hurry,” she says and I can hear the pain in her voice.

I take off running as fast as I can. I run in the opposite direction of the train station and train tracks. It looks like there’s a mile, maybe two, before I can get to what looks like a forest. I hope that’s what it is. I hope it’s a thick forest, where we can hide and maybe find a place to let Penny rest and heal.

When I get to the tree line, the sun is just starting to rise and I can see very quickly that this is no thick forest. This is just a smattering of trees, and we’ll have to continue on.

Penny pushes her face against my back as I run. I can hear her whimpering periodically, but she keeps the sounds as quiet as she possibly can. I frequently stop listening to make sure that no one is following us, that no one has caught our scent. This is a bad situation, and it would be very easy for us to be captured.

Somewhere around noon, I stop near a lake, sitting Penny on the ground. I need to catch my breath and she needs to stretch out her legs. Thankfully the trees have gotten thicker as I’ve run. I’m still moving in the general direction of my parents’ pack, hoping that it’s them leaving the food out. I know we’ll need to be more careful as we get closer to my parents’ pack. There are several wolf packs in the surrounding area. I don’t know how many of those Alphas have found their mates, but I’m sure if they haven’t, they’ll be on the hunt for one.

I take our water bottles and fill them quickly in the cool lake coming back and handing one to Penny as I sit beside her. I drink the water quickly, thirsty after my long run. Then I look down at her knee.

“How does it feel?” I ask her.

“Better,” she says. I look at it and see that it’s turned into a yellow and green bruise from the ugly black and purple that it was earlier today. That’s a good sign that it’s healing, but the fact that it’s still bruised means it’s not healed enough.

“Do you want to try walking on it?” I ask her.

“Yeah, let me at least try and if nothing else, maybe I can walk for a while. The forest has gotten thicker here.”

“Okay,” I agree, knowing it would be better if I can look around, see if I can find a place for us to hide tonight. I pull out two more granola bars from my bag and hand her one before taking our water bottles down to the lake and refilling them.

“Let’s try walking around the lake, maybe there’s an area here where we can hide for the night, or at least let you rest until your knee is healed. It looks like it should be fine by tomorrow and then we can both begin to run.

“I’m holding you back. You should just go without me,” she says,

“I’m not leaving you here. You’re at risk at being captured. I’m not going to do that to you.”

She nods and surprises me by reaching out to hug me. “Thank you.”

“That’s what friend’s do.”

“I wish we were the kind of friends who could stay together and not have to separate in another day or so.”

“Me too. Maybe someday. We can hope.”

I help her up and wrap her arm around my shoulder before we begin making our way slowly around the lake. We both listen intently for the sounds of footfalls, running paws, growls, or howls of any kind.

It’s slow going as Penny limps her way around the lake trying not to put too much weight on her bad knee. Once we’re around the Lake, I look around and see that away from the lake, the forest becomes thicker with trees.

“What do you think, Penny? The lake or the forest for tonight?” She looks around, then looks back at the forest.

“I feel too exposed here by the lake. I feel like anyone in the area will come here to get water, and then they will find us.”

“I agree. I think it’s time for you to climb back on my back. I’d like to make some good time and get away from this lake. As soon as someone catches our scent, they’ll come after us and I’d like to be far enough away that we still have a chance.”

“Why don’t we swim across? If we get in the water, our scent will be lost, and it will take a long time for them to find our scent again. If we swim straight across, we can get out and then cut left heading north again.”

“Are you sure your knee can handle it?” I ask her, worried about her ability to swim. It’s why I hadn’t already suggested that we cross the lake.

“I’d rather take longer to heal than to get caught,” she says resolutely.

“Okay, let’s do it. We’ll swim together. I’ll carry our bags and keep them over my head. You worry about swimming and keeping your head afloat.”

We strip off our clothes and make our way into the water. It’s cold and my body is covered in goosebumps almost immediately. Once we’re submerged in the water, Penny looks at me. Her lips have already started turning blue.

“At l-l-least the c-c-cold f-f-feels g-g-good against m-m-my knee,” she stutters with the cold.

I nod, focusing on keeping our bags over my head as I use my legs to kick and push me across the lake. Penny uses her arms, pulling her body behind her, letting her bad leg drag limply in the water. Thankfully, there isn’t much of a current. The problem is the cold.

By the time we reach the other side, the sun is starting to set. We get out and I immediately grab clothes out of both our bags, handing hers to her and putting mine own on.

Once we’re dressed, I give Penny our bags and I help her get on my back again. It takes me about a mile to work out the cold and the stiffness in my joints. But after that I get into a rhythm and begin running. This time it’s not as painful for Penny. And she’s able to listen for sounds of others chasing us while I focus on running and finding a place where we can be safe for the night.

While I’m running, I cross the path of a small Alpha hunting group. So rather than stopping, I continue on much longer than I intended to. It’s well into the night when we finally find a place to stop. We both collapse, exhausted. Neither of us even bothers to change. We put our bags under our heads and fall asleep.

It’s late the next day when we wake. I step out of the little shelter I found and sniff the air, looking around. We had both been so tired that we hadn’t kept watch, but I don’t hear anything, and I don’t smell anyone. I turn back and I look at Penny. She’s checking out her knee and it looks much better than it did yesterday.

“How does it feel?” I ask her.

“Better. Healed,” she says.

“Good. I don’t think we’re too far from where we’re supposed to be based on the directions you gave me. If we run hard, I think we can be there in a couple of hours,

early afternoon at the latest. Then you can have some food and maybe you'll be nice enough to share the water with me," I smile at her.

"I'll share both the food and the water with you," she says. "You've been so kind and so generous to me."

"Let's just see what's there. Let's hope that there really is food and water."

We pack up our things and we start slow, making sure that Penny is able to run on her injured leg. But it seems that it's healed, if not completely, then almost completely, so we begin running much harder. It's early afternoon when we arrive.

We slow down and I let Penny take the lead. She has a better idea of where she's going. The terrain here has become much rockier than the forest, and we have to be careful. I lift my nose in the air, sniffing to see if I smell any Alphas in the area.

What I smell has me stopping in my tracks. I smell the scent of a she-wolf. That's expected. It's not one that I recognize, but it makes sense that a she-wolf is the one leaving the food and water for us.

It's the other scent that makes me stop. The scent of pine, the scent of home.

'Mate,' Hedda says.

## **The One He Claimed Chapter 12**

### **Chapter 12: Home**

Sophie

I slow, nearly to a stop. I growl softly at Penny, and she stops too, turning to look at me. She whimpers softly, wanting to know what is wrong.

I sniff the air again and my eyes practically roll into the back of my head. The smell of pine intermixed with the musky masculinity of the Alpha is making my body feel strange. I know he's an Alpha. I'm not sure how I knew, but I could tell, just by his scent.

Hedda whimpers in my mind, much more loudly than Penny. She wants to meet her mate.

'Hedda, you know that's not possible.'

'I know, but still...he smells so good,' she half purrs, half whimpers in my head.

I can see that Penny still hasn't picked up his scent. I probably have because he's my mate, but I'm also an Alpha and my senses are a bit stronger than hers.

I shift, staying in my crouched position. "I smell an Alpha up ahead," I whisper to her.

Her head whips around and her nose goes in the air as she whimpers again.

"Easy, Penny. I can smell a she-wolf with him. She smells like a ranked member. Maybe she is the one who is putting the food out and he's helping her?" I suggest. It's unlikely and I know it. Just having his scent here now will deter several she-wolves from getting the food and water they came here for, at least. until his scent dies down.

I wonder why he's here. Why now? Why today? I stay in my low. crouch, and I slowly move forward, staying hidden in the bushes.

I stop when I see a man and a woman, walking away from a particularly rocky spot in the side of this mountain.

"Alpha?" the woman asks. It's interesting to me that she doesn't seem afraid of him. Hedda growls possessively in my head. She doesn't like this she-wolf near her mate. I fight to keep the sound to myself as I watch his nose turn in our direction, watch it twitch as he sniffs the air,

I realize the wind has shifted and he's caught my scent. I stiffen, waiting for him to come after me. I'm ready to leap and run.

"It's nothing, Kinsley, let's head back."

The woman, Kinsley, turns and looks in our direction, but I can tell that she has not captured our scent the way that he has, or at least not mine. I'm not sure if he smelled both Penny and I or just me as his mate.

"You go find the food. I'm going to make sure they leave," I whisper to Penny.

J shift, knowing that Hedda is much quieter than I am. She stays low and we follow the two of them all the way back to a car. I watch as the Alpha turns and looks back in our direction. When he does, I realize two things. First, I know him. I remember him from Amelia's birthday party. That is Alpha Hunter, the man who danced with me and watched over me that night. Second, he doesn't have a mark on his neck. He hasn't found his mate yet.

'That's why he smells so good. He's been waiting for us,' Hedda purrs.

I ignore her and watch as they leave, wondering if he will return without the female, worried that we'll have to leave tonight. When their car is far enough away, I turn and run back to where Penny was. I follow her scent until I have to shift back into my human form to be able to follow along the passageway. I have to admit, that she-wolf was smart to find this spot. I'm not even sure how that Alpha fit through here, I can barely fit through here. Omegas would have a much easier time being naturally smaller. I look

around, sniffing the rocks, wondering if the Alpha scraped himself and left blood. When I don't smell any, I realize that he must have been very careful and that the she-wolf must have helped him if he went into this area because I don't find a single spot of blood.

When I finally get to the center, Penny is devouring the food that's been left. "It's still lukewarm," she mumbles around a mouthful of food. I'll admit, the scent of freshly cooked food is making my stomach grumble, but I know that Penny is much hungrier than I am.

"Eat," she says, pushing some food towards me. "And look, there's a place where we can bathe."

I step forward, taking some of the food. My mouth is watering as I take the first bite and I moan softly to myself. It's been a while since I've had real food. Food at the diner was greasy and gross but I lived off of it because I had to. This is the kind of food you get in a packhouse, the kind of food meant for werewolves.

While I eat, I walk over to the small pool. I reached my hand out where the water is dripping down from the side of the mountain against the rocks. The water here is cool, but when I put my feet into the pool, it's warm where the sun has shone on it throughout the day.

"Oh Penny, I'm getting in before the water gets cold," I tell her.

Since I haven't bothered to put on clothes since I've shifted back and forth, I step into the pool, letting the warm water soothe my aching body. I lower myself into the pool, moving my arms around, letting the water lap against me. I close my eyes and lean back, floating in the water and letting the sun hit my face, feeling safe for the first time in a long time.

That thought makes me pause. I feel safe, yet I just ran into the Alpha who is my mate. My mind goes back to that night. The night I met Alpha Hunter. I remember he was a great dancer. I remember he was very polite and kind to me. I remember him challenging Alpha Owen when he wouldn't let me and Warrior Julianne pass. But what I remember most is him watching me while Alpha Calvin claimed my sister. The memory sends shivers up my spine, and I sit up in the pool of water.

'It didn't feel covetous. It didn't make the hair on the back of my neck stand up like what Alpha Owen did,' Hedda says.

'No, but he was there,' I say and then think about it. Why wasn't he in the room with the others? Why was he looking up at me? Did he know, even back then, that I was his mate? Was he planning even back then, to claim me as his mate? Or was he doing what Julianne had suggested he'd been doing and watching out for me all night, protecting me from the others?

I step out of the water feeling torn, unsure of my feelings. towards Alpha Hunter. Although I'm confident about one thing. Mate or no, I have no intention of being claimed publicly.

When I step back over to where the food was, I realized that Penny has stuffed herself completely. There was enough food for her to take with her, but she was so hungry that she just shoveled it all in and now her stomach is so bloated that she can barely move.

I look around and realize that this is a fairly safe place and unless Alpha Hunter returns tonight, we could actually stay here.

"Read the note," Penny says from where she's lying down on the ground. She points at a note sitting on the makeshift stone table. I pick it up along with a bottle of water and sit down to read it. It gives the last known coordinates of the Alphas and the other ranked members who are hunting the females. The note wishes us luck, letting us know that there are four wolfpacks in this area and that we need to be careful, but I already knew that. It also says that while her Alpha does not agree with the current process of claiming mates, not everyone in their pack agrees with him, so it is unsafe for him to bring the she-wolves into his pack. That is the only reason he's not offering his protection.

The note goes on to explain that there is a separate exit from the entrance, in case we're found here. That way, we're not actually captured. I look at the instructions for exiting and I find the opening across from where we came in.

"You stay here. I'll be right back," tell Penny.

She struggles to sit up, looking at me. "Where are you going? Did you see that this is a safe place for us to sleep tonight?"

"I did, but I want to check out this exit. I want to know where we're going to come out and I want to make sure that I don't smell any Alphas in that area. Otherwise, we'll need to exit through the front.

She nods and I make my way through the back exit. These rock formations are even tighter than the other ones, making it even harder for me to move through them. I know that no Alpha or male ranked member could fit through here. When I get to the end, I carefully step out, sniffing the air. I don't immediately smell any Alphas in the area, so I step out a little bit further.

From here I can see that we're on the other side of the mountain from where we entered. It's a small mountain, but it gives me a view of the vast area surrounding us. I find what I'm looking for and I find a place to sit down. I look down over my parents' pack. I'm so close. I wish I could just go to them, but I know that I can't. From everything that Penny told me, my father has worked very hard to give me the freedom that I chose



when I ran. It's too risky to try and go see them. If I were captured, he would have done all of that fighting for nothing.

I turn and look in either direction, seeing the other wolf packs, watching to see where their patrols go and how far their territories extend. When I exit this way tomorrow, I'll have to be careful. There's only a thin area in between the pack lands and I will have to be very quick getting through them.

I stay longer than I intended, waiting until the sun sets, and I can see the lights and torches light up in my parents' pack. I can't be sure, but I think I see my father step out back, looking up at the mountain.

"I see you, Father, and I thank you for helping to protect me in the only way that you can," I say softly on the wind. Then I stand, making my way back into the center of the mountain, where I know I will sleep safely tonight.

## **The One He Claimed Chapter 13**

### **Chapter 13: Wait**

Hunter

I tossed and turned all night, unable to sleep knowing she's out there. Alone. My mate.

I've thought through hundreds of scenarios of how to talk to her, to let her know that I won't force my mark on her, or claim her publicly, but I have no idea how to even get close enough to her in order to have a conversation with her.

Shaw has been no help. He's ready to hunt her down and mark her. He wants to claim his mate so no one else can. He's been pacing in my head, asking me every 15 minutes if we have any updates on where the Alphas are hunting.

When he asks me again, I snap.

'Shaw, it's the middle of the f\*\*k\*\*g night. No one has an update on any of the Alphas!' I bark at him.

"We should go to her, find her, protect her, make sure she's safe.'

'If she's safe and we show up, especially at night, she'll run.'

He growls at me and continues to prowl around in my head.

I sigh, sitting up. There was no use trying to get any sleep. Between me and Shaw, I won't be sleeping tonight.

I feel like a zombie by the time I have to get dressed for warrior training. I trudge down the stairs and I'm almost knocked over by Lucas who is practically sk\*\*g down the stairs.

"Good morning, Alpha!" he sings, causing me to flinch at his much too loud tone.

"What's good about it," I grumble.

'It's good because we can finally go to her," Shaw grumbles in my head. He's as tired as I am, both of us working off of anxious adrenaline.

"Rough night?" Lucas asks me, his tone and demeanor much more muted.

I sigh. I haven't told anyone. I didn't even tell Kinsley yesterday on the way home. I look around, seeing the warriors all heading out back for training.

I take Lucas' arm and pull him into my office, closing my door. "This stays between me and you. For now, you can't even tell Kinsley," I say, turning to look at him. "Do I need to command you?"

He frowns at me. "When have you ever needed to command me to keep a secret, Alpha?" he asks, and I can hear the hurt in his voice.

I huff, running my fingers through my hair. "You're right, I apologize. I'm just..." I sigh and scrub my face roughly, trying to focus. When I look back at Lucas I can see his worry.

"I smelled her. Yesterday when Kinsley and I went to the place where she leaves the food for the she-wolves on the run, I smelled my mate. She was there.

"Oh, f\*\*k. What did you do?"

"Nothing! I was afraid I'd scare her off. If she's hungry or needed a safe place to sleep, I didn't want to take that away from her, but now..."

"You didn't sleep all night worrying about her," he finishes for me.

I huff out a sigh, running my hand through my hair again. "Exactly."

He looks at me a moment. "Go. Go find her. I can take care of training this morning. Go, talk to her. But Alpha, if you mark her, if you do it in private..."

I feel Shaw push forward, feel anger at my Beta. "Would you challenge me?" I growl at him.

He frowns at me. “No, never. I understand now, more than I ever did. But others may challenge you and her as a Luna. Not just other Alphas, but also some in our pack. You need to be prepared for that.”

“If I mark her and she agrees to return with me, they will accept her or I will reject them from the pack,” Shaw snarls.

He nods. “Then go, convince her to let you mark her. Kinsley would love to have another female around.”

I’m desperate to go to her. Whether it’s Shaw’s need, mine, or both of ours, I don’t question Lucas’ ability to watch the pack while I’m gone. He’s my Beta for a reason.

I turn and before I can think too much about it, Shaw pulls the shift, and begins racing to where he last smelled our mate. As we run, I catch the scent of local Alphas, but we also catch the scent of other ranked wolves that aren’t local.

Shaw growls. The only reason ranked wolves would be in these woods is because they are hunting she-wolves on the run, one of those being my mate. When we cross their trail and smell the scent of only a few wolves, I know that I’m right.

Shaw pushes harder to get back to our mate before one of these Alphas finds her first. One of the problems that has arisen with the she-wolves running is that now, ranked members don’t only search for their fated mates. If they find a wolf and catch her, they claim her. So, the fact that this she-wolf is mine won’t matter to them. And if they claim her first, the mate bond, my fated mate bond, will be gone forever. I can’t let that happen.

When we get higher up into the areas where the forested mountain becomes rocky, Shaw slows, lifting his head into the air and sniffing for her scent. Since we know where the opening to the safe area is, we continue to make our way there while he searches for her scent.

It’s possible that she didn’t go inside. If she caught my scent, it could have scared her off. But I’m hoping that she needed the food and shelter more than she feared my scent.

As we get closer, I catch her scent and the scent of another she-wolf, younger than my mate. I follow it to the entrance of the hiding spot that Kinsley found and I smile. If nothing else, I know my mate has eaten recently and hopefully she slept here last night. If I’m really lucky, she’s still here.

I carefully make my way into the space where Kinsley leaves the food. I realize that I should have brought some with me. Now, depending on what happens with my mate, I’ll either have to come back later, or I’ll have to figure out how to get more here. I don’t want hopeful she-wolves going hungry because of my distraction with my mate. I’ve

made a commitment to help. these she-wolves and I need to fulfill that. I'll just have to figure it out once I've found my mate.

When I finally get inside, my heart drops. While I can smell her scent and the scent of the other she-wolf, neither of them are here. I lift my nose, sniffing the air. Her orchid scent is filling the small space and the small bit of air blowing around in here is wafting her scent around me.

I can see that the food that Kinsley and I left yesterday is gone. It also looks like both women slept here last night. I walk around sniffing the ground until I find the spot where my mate slept. Her scent is strong. I touch the ground and realize that it is still warmer than the earth around where she was sleeping. She hasn't been gone long. Then I see the bag. I reach out and take the bag, bringing it to my nose. This is my mate's bag. It's possible that she forgot it, but most likely, she's coming back.

I begin looking around. I hadn't looked for the secret exit yesterday when Kinsley told me about it, but that must be how they got out. Otherwise, I would have seen them. I see the card sitting on the stone table and s\*\*h it up. I find where the back exit is and I walk over to it, sniffing the walls and catching her scent.

I feel Shaw perk up in my mind and I open my senses, letting him guide me to whatever caught his attention.

"Be careful, Penny. If you go that way, there are several packs. that are close together. You have to be very careful not to cross onto their pack lands," my mate instructs. I know it's my mate by the fluttering my heart makes at the sound of her voice.

"Which way do you think is safer?" the girl, Penny, asks.

It's quiet for a moment while my mate ponders her answer. Is she staying or are they going their separate ways now?

"If we hadn't heard the sounds of wolves nearby last night, I'd say go the other way, but since we did, I think you should head toward the packs. See the one in the middle there? That one is safe, and you are probably safe to go between their pack and the one to the left of them. There's about a mile between the pack borders, but you'll have to be fast. I don't know if that pack is hunting she-wolves, so skirt closer to the one on the right."

I think about where my mate is directing the younger she-wolf. The middle pack that she'd see from up here would be Alpha Carter's pack. I wonder how she knows that his pack is safe. Alpha Dutton's pack is on the left of theirs from this perspective and it's also safe, although Dutton hasn't found his mate yet. I know he's not out hunting for a mate, but I also don't know that he wouldn't let an opportunity like that pass him by if one landed, at his front door. So, my mate's instructions are perfect for this she-wolf.

I hear Penny say something quietly to my mate, but I don't hear what she says.

"Yes," my mate responds.

"It must be hard to be this close."

"Yes, it is," my mate says sadly.

This close to what?

I hear the rustling of clothing and then the snapping of bones as Penny shifts.

"Be safe, and I hope our paths cross again," my mate says.

Penny lets out a soft bark and then I hear her paws running off in the direction of Alpha Carter's pack.

I wait, listening, until I hear my mate sigh and then I hear the tell-tale scratching of skin and clothing against the rocky surface of what must be the exit. She's coming back.

I move, not wanting to startle her and cause her to hurt herself. The fa\*\*t place I can move in this small space is over by the main entrance. As I feel her getting closer, I take a deep breath of her scent.

The moment she steps back into the space she stops. Her eyes go wide, and she immediately starts to turn back.

"Wait!" I say, putting my hands up. "I could have captured you, but that's not the type of man I am. Please, I just want to talk to you," I say to her.

"The type of Alpha you are, you mean?" she asks, not moving away from the exit.

"Please, I just want to talk to you.

"How did you even get in here?" she asks, looking around.

"It's my Beta female who is leaving the food. I caught your scent yesterday when I came here with her, and I couldn't sleep all night, worrying about you, out here alone."

"I wasn't alone," she says.

"That juvenile she-wolf doesn't count. I'm sure you were providing more protection to her than she was to you."

"How did you..." she begins, but I tap my nose. "I caught her scent as well."

She looks at me warily. "What do you want to talk about?"

I look at her a moment. I know she must sense the mate bond, but since she's also on the run, I know it's probably scaring her right now.

"What's your name?"

She looks at me for a long moment. "Josephine."

Josephine? It's not a name, I know and now that I'm closer to her, I can smell that she's an Alpha. I've been given a rare gift from the Moon Goddess, an Alpha she-wolf for a mate. Given how long it took her to respond, I'm guessing it's a fake name. I can understand why she's scared. But I want her to know that she can trust me.

"My name is..."

"I know who you are, Alpha Hunter," she says.

"I wasn't alone," she says.

"That juvenile she-wolf doesn't count. I'm sure you were providing more protection to her than she was to you."

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"My name is..."

"I know who you are, Alpha Hunter," she says.

## **The One He Claimed Chapter 14**

### **Chapter 14: Hunted**

Sophie

Maybe it's the sadness of seeing my family's pack again, or maybe it's because I was distracted by the masculine scent mixed with pine that Hedda was purring over, but I didn't realize that Alpha Hunter was in the hidden space until I stepped back into it after saying goodbye to Penny.

I wanted to run, to get out of here before he could grab me, but Hedda held me in place, and he made a good point. If he had wanted to grab me, he could have, and I wouldn't have realized what was happening until it was too late.

I considered giving him my real name. Hedda wanted me to, but I don't trust him yet. It doesn't help that he's standing here, naked in front of me. I've been working with humans for so long, I've forgotten what it's like to live with shifters who have no modesty.

And why is he here? What are his motives for being here? Are his warriors right outside the entrance to this space and if I follow him, he'll force his mark on me in front of them? No way I'm letting that happen.

I can see the shock on his face when I tell him I know who he is. I'm not sure if I should be insulted that he doesn't remember me or happy that he doesn't know who I am. I have changed my hair color. I'm sure that I look harder than I did a couple of years ago when I led a cushy life. Life on the run tends to do that to you. I'm thinner, more muscular, and more streetwise than I was two years ago.

"You know who I am?" he asks, his nose going up in the air and he sniffs my scent again. "Have we met?"

"What do you want, Alpha Hunter?" I ask him and he instantly refocuses his attention on me. I swallow hard. The man's gaze is intense. It was before when we danced at my sister's birthday party, but now...now his gaze is sending waves of warmth through my body.

"I want to get to know my mate. I want to keep you safe, and I want to let you know that I'm not one of those Alphas who will mark and mate you in public."

I raise my eyebrow at him and chuckle derisively. "Really? Are you going to keep me safe from yourself?"

"I would never hurt you."

"Why should I believe that you are any different from the other Alphas who claim their mates publicly?"

“Because I am a possessive man, a possessive wolf, and a possessive Alpha,” he growls, making shivers run through my body. He takes a predatory step forward and I press my back against the rocky wall.

“I will never share my mate with anyone. No one has the right to see her, to see you, in that state except for me,” he says. “You are mine. The Moon Goddess made you for me and I do not share what is mine.”

His words are doing strange things to me. I desperately want to believe him, but I can't. I remember the way he watched me that night at Amelia's birthday party. Now, I wonder if it was this possessiveness he's speaking of. Did he know back then that I was his mate?

“You said it's your Beta female who is leaving the food out here?”

“That's right. I want to help when and where I can.”

“Then, what you're saying to me is a lie,” I tell him.

“Why do you say that?”

“In her note, she very clearly says that you can't bring these she-wolves into your pack because not everyone in your pack agrees with your decision to not claim mates publicly. Tell me, was her claim public?”

“Yes, it was. My Beta did not understand the impact of the public mating until after it was too late.”

“What does that mean, too late?” ask.

“When you mark your mate, you not only can hear their thoughts, but you can feel their emotions. He was able to feel everything that she was feeling in that moment. He s\*\*hed her up and took her to their room, but the damage was done. It's taken them over a year to finally start to come together. He understands now why I would never do that. I want a positive relationship with my mate. I want her to trust me, to love me and cherish our bond as much as I do. The only way that's possible is if I cherish it from the very beginning.”

“Those are pretty words, Alpha. But that's all they are. Words.”

“How can I convince you? Would you be willing to stay here until I can bring Kinsley to you? She can confirm everything I've said to you.”

I can feel Hedda howling in my head. She knows what I'm about to do and she's howling her resistance, making my head hurt.



“She’s your Beta. She would do whatever you tell her to do. I can’t trust that. I’m sorry,” I say and I see his eyes go wide.

“NO!” he shouts, taking a step forward.

“I…” S\*\*t! I can’t give him my real name. He’ll know who I am, that I’m an Alpha female, and then I’ll never be free of him, “I reject you, Alpha Hunter Reynolds as my mate and Alpha,” I say, and watch as his hand slaps against his chest.

I don’t wait to see if the rejection works. I know it’s only partially complete anyway. He’d have to accept it, but perhaps he’s hurt enough for me to escape.

Leaving my bag behind, I quickly make my way out of the secondary exit. I scratch myself in several places as I rush to get out and away from Alpha Hunter, from my mate, from his intoxicating scent, and from all of the pretty things that he said that I wish I could believe. But that’s not reality. There’s no way he’d risk losing his pack members and maybe even his Alpha title to claim me privately.

Rather than follow Penny, I change directions and go left. I leap, letting Hedda take over and begin running hard and fast. I don’t know if Alpha Hunter will follow me, but I’m not taking any chances.

I haven’t gone far when I hear the howl of the hunt. My heart s\*\*p\*s a beat, and we stumble as we run. Thankfully, Hedda catches us before we can fall, and she begins pushing herself even harder. I hear the answering call of three more wolves, and I know I’m in trouble. If they catch me…

‘If we’re going to be forced, I’d rather it be my mate,’ Hedda says, and I can hear the fear in her voice. She doesn’t want to be forced into a mate bond, especially when her mate is so close. Unfortunately, we most likely left our mate writhing on the ground, so I don’t think we can expect any help from him.

‘Do you think we can turn back?’ I ask her, just as we hear yips coming up on either side of us.

‘Too late,’ she says. Real fear slides down my spine. If this group is able to keep up with us, they are all ranked members. This is most like an Alpha and his ranked members hunting for a mate. And as an Alpha female, I’m the golden prize.

I hear paws running us down as the wolves on either side of us begin closing in.

‘Faster, Hedda,’ I scream.

I feel her push even harder, but I was right. This is an Alpha male. Only an Alpha can run down another Alpha.

I feel jaws snapping at Hedda's legs, then a nose bumping into her legs, tripping her up. She stumbles, flipping over and over before finally landing on her stomach. When she shakes her head and focuses, we're surrounded by four wolves. The largest one, the Alpha, comes to stand in front of me. He shifts, then Nooks down at us.

"Shift!" he commands. I can already see that he's aroused, excited by the hunt and capturing his prey. Me.

I feel the weight of his command wash over me, but I'm an Alpha too. I can't be forced by an Alpha that isn't my own.

When I don't comply with his command, I watch a slow, predatory smile spread across his face.

"Well, well, looky here boys. We caught ourselves an Alpha," he says, watching me intently.

"I'm going to give you one more chance to shift, little one. Then, if you don't comply, I'm going to let Hegir, my wolf, to mark and mate you and then you'll be forced to shift on command so that I can mark and mate you in human form. What will it be, little Alpha?"

Hedda gets to her feet, her head low as she growls menacingly at him.

I watch as he smiles. "Good, I love a good fight before I f\*\*k," he says before shifting.

He leaps and Hedda jumps away from him, only to be corralled by the other three wolves. The wolf, Hegir, begins stalking us. Hedda waits until he close, then leaps, trying to jump over him. I'm not sure if he anticipated the movement or just got lucky, but he leaps up at her as she jumps, knocking onto her side. Before she can get up, he pounces on her.

She snaps and scratches, snarling at him. He lays his body on her, crushing her into the ground and trying to get his teeth around her throat or the back of her neck to force her submission.

It's getting harder to breathe and know we're only moments away from his wolf getting the upper hand when I hear another snarl and suddenly, Hegir is ripped off of us.

The huge wolf puts himself in between me and the other wolves as they snarl, some checking on their Alpha and the others preparing to leap on Hunter's wolf. Because that is who came to my rescue, Alpha Hunter.

Faster than I've ever seen anyone shift, he's in his human form, his head turned to look at me.

“Run! I’ll find you,” he says before quickly shifting back just in time to snap his jaws at the wolf leaping at him.

When I don’t immediately take off, he turns, barking at me to go, and I shake off the shock before Hedda turns and races off.

I don’t know what I’m more terrified of that he’ll come and find me, or that he won’t because he’s dead.

## **The One He Claimed Chapter 15**

### **Chapter 15: Comfort**

Hunter

When my mate rejected me, I instinctively clutched at my heart, expecting the horrific pain of rejection. My heart felt the sting of her words, but not the debilitating pain of her rejection. And then I’d realized something very important – she hadn’t given her name in the rejection which just confirmed to me that her name isn’t Josephine. Every wolf, especially an Alpha wolf, knows how to properly reject their mate. Not that it matters much in these times, but it matters to me.

I made my way out of the hidden space and was debating on whether or not I should chase after her when I heard the howl of the hunt go up. There was no way that I was going to risk my mate getting caught and claimed by anyone else.

Shaw pulled the shift and began racing in the direction the howls had come from. When we hear the yipping excitement of the pack closing in, Shaw snarls and pushes harder.

I hear her vicious snarl and as terrified as I am for her, I smile internally at her willingness to fight. I know they’ll have her surrounded, but she’s refusing to go down without a fight. That gives me enough time to get to her.

When I finally lay eyes on her though, fear unlike anything I’ve ever felt before runs icy in my veins and I see red. I knew from his scent that it was Alpha Owen, and he has my mate pinned to the ground in wolf form trying to force his mark on her so he can force her shift.

Shaw swipes at his Ga\*\* before leaping and grabbing Hegir by the back of his neck and ripping him off of my mate. Shaw doesn’t take the time needed to snap his neck, but his bite is deep and I feel his teeth touch bone.

We place ourselves between our mate and Owen’s pack members. His Beta immediately runs to help him while his Ga\*\*a is still trying to stand with the gaping wounds I left. running down his side. The fourth wolf, however, looks like he’s going to leap at me. He obviously doesn’t know who I am.

Before he can make his move, I pull the shift, staying in my crouch and turn to my mate, telling her to run. Just as the wolf leaps at me, Shaw pulls the shift back into our wolf form. He jumps up and our jaws sink into the wolf's soft, fleshy throat.

When I don't hear my mate's retreating paws, I turn and see her gaping at the scene in front of her. Shaw barks sharply, getting her attention and she turns and runs as Alpha Owen regains his feet.

Since neither his Beta or Ga\*\*a look ready to attack me, I shift as well, standing to face him.

"Alpha Hunter, I should have f\*\*k\*\*g known. What theF \*\*k are you doing? I'm within my rights to claim that she-wolf," he says, rubbing the wounds on the back of his neck.

"She's my mate. I will kill you, all of you, before I'll allow you to touch her," I snarl, Shaw's voice overlaying with mine.

Alpha Owen stops, looking at me. "You just want her because she's an Alpha."

"I want her because she's mine."

"Then you'd better claim her fast, because if I come across her trail again, she's mine."

"Touch her and you die," I snarl again.

He looks at the fourth man, lying dead on the ground and realizes my threat isn't idle. I didn't rip his throat out completely, but there's a gaping hole in between his throat and his spine.

Alpha Owen looks around. "I don't see any of your pack members. Did want us to follow you, so we can watch you claim your mate?" he asks, licking his lips lasciviously. He's a disgusting man and I would never let him see my mate in any form of undress. I don't care that she's a werewolf.

"No. I'm good."

"Suit yourself, but in my experience..." he begins.

"The experience that you don't have because you haven't been able to run down your mate yet? Even when she's outnumbered four to one?" I growl at him. "Remind me, how long have you been trying to capture your mate?"

His lip curls with his anger at me. "I look forward to the day when I can knock you off that pedestal that you've placed yourself on. And don't worry, Hunter, that day will come."

"I doubt it, Owen. You aren't smart enough to knock anyone off of anything," I retort. "Now, are you going to turn around and run off in the direction you came from, or am I taking out one of your ranked members?" I ask him, staring down his G\*\*a and Beta.

"We're leaving," he says, nodding at the two. His Ga\*\*a is still bleeding heavily from the g\*\*s\*es gave him, but he turns and takes off running. His Beta shifts and follows closely behind him.

Alpha Owen gives me one final glare before leaping, shifting, and following his pack members. I guess the dead guy doesn't matter, since they left him.

Once I know that they're gone, I turn, leaping and letting Shaw pull the shift. He immediately catches our mate's scent and begins hunting for her. We follow her erratic trail, turning at strange points, shifting left then doubling back right before leaping over a fallen tree and running full out. I can't tell if she's trying to throw a hunter off her scent or if she's struggling with almost getting caught.

When we finally come up to a river, Shaw slows down. Before I see her, I can hear her teeth chattering, and I can smell the salt of tears. Shaw is slow to step out of the woods and I see her in the water, scrubbing her body that is already bright red as she \*\*b\*s.

Shaw whines and m ready to pull the shift, but he stops me.

'She's in her human form. If you shift, she might run. She's in shock. She's shaking. Let me see if she'll let me close to her. I can't mark her in her human form,' he says as her head whips around.

"Stay away from me!" she screams, and I can see that Shaw is right. My mate is in shock. Shaw lays down, watching her and she resumes the scrubbing of her body that is becoming so rough that I can smell a faint scent of blood.

He whines again and begins to belly crawl toward her. She lifts her nose in the air, continuing to scrub her body.

'Let me shift. I need to talk to her, I tell Shaw.

'You'll scare her off,' he growls.

'She's going to hurt herself. I need to talk to her, then you can shift back.'

He reluctantly agrees, and I shift. As expected, she turns, ready to run.

"Wait! I'm going to shift back, but I wanted to speak to you quickly. You're in shock. You're rubbing your skin off of your body. I'm going to shift back into Shaw. Let him lay with you, let him warm you. Your teeth are chattering. I don't have any clothes, or I'd offer them to you. Please. I know you're afraid. I promise, my word as an Alpha, this

isn't a trick to try and mark you. You're my mate. I don't like seeing you like this. Please, let me help you," I say as gently as I can.

I've never begged for anything in my life. I've never had to. I'm an Alpha. I get what I want, what ask for, or what I demand. But this is different. She is different. I want her to trust me, even if it is because she's desperate to get warm.

"Sh-sh-shift back," she says, her teeth chattering, her arms wrapped tightly around her body. She's still in the water. I have no idea if it's cold, but I know she is. I can see her lips turning blue from here.

Shaw pulls the shift and immediately lays down on his belly again, whining at her. We watch as her eyes flash darker and I know she's talking to her wolf. When she's done, she looks at Shaw, taking a step in our direction.

"Okay, Sh-Sh-Shaw. My w-w-wolf, Hedda, says w-w-we can trust you. She d-d-doesn't feel any ill intent fr-fr-from you. Don't p-p- prove her wrong," she says, her teeth chattering as she walks. out of the water. I feel a tightness I didn't know I was carrying in my chest ease as she makes her way toward us.

Shaw slowly stands and carefully takes a step toward her. She looks around. "Maybe we can find a place that isn't so sandy and rocky and is hidden, in case other Alphas catch my scent?"

Shaw growls at that, making her lips twitch. She turns, heading back to the wooded area of the forest. "I need to th-th-thank you for coming to my rescue. Alpha Owen is d-d-disgusting. I can't image being b-b-bound to him for the rest of my life. I'm beginning to understand why some sh-sh-she-wolves prefer to take their lives instead of living with the Alphas who claim them."

Shaw begins to whine at her statement. She turns and looks at him, sitting down and huddling into a ball. He approaches her slowly, carefully wrapping himself around her.

She gasps, then leans into his body, making him purr as he settles.himself and presses his body closer to hers. "Oh, you f-f- feel so warm."

She presses herself closer to his body, grabbing hold of his fur and sliding her ice-cold feet against his body. We jerk at the feel of her cold body, but don't pull away.

"S-s-sorry, I know I'm c-c-cold."

Shaw nuzzles her face, sniffing her, and beginning to lick the shallow wounds she caused herself by scrubbing so hard.

She chuckles. "You're very sweet.

I'm guessing that came more from her wolf than from her. I wish I knew her name. All I know is that she's an Alpha female, not named Josephine.

"I'm surprised you followed me, after I rejected you," she says, her voice m\*\*d by Shaw's fur.

He rumbles at her, not quite a growl, not quite a whimper.

"I'm really glad you did," she says, as her body begins to warm and the tremors from before begin to ebb.

She snuggles closer to Shaw. Whether it's her or her wolf, I'm not sure and I don't care. All I know is that she's seeking comfort from us.

'From me, you mean,' Shaw says smugly as he begins purring at our mate, calming her even more

'Shut it, douche-bag. She wouldn't be here if I hadn't told her that we wanted to help her.'

While she begins to fall asleep, I look her over.

'Her hair isn't red, Shaw,' I say, seeing the chocolate brown roots of her real hair.

'I realized that when we saw her wolf earlier. She's not a red wolf, she's a brown wolf,' he says, I had been so angry at Owen trying to claim what was mine and getting her away from him, that I hadn't paid attention.

'That's why you need me,' Shaw says, arrogantly.

I just shake my head at him. I wait until my mate's body has warmed and she's sound asleep before I shift, pulling her into my arms and holding her close. We both need some sleep.

'I'll keep watch, you sleep,' Shaw says in my mind.

## **The One He Claimed Chapter 16**

Chapter 16: Questions

Sophie

I wake slowly, warm and comfortable, with the scent of pine surrounding me. I love the scent of pine. It reminds me of the pine trees surrounding my home.

My hand moves over something hard. It's not a rock, it's..... frown, running my hands over the hard surface.

When I hear a man's groan of pleasure I shoot up, or I try to. I realize I'm in the arms of a man and not just any man, Alpha Hunter. My mate.

"Let go of me! What are you doing?" I scream, pushing away from him and landing on my butt.

"What? Huh?" he says, shaking his head as if shaking the sleep away. I make the mistake of looking down and I can see that he's very much aroused.

"Oh no! No, no, no!" I yell, scooting away from him on my butt, ready to turn and shift into Hedda.

"Wait! Don't go! I'm..." he jumps up, then looks down at his erection. "I'm sorry. There's nothing I can do about that. I was laying with you, you're my mate, you were running your hands over my chest, and it felt so good..." He holds his arms out to the side, shrugging. "I'm a man, it's not like I can hide it. I'm attracted to you, aroused by you. But I'm not going to hurt you. I would never force myself on you.

"No, you'd just force your mark on me, and then force yourself on me," I say, still scooting back.

"Look," he says, putting his hands on his hips and as much as I don't want to, I can't help but appreciate how utterly gorgeous this man is. He has thick, sandy blond hair, still mussed from sleeping. His body....I have to press my legs together as I look over his body. There isn't an ounce of fat on this man. I know from touching him a moment ago, that his muscles are solid and rock hard, and they cover his entire body. Every inch of him is muscular and powerful. Hedda begins purring and I quickly cut her off.

I see his nostrils flare. Da\*\*it, he can smell my arousal. Well, arousal or no, I'm not going to let him mate me in front of goddess knows how many people.

"Look," he says again, this time crouching down. "If I was going to force my mate mark on you, I could have done it at any point last night."

"There's no one here to witness it, what would be the point?"

He growls at that, and I watch his hands turn into fists. "No one will ever see you like that. I told you before. I'm a possessive man. I do not share. Ever. You are mine. You will only ever be mine. I refuse to mark and mate you in front of anyone. If you want to kiss me in public, or let me kiss you in public, fine. If you want to sit in my lap in public, I'd love that. But I will never parade you naked, never put you in any state of undress or partial undress where anyone can see you. You. Are. Mine," he snarls the last part, standing again.



I scramble to my feet, not wanting to be at a disadvantage of being on my a\*\* in front of this man. But, I have to admit, his

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words send shivers down my spine.

“Now, can we start by you telling me your name?” he asks.

I open my mouth, but he cuts me off. “You’re real name, this time.”

I shake my head at him.

“I already know you’re an Alpha. I can smell it. Hell, even a\*\*hole Owen could smell it.”

“No, he didn’t. He just realized that his Alpha command didn’t work on me,” I tell him.

He gives an exasperated look. “Good to know he’s as s\*\*d as I thought,” he says, which makes me chuckle before I slap my hand over my mouth.

It’s too late, he heard it. When he looks back up at me, his eyes have gone soft.

“If I had to guess, I’d go way, way out on a limb. Someone who I thought I would never see again,” he says, his voice so soft I have to strain to listen.

I feel a wave of jealousy flow through me. Who is this woman who he thought he’d never see again, the woman he obviously hopes to see again.

He looks at me with those grey eyes through his long lashes. D\*\*n him and his long, s\*\*y eyelashes.

“Who would you guess?” I ask, not sure I really want to know.

“Little Sophie Meyers.” My heart \*\*ips a beat at the way he says.

1. It’s as if he truly is desperate for me to be her.

“I’m not little anymore,” I say quietly.

“No, you’re not. I remember you being so happy, so excited the night I met you,” he says with a soft smile on his face.

“Yeah, well, two years on my own, on the run, and a big dose of reality will wipe that right out of a girl,” I say sarcastically.

"I can't imagine how hard it's been for you." He says it so gently, with so much concern in his voice, that it brings tears to my eyes..

I shrug, turn so I can wipe the s\*\*d tears from my eyes.

"Where have you been all this time?" he asks me.

"I was hiding in a human town."

"What happened, why did you leave that town?"

I shrug again. He gestures for me to sit, and I narrow my eyes at him. He puts his hand up in front of him and then slowly sits down. "Please," he says, gesturing for me to sit with him.

'Hedda?' I ask my wolf.

'I like him.'

'Yes, but can we trust that this isn't a trap?'

She pushes forward, looking at him. He never once looks away. 'Yes, I think we can trust him. At least for now.'

When I sit, he smiles, pleased with my decision.

"Tell me about what's happened with you. Where did you go? Why did you leave?"

"First, I have a question for you," say, crossing my arms. The motion makes me realize that I'm just as naked as he is. It's been a long time since I was naked like this in front of someone. I suddenly feel very self-conscious.

I'm not sure what he sees on my face, but he puts his hands up again. "Give me one minute," he jumping to his feet. He starts to turn and then turns back. "Don't run. Please."

I nod: I'm pretty sure I've never heard an Alpha say 'please' as many times as Alpha Hunter has said it to me in the last 24 hours.

I hear some rustling nearby and he's back in a few minutes. I'm shocked when he hands me branches with leaves and shrubs on them.

"You look uncomfortable sitting here naked, so I thought you could use these to cover yourself, I got myself one too, so you don't have to see how excited I am to be talking to you," he says, giving me an embarrassed smile.

I stare at the branches for a moment, feeling my heart melting just a bit at his kindness.

“Thank you,” I say, covering myself. I feel better not being so exposed.

“You’re welcome. Now, you had a question for me. You can ask me anything,” he says, covering himself and settling in like we’re in an office or sitting room somewhere, catching up like old friends.

I frown at him for a moment, trying to understand him. I can’t, so I decide I’ve got nothing to lose by asking him my question, or rather, questions.

“You said you remember that night, the night we met?” I ask.

“Yes, your sister’s 18th birthday party.”

“Yes,” I say, looking down at my hands. “Why....why did you. hover around me that night? Why did you dance with me and only let certain people dance with me?”

“To protect you. I could tell instantly that you had no idea what was going to happen. It didn’t matter that Alpha Calvin is a good guy and I knew he’d do whatever he could to make the night easier for your sister. There are always some people, like Alpha- Owen for example, who get out of hand. You were underage, but you were also quite naïve. I warned your father about only letting you dance with a few of the Alphas that night, and we took turns dancing with you.”

He smiles, looking away for a moment. “I remember you loved dancing, and you were very good at it.”

I smile, blushing at the unexpected praise. “I remember thinking the same about you. You were a very good dancer. I enjoyed dancing with you that night.”

I looks at me, the smile lingering on his face. “Is that your only question for me?”

I shake my head, not sure how to ask my next question.

“You want to know why I was watching you when your sister was being claimed?”

I look up into his eyes. “Yes.”

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“I felt a pull to you that night. Shaw felt a pull to you, a need to protect you. I didn’t know it at the time, but it’s quite possible it was the early stages of the mate bond. We are both Alphas so

feeling it early. I refuse to watch a woman be taken publicly like that. I don't agree with it, and I have no desire to have a conversation with a woman who can't meet my eyes because I saw her in a situation like that and now, she's too embarrassed to even look at me, much less speak to me. I was outside that room, so I could give your sister what little privacy I could offer her. That's the first reason."

"And the second?" I ask.

"I was watching over you. I was making sure no one tried to sneak to your room while everyone was watching your sister's claiming. I also helped your warrior get back to her room safely, but I came right back to make sure you were safe. It was not my place to tell you what would happen, but I could see on your face how horrified you were. I wasn't surprised to hear that you had run the next morning."

I look down, thinking through everything that he's said. It changes the entire perspective that I've had of him that night. I look back up at him, having one more burning question for him.

"Ask," he says gently.

"Why are you here?" I whisper.

"You're my mate. I want you. I want my mark on your neck. I want to make love to you and bind you to me in all possible ways."

"But not in public?" I clarify.

"No, I want to do it privately, just you and me."

"What about your pack members who don't believe in a private claiming? What about the other packs who will fight against me being named your Luna?"

"Any pack member who does not accept you as my mate and their Luna, will find themselves without a pack, at least until they find someone else to take them in. I will renounce myself as their Alpha."

"You would do that?" I ask, shocked.

"Yes, absolutely."

"Why?"

"Because you are my mate. Because I am your Alpha. I am meant to protect you, and love you, and care for you. And that is what I will do. No one will be above you in my life. No one. They may sound like pretty words," he says, using my phrase, "but they are words that I mean. They are from my heart."

# The One He Claimed Chapter 17

## Chapter 17: More Questions

Hunter

I watch as my mate stares at me in disbelief. I'm beyond thrilled that she's at least talking to me. She no longer looks like she's ready to run at any minute. It seems as if she's truly interested in what I'm saying.

I'm hoping that I've cleared up whatever memory she has of me from the night of her sister's birthday. Looking at it from her perspective, it may have looked like I was watching her possessively.

'We probably were. I was pulled to her even then,' Shaw says, and I can feel him blaming himself.

'Neither of us knew. How could we. But we're here now. We need to make this work, make her see that we mean it.'

"Did you have any other questions for me?" I ask her.

She shakes her head, and I see a ghost of a smile before she answers. "No, but I reserve the right to change my mind."

"I was serious about you asking me anything. I will never lie to you. I will share everything with you, my mate."

I see her frowning again. Hopefully, it's good that I'm surprising her. I really do mean what I'm saying.

"Can I ask you my questions now?" I ask.

She nods, looking hesitant.

"Where did you go?" I ask. While I didn't know she was my mate, I've often thought of Sophie over the past two years, wondering if she was safe, if she had been captured.

"I found a human town. It's a small place, in an area with a bunch of cattle ranchers."

I raise my eyebrow at that. Cattle ranchers don't think much of wolves running around their areas. It's actually a very smart and probably one of the safest choices she could have made to settle down.

"How did you survive?"

“I got a job at a diner as a waitress. Sometimes, lone wolves. would travel through, and they’d all ask if I was okay,

recognizing that I was a juvenile. But they’d continue on their way, and I stayed.”

“What happened that you finally left? You didn’t go straight home, so it’s not that,” I say and now I understand the conversation between Sophie and Penny earlier. Penny knew that Sophie’s pack was close by. That’s what she meant when she said it must be hard to be this close.

“Some of the she-wolves on the run started coming through the area. The Alphas and other ranked wolves eventually followed. On the night I left, I saw a woman captured, being mated in front of the Alpha’s pack members. I had run back to my apartment and seen another group of ranked wolves at the diner. I knew they’d catch my scent and find me. Hedda and I ran with just a small bag, but the last bus of the night wasn’t leaving for another hour, and I knew I didn’t have that much

More Questions

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time. I ran to the next closest bus station and hopped a bus there. At the first stop, I got off and asked the driver where the next closest bus station was. I wanted to make it hard for the hunters to find me. He seemed to realize that I needed to get away quickly and he suggested the train. You don’t have to pay for the train, you find an empty car and you jump into it, or at least, that’s what I did.”

Her eyes have gone unfocused as she remembers that night. Her jaw has tightened, and no tears have spilled over, but I can smell the saltiness of them, along with the heightened fear that the memories are bringing to her.

I desperately want to comfort her, pull her into my arms and hold her, but I know that’s not an option. Not yet at least.

“When I jumped in the car, there was another girl there, another she-wolf running from the claiming process,” she says.

I nod. “Penny, right?” I ask and her head snaps up to me.

“How do you know that?” she asks, and her body tenses as if she’s ready to flee again.

I put up my hands. “I was waiting for you to return to the space inside the mountain, but I could hear the two of you talking. I heard you call her Penny.”

I watch as she relaxes. She scrubs her hands over her face. "Penny was there. She's an underaged G\*\*a and unlike me, she hadn't found a place to settle. She'd been running and apparently word of your little food pantry is making the rounds."

"Food pantry?"

21-16

She shrugs. "It's free food, right?"

"I guess," I say, chuckling.

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She looks down at her hands again. "That's a good thing that you do. I didn't know if we could trust it. I was actually thinking, or hoping really, that it was my family who was doing it."

"They can't. The unmated Alphas still watch your parents all the time."

She growls at that. "F\*\*king vultures," she says, and I raise my eyebrow at her.

"What?" she asks, frowning at me.

"Such language, Little Sophie Meyers," I say, smiling at her.

"I told you, that little girl is gone."

"Yes she is, and in her place is a beautiful woman, striking really You were beautiful when I met you two years ago, but now.... you're breathtaking."

"Back to using your pretty words, Alpha?" she asks, but I can see her blush, even though she tries to hide it.

"Call me Hunter, and as I said before, they aren't just pretty words, they are words from my heart." I shrug. "Maybe it's the mate bond. I don't know and I don't care. I just know that you are the most beautiful woman I've ever seen in my life."

I can tell she doesn't know how to respond to what I've said, and an uncomfortable silence begins to weigh heavily between

us.

www

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“When’s the last time you ate?” I ask her, not wanting her to leave. I quickly glance over her body, seeing that even though she’s been settled and in one place, she’s still much too thin.

“Penny shared some of the food with me,” she says.

I frown. “You make it sound like it was hers and not yours. It was meant for everyone.”

“She and I had agreed to go our separate ways after arriving here. She was hungrier than I was, so I told her she could eat and leave first, and I’d stay for the next day’s meal. But there was a lot of food and she practically fell into a food coma, she ate so much.”

That makes me chuckle. “I’m glad there’s enough food. I’ll make sure Kinsley knows that she’s doing a good job.”

Of course, that reminds me that today is my day to leave food. “Would you be willing to go back to the hideout with me?” I ask

her.

She narrows her eyes at me. “Why?”

“First, because it will be dark soon and you’ll be safe there. Second, because my Beta female is at the store today, and I was supposed to bring the food. But Shaw was too worried about you, and we left without thinking about food. Of course, you’re always welcome to come back to my pack with me...”

I break off as she begins emphatically shaking her head, no.

“I didn’t think so. So, rather than you sleeping out here on your own, I can feel safe leaving you if you are there. You have some clothes there and then when I come back, I’ll bring food for us

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Chapter 17: More Questions

288 Mouchen

and we can continue talking,” I tell her.

“What else is there for us to talk about?”

“I’d like to tell you about what my pack is like, what your life could be like if you accept me as your mate.”



“Like what?” she asks me.

Rather than answer, I set aside the branch I had placed over my lap. My erection is mostly gone now, so hopefully I won't scare her. I stand and reach out my hand to her.

“Come with me. I don't mind killing to protect you, but if I can avoid a bl\*\*dy fight, I'd prefer it. You're too vulnerable out here and Shaw and I won't be comfortable until we have you tucked away for the evening.”

She looks at my hand, then up at me. Tentatively, she reaches out. Her hand is cold, and I help pull her to her feet. She trips over the bushes that were covering her nakedness and stumbles into my body. I catch her easily, my arm wrapping around her waist as I look down into her pretty green eyes. The nearly gone erection springs back to life.

Whether it's the surprise at falling into me, or the feeling of the tingles that just whipped across my body and I'm sure hers as well, her eyes go a bit glassy, she licks her lips, and she leans into me.

“Sophie, you need to stop looking at me like that. If you don't, I' m going to kiss you.”

## **The One He Claimed Chapter 18**

Chapter 18: A Possible Future

Sophie

Did he just say he was going to kiss me?

I look down at his lips – full, soft, warm-looking lips and I wonder what it would feel like to be kissed by this man. Everything he has said has made me feel safer and more loved than I've felt since I ran away from home. It's dangerous because it's intoxicating.

“I...” I begin.

He growls low, sending heat through my body and straight to my core.

“I warned you,” he says and slides a hand into my hair as his mouth gently presses against mine. His lips are just as warm and soft as they looked. I melt into the kiss, my very first kiss.

He has one hand splayed on my back, holding me to him, the other slides into my hair, gently tugging my head to the side. As soon as I do, he deepens the kiss, running his tongue of the seam of my lips. I gasp and his warm tongue slides into my mouth, gently coaxing my tongue to join his.

My hands slide up his chest and I feel his body shiver at my touch. He growls again, this time it's a deep, primal, possessive growl as he deepens the kiss even further. I can only hold on to him, overwhelmed by the feelings that he's conjuring in my body, the swirling of emotions in my mind.

289 Wouchert

When he finally pulls away, we're both panting. He presses his forehead to mine and I feel his heart beating just as fast as mine is.

"You taste just as sweet as you smell," he says. When I look, his eyes are closed and he's licking his lips, as if he can't get enough of my taste.

When he pulls his head away from mine, he looks at me with grey eyes that have darkened to a nearly charcoal color with his desire for me.

"We need to get moving. You smell entirely too delicious to be left in the open like this," he says, stepping back and sliding his hand out of my hair and down my arm to intertwine our fingers together.

He turns and begins walking, leading me away from the river. I can still feel the tingling sensation on my lips. I turn and look at the river. When I got here early this morning, I was trying to scrub the scent and feel of Alpha Owen off of me.

I look at Hunter. Now, all I want is to feel his mouth on mine again and to roll myself all over him until I'm covered in his scent.

'He smells SO good. I bet if you asked him, he's let us roll on him,' Hedda purrs seductively.

'Did you feel how... big he is? You know, down there?' I ask her.

The purring gets louder. "Oh yes, yes I did,' she says.

I see Alpha Hunter looking at me out of the corner of his eye, and a smile twitches at his lips.

Chapter 18 A Possible Future

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"Did Hedda have something she wanted to say?" he asks me.

"No," I grumble, and his smile gets wider.

I huff. "What were you going to say about my life if I accept you as my mate?" I ask, changing the subject.

He looks at me, then focuses on where we're going, never letting go of my hand. His thumb is rubbing circles on the back of my hand, and it continues to send tingles throughout my body. It feels amazing.

"Well, for one thing, you'd no longer have to run. My mark on your neck would make you safe from any other Alpha." I knew that. My issue was never having a mate, it was all about how the mates were claimed.

"You'd be able to see your family again. And, without putting too much pressure on you, it would make your father safe again. The Alphas would stop watching him and your mother. You and Amelia would both be claimed, so there would be no reason for them to watch your family's pack."

I hadn't thought of that. That, without anything else, would make me reconsider accepting Alpha Hunter's proposal.

He stops, turning me to look at him. "But most importantly, second only to you being my Luna, is that you could stand by my side and help me fight against this injustice, help me fight for other she-wolves to have the right that I'm offering to you."

I stare up into his eyes, seeing his fierce determination, not to claim me, but to make our world a better place for every she-wolf, not just for me, and not just for our pups.

## Chapter 18: A Possible Future

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Our pups. The thought makes my heart flutter and Hedda flip onto her back ready to show her belly to Shaw.

"You're really serious about all of this?"

"Absolutely. I'm not the only one, I'm just the only one willing to stand my ground and fight for what is right. There are others who will stand with us, my Beta for one. I'm guessing your sister and Alpha Calvin would stand with us as well. Your parents would stand with us."

"That's not a lot of people," I say frowning, thinking of the mountain that we'd have to climb to change our laws.

"It's a start. I want a better life, not just for you, and for us, but for our pups, our daughters."

There it is again. OUR pups. I can practically feel myself ovulating for this man right now.

I'm not sure if it's me, or Hedda, but I think it's more me, that throws my arms around his neck and slams my lips against his. His body jerks with the shock of it and I start to pull away, embarrassed by my action, but his mouth follows mine, capturing me in another kiss, this one even more passionate than the first.

I'm feeling light-headed and wobbly when he pulls away, growling possessively.

"You smell so \*\*g good. I need to get you out of this forest," he says, turning and moving quickly. My arm jerks as he tugs me along, my brain struggling to catch up as I let him lead me back to the hideout.

## Chapter 18 A Possible Future

### 288 Vouchers

He comes up to the back side of the hideout. "Where's the back entrance?" he asks me.

"You don't know?" I ask, surprised.

"No, I didn't want my scent back here, so I told Kinsley not to show me."

I smile at him. He's so thoughtful. "It's right here," I say, showing him.

"Good. Go, get inside before you draw too much attention with your scent," he says, his eyes darkening.

"You're leaving me?" I ask, feeling lonely in a way that being on the run never made me feel.

He steps up to me, taking my face in his hands. "I'm going to go back to my pack and get food. Food for you and then more for anyone else that finds this place. It will take me a couple of hours. Please, stay here. You'll be safe inside. And for goddess' sake, wash your arousal off your legs," he says gritting his teeth. "Any male in a five-mile radius will be drawn to your scent."

I don't know what makes me do it, other than the warm feelings this man is making me feel, but I lean into him, sliding my hand up his bare chest. "What about you? Are you drawn to my scent?"

One hand traps my hand on his chest, just over his heart, while he wraps the other arm around me, tugging me against him. "I could forego dinner and spend the rest of the night dining on you, feasting on your delicious scent. Generally speaking, I have a lot of

control, but don't push me, Sophie. You could very easily snap what's left of my control and I'll have my face between

## Chapter 18: A Possible Futu

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your thighs and you screaming my name in pleasure in no time.”

His words send another wave of pleasure through me, his hard length pressed against my stomach making butterflies take flight. I watch his nostrils flare as my arousal s\*\*s, and I feel my heat dripping down my thighs.

I feel his entire body shiver in much the same way that my body is responding to him before he drops to his knees in front of me.

“Just one taste,” he says, sounding like a desperate man.

“What...” I begin, just as his tongue snakes out and slides between the folds of my p\*\*y lips before swirling over my c\*\*t.

“F\*\*g delicious,” he growls, before standing quickly. I can see his wolf close to the surface. He's on the verge of losing control and it excites me as much as it scares me.

“Get inside, Sophie, before I start something that you're not ready for,” he growls. “I'll be back in a couple of hours. Then we can talk about next steps. Think about what I've said,” he says, before leaping away from me and shifting, running quickly around the side of the mountain.

I step inside the small opening, hurriedly making my way inside to the safety of the hideout.

## **The One He Claimed Chapter 19**

Chapter 19: Unexpected Jealousy

Hunter

As soon as I'm far enough away to get control of my desire, I turn back, making sure that Sophie gets inside the walls of the hideout.

F\*\*k! That woman tastes better than she smells. I knew the mate bond was strong, but this...this is far beyond anything I could have anticipated. It's taking everything in me to hold Shaw at bay and keep from marking her. I want her agreement first. I want to know that she is choosing me as her mate.

I turn, running toward the front of the hideout.

'She hasn't rejected us again. Now that we know her real name, she could have and it would have been much more effective,' Shaw says.

'True. Hopefully, she'll use this time to think about what I've said. I feel like I was getting through to her,' I say as we make our way around the mountain.

I intend to cut straight across the forest and run home again, but I catch Kinsley's scent and pull up short. Shaw lifts our nose in the air and begins tracking her scent. I find her halfway between the parking lot and the hideout.

"Hey Alpha," she says, looking behind me. "Lucas said you came looking for someone. You've been gone all day, so I decided to bring the food out here, in case any new she-wolves arrive."

## Chapter 19: Unexpected Jealousy

I shift and stand, looking around and sniffing the air.

"You shouldn't be out here alone at night, Kinsley. Not all of these Alphas that are on the hunt will stop to see that you're already marked before trying to take you."

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"I know. Lucas wasn't thrilled about me coming out here, so he's waiting by the car. I told him I'd howl if I needed help. So...did you find who you were looking for?"

"I did. She's in the hideout. We've...talked. I'm hoping she'll let me mark her."

She looks at me a moment, a slow smile spreading across her face. "You found your mate?"

I nod.

"You're a good man, Alpha Hunter."

"Come on, I'll introduce you," I say.

She raises an eyebrow. "You want to introduce me to your mate?"

"Yeah. I told her about you. Maybe you can put in a good word for me," I say.

She smiles at that and nods. "Anything I can do to help."

I take the food and follow her to the entrance. We both stop and lift our noses in the air, making sure there aren't any Alphas or other ranked wolves in the area before she ducks inside.

I carefully make my way through the narrow walls behind her. Having done this several times already, I have a better idea of

### 1. Unexpected Jealousy

how to get through.

"Hey, I'm not going to hurt you," I hear Kinsley say.

I push faster, stepping up behind her.

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"Sophie..." I begin, watching as she steps out of the water, her eyes tracking from Kinsley to me and back before she growls, not at me, but at Kinsley. It's a possessive growl and while I want to smile at her possessiveness, I don't want her attacking my Beta female.

I step in front of Kinsley, setting the food down and putting my hands up. "Sophie, this is Kinsley. I ran into her on my way back to my pack. She's my Beta female, the one I told you about. She's the one who found this place and brings the food in every day."

I watch as she shakes her head as if clearing it. "I'm sorry, I don't know why..."

"It's okay. It's the mate bond," I say, trying to reassure her.

"Sophie? Sophie Meyers?" Kinsley asks, shocked.

"Yeah," Sophie says, frowning.

Kinsley turns to me. "Your mate is Sophie Meyers? The Legend?"

I press my lips tightly together. I hadn't quite gotten that far in my discussion with Sophie.

"What are you talking about? I'm not a legend."

"Oh, but you are! You didn't know? EVERYONE knows who you

Chapter 19: Unexpected Jealousy

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are. You started it all, the entire revolution! It's all because of you," Kinsley says excitedly.

"Kinsley," I say warningly, watching my mate. "She's been away from the packs for two years. I haven't had a chance to talk to her about the impact that her running had on the she-wolves."

"Oh...so you didn't know?" Kinsley asks, her tone much more muted.

"Penny said something, but I thought she had to be exaggerating," Sophie says, and I can feel the nervousness coming off of her in waves.

"We can talk about it over dinner. Kinsley, what did you bring tonight?" I ask her.

"Uh...some pork chops, mashed potatoes, and green beans. They might still be warm," she says, and I hear Sophie's stomach rumble.

"You can go, Kinsley. Tell Lucas that I won't be home tonight. Can you plan to bring more food tomorrow morning?"

"Yes, Alpha," she says and turns to leave.

"Before I go," she says, turning back. "I want you to know, Sophie, that our Alpha is as genuine as he seems. He's not the kind of man who lies to get what he wants. In my experience, he's always truthful, he's always respectful, and always kind. ...." she stops and I turn my head slightly to see her looking down at her clasped hands.

"I was claimed publicly by my mate. Alpha Hunter was there, and I watched him leave the room before Lucas claimed me.

## Chapter 19: Unexpected Jealousy

That's the kind of man he is. He gives every woman the only

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privacy he can and because of that, he's had my loyalty from the moment I became his Beta female. My relationship with him has always been easier than my relationship with my own mate because of it. Because I trust him to protect me in ways that I haven't always trusted Lucas. We're....working through that, but it's still hard. I only tell you this so you'll know, woman to

woman, that I believe in and trust my Alpha. And I know that you can too. Give him a chance. You won't be disappointed," she says and turns to leave.



“Thank you, Kinsley,” I say, touched by her words.

“Yes, thank you,” Sophie says, looking back at me.

I stay still, listening to make sure Kinsley doesn't have any problem getting away from the hideout before I turn back to Sophie.

“Ready to eat?” I ask her.

“I'd like to get dressed first,” she says, pointing to her bag.

“Yeah,” I say, dragging out the word. “I didn't make it to the pack, so...” I gesture down at my naked body.

She turns and looks at me over her shoulder as she crouches down to open her bag. I can see a smile twitching at her lips. “Want to wear something of mine?”

“You're a wee bit smaller than I am. I'm not sure you have anything that will fit me. But if it will make you feel better, I'll take a shirt and lay it over my lap.”

She turns back to her bag, but not before I see her blush. “I've

## Chapter 19: Unexpected Jealousy

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been away so long, I've gotten used to wearing clothing in front of others,” she says, as if she's embarrassed of herself.

“I think that's completely understandable, considering you were living in a human town. I also think it's understandable since you know that I'm your mate, you know that I'm attracted to you and as hard as I'm trying not to drool over your gorgeous body, I'm probably not doing a very good job,” I say honestly.

She barks out a laugh. It's unexpected, but it makes heart soar that I was able to make her laugh. Rather than grabbing clothes, she stands and turns to me. “Well then, perhaps I should stay naked so that you're as uncomfortable during this dinner as I am.”

I have to bite my tongue to keep the growl from leaving my mouth. There's no way I'll be able to hide my excitement at being here with her and if she's naked, that will only make it

worse.

“As long as I don’t make you any more uncomfortable,” I say, gesturing at the evidence of my arousal for her.

She looks down and whether she means to or not, she licks her lips, making my already hard c\*\*k twitch.

She blinks her surprise and looks back up at me. I know my eyes are dark with desire for her and I swallow, closing my eyes and trying to get a grip on my emotions. I’m an Alpha, I’m supposed to always be in control, but this little slip of a girl is about to make me lose every carefully held shred of self-control that I have.

“How about we eat,” I grit out, my eyes still closed.

Unexpected Jealousy

“If it’s easier for you, I can put clothes on,” she says.

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“No. It won’t help. I now have the image of your beautiful body burned into my brain and even if I could forget it, Shaw

definitely won’t.”

“You think I’m beautiful?”

I look at her, looking over her body slowly, watching as her face turns a darker shade of red as I take my time.

“Can I be honest?” I ask.

She nods, hesitantly.

“You’re perfect, except for one thing.”

She frowns. “What’s that?”

“I prefer your chocolate brown hair to this red hair you’ve got now.”

She reaches up to touch her hair. “That was a disguise.”

A

“So, it wasn’t a preference? You don’t prefer the red?”

She crinkles her nose. “No. But going blond was a lot of effort and I had to dye it more often. It was harder on my hair, drying it out, so I switched to red. I was hoping that the color change would make some of the ranked members question if I was really Sophie Meyers. Speaking of, how did you know it was me?”

gesture for her to sit, and I reach down and pick up the bag of food that Kinsley brought.

“I’ll tell you while we eat,” I say, moving to sit across from her, using the stone table to lay out the food.

When I’m done, I make sure that she starts eating before I do. I watch as her eyes roll back into her head as she shovels in two more bites of food before looking at me. Shaw begins purring loudly, loud enough for her to hear.

“What?”

“My wolf and I like the feeling of taking care of you, my mate.”

She blushes again and I take a chance, reaching out to stroke my knuckles over her cheek. I’m thrilled when she leans into my touch. When she catches herself, she pulls away, looking down.

“You should eat, too.”

“Yes,” I say, digging into the food.

## **The One He Claimed Chapter 20**

Chapter 20: Say the Words

Sophie

Alpha Hunter is doing strange things to me and Hedda isn’t helping. I can’t believe I leaned into his touch. But the electric tingles, the feel of his warm skin against mine, made me crave to have him touch me all over.

“Back to your earlier question,” he says, refocusing on our discussion. I like that he’s not pushing me to mate, not pushing for me to allow him to put his mark on me. It reminds me a bit of how Alpha Calvin took his time with Amelia on her birthday, talking to her and getting to know her. It feels like Alpha Hunter is doing the same with me.

“You gave me a couple of hints. First, I heard you and Penny talking before she left. I didn’t understand what she meant at the time, but it fell into place later. You knew who I was, which meant that we’d met before. I’ve been to a lot of packs, so that didn’t really help, but you also know who Owen was. That, combined with your conversation with

Penny and me realizing that you were talking about being close to home, helped me to figure it out,” he says. It doesn’t seem like enough to have figured out who I am.

“Do you always pay such close attention to things?” I ask, curious.

He shrugs. It’s a nonchalant gesture, but somehow, watching the muscles in chest and shoulders flex and relax, is very \*\*y. My fingers twitch with my desire to touch him.

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“I try. I can’t always stay on top of everything, but I do the best I can. I’ve learned to trust my Betas and my G\*\*a though to follow up on things that I can’t. However, with you, my mate, I will always pay close attention,” he says, focusing his attention on me. His gaze is intense and I know that he means what he’s saying, which reminds me...

“Your Beta female gives you high praise,” I say. I don’t mean for it to come across that way, but even I can hear the jealousy in my words.

He sets his fork down, leaning forward, his gaze intensifying even more. “Kinsley is my Beta’s mate. They’ve had a rough time, like she said. It’s not my place to talk about their struggles, but she mentioned it, so I’ll tell you this. When she and Lucas were first mated, she didn’t trust him at all. She wouldn’t let him touch her, wouldn’t look him in the eye, and barely looked the pack members in the eye. She stopped eating, to the point that I finally had to step in so she wouldn’t starve herself to death,” he says, and I gasp. She looks so healthy now.

“What she said to you was the truth, just like with your sister, and every other female whose claiming I’ve been to, I step out of the room while the woman is claimed. Because Kinsley saw me do that, I was one of the only people she could look in the eye, one of the only people she trusted to make her feel safe and protected. She and Lucas have been mated over a year now and they’re only just now starting to come together.”

He reaches out, taking my hand. “I don’t want that for us. I don’t want you to fear me, to fear my touch or have it remind you of a terrible, traumatic moment in your life. I want you to seek out my touch, seek me out when you need or want comfort, to feel confident that I would never, ever allow anyone to hurt you,

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Chapter 20: Say the Words

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embarrass you, or make you feel anything less than the strong, confident woman and Luna that you are.”

“What do you propose?” I ask, wondering how he intends to accomplish that.

He smiles, reaching out to touch my cheek again. This time, I lean into him willingly, letting his stroke my cheek with his thumb.

“Give me tonight. We can talk, we can touch, get to know each other, we can swim,” he says gesturing to the small pool. “But I want to make love to you, I want to put my mark on your neck, I want to make you mine, here, with no one but you, me, and the moon above us.

I look down, but I don’t pull away from his hand.

“You said you remember me from that night, the night of my sister’s party?” I ask him.

“I do.”

I look back up at him. “I was so excited about finding my mate. I had such fairy tale dreams of what it meant to find him, to find you, and to become his. Yours. Then, the bubble of that dream was burst, and I never wanted to think about being claimed again.”

I put my hand over his, holding it against my cheek. “You make me feel like the fairy tale could become a reality.”

He smiles at me. “Is it too cheesy to say I want to make all of your dreams come true?”

## Chapter 20 Say the Words

I laugh, watching as he smiles, his grey eyes t\*\*g in the moonlight. “Much, much too cheesy.”

“It doesn’t make it any less true.”

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He looks at me a moment. “Why don’t you come sit in my lap. I’ll feed you.”

I’m sure he can feel the heat of my blush. “But we’re naked.”

“Mmm, yes we are. You did mention something about making me as uncomfortable as you are. Having you in my lap would definitely do that,” he says, and I can see the challenge in his eyes. D\*\*n him, he knows that as an Alpha myself, it’s hard to back down from a challenge.

‘Do it, then his scent will be all over us. And maybe he’ll do something about that ache between our thighs,’ Hedda says.

'Stop being a h\*\*y,' I scold her.

'Then start acting like an Alpha and accept his challenge,' she counters.

I stand, ready to call his bluff. Instead, he smiles, scooting back on the rock that he's using as a seat. He taps his thigh, reaching over to pull my plate across the stone table.

I walk to him, sitting on the thigh he suggested, my back ramrod straight. It's impossible to miss the very hard erection that is now pressed against my thigh and hip. His warm arm wraps around my waist, and he scoots me closer, urging me to lean against him. He's so warm and he smells so good, that I don't resist.

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He reaches out with his hand, taking a piece of pork, sliding it through the mashed potatoes and puts it up to my mouth. I open my mouth and he puts it in, getting mashed potatoes on my lips. He takes his thumb, wiping the potatoes off my lips. While I chew, then he sucks his thumb into his mouth, watching

me.

I stop chewing, watching his mouth. I have a very strong desire to lean forward and kiss him.

"You can do anything you want to with me, Sophie. Tonight, and every night, I hope," he says softly.

I look up at him, seeing the earnestness in his eyes before I look back down at his lips. Instead of leaning forward, I turn to the plate, doing what he did, getting a piece of pork and sliding it through the mashed potatoes. When he opens his mouth for me, I put the food into his mouth. Instead of wiping the mashed potatoes off his lips, I lean in, watching him as I slide my tongue over his lips to lick off the potatoes.

He surprises me by swallowing quickly and sliding his tongue out to touch mine swirling his tongue around and drawing mine into his mouth. Our lips meet again. His are so soft and warm, his body heat so inviting that I lean into him and the kiss, letting him tease my tongue. I wrap my arms around his neck and feel his free hand come to my thigh, holding me on his lap. His fingers begin stroking up and down my thigh, sending waves of pleasure through me.

I can feel heat spreading through my body, feel my arousal begin to drip onto his thigh. I moan softly against his mouth, as his hand begins to move up my side, his thumb sliding under my breast. I arch my back, pressing my breast into his hand,

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needing him to touch me.

He begins kissing his way down my neck, making my body shiver as he sucks on my marking spot, making me gasp as heat floods my body and drips from my entrance.

“You are so beautiful Sophie, and so responsive to me,” he says, brushing a thumb over my nipple, I whimper at the touch, and he lifts his head, watching me as he gently pinches and rolls my nipple between his fingers.

“Do you like that?”

“Yes,” I breathe.

“I want to make you feel all sorts of pleasure tonight, Sophie. Will you let me make love to you? Will you let me mark you? Will you accept me as your mate?”

I open my eyes, seeing the desire in his, the apprehension that I might tell him no.

“I want you, Sophie. I want you as my mate, as my lover, as my Luna. Say that you’ll be mine. Tell me you want me to claim you.”

“Yes, Hunter. Yes, please,” I say, letting my head fall back.

“Say the words, Sophie, I need to hear them.”

I lift my head, looking into his dark eyes.

“Make me yours, Hunter. I want you to claim me as yours.”