

The One He Claimed Chapter 121

The One He Betrayed Chapter 4: Amelia's Stand

Sophie

My friends have been incredible, being here for me and supporting me during this awful time. If you had told me six months ago that today I'd be mated, pregnant, happy, and with friends that I know I'll have for the rest of my life, I'd have laughed in your face.

And while I'm horribly sad and wrought with grief, I know enough to realize that not everyone has that, including and especially, my sister. I can't imagine how alone and lonely she feels right now.

Amelia never re-emerged after she asked to be alone. I took her some food, but she asked me to leave it outside, unwilling to open the door or even to talk to me. That night, I needed my mate, needing to feel his arms around me and his body inside mine. I needed to feel our connection to remind me that I'm happy and that my parents knew that before they passed.

Hunter has been fantastic. He's been patient, kind, and given me anything and everything I've needed during this time. He's taking care of the pack, making plans with the other Alphas, especially Dutton, to keep my parents' pack secure when we're gone and talking about options for this pack in the future. He even offered any of the pack members who don't feel safe in the interim a place in our pack. When I reminded him that we have no room for any more pack members, Hunter said we'd figure it out.

"Providing safety to those who need it is what we do," he'd said, once again making me proud to be his mate. I love this man with all my heart, and I know that we have to get back to our own pack. We have our own dead to lay to rest so when I wake in the morning, I decide that I have to push Amelia to make a decision. I know it's hard, but Hunter and I can't stay another day. Ezra is anxious to return to Margot and the others need to get back to their packs as well. We've all been in a war recently.

I've mentally prepared myself to push Amelia to talk this morning, but instead, she surprises all of us by walking into breakfast, looking less like a Luna and more like a queen. When she walks in, Calvin rushes up to her. Unlike Amelia, he looks exhausted, disheveled, and distraught. My sister barely spares him a glance.

"Sophie, may I have a word," she says, her voice ringing out across the room.

"Amelia, please, just talk to me," Calvin begins to beg her.

She turns to look at him with something close to disdain. "You've made your decision Calvin, and now I've made mine. Step aside and let me speak to my sister," she says. Her voice is confident and strong, and he jerks as if she slapped him in the face.

Hunter squeezes my hand before I stand and make my way to Amelia.

Walk with me, Sophie,” she says, her voice considerably warmer to me than to her mate. I glance at him, before following my sister out of the room.

She takes me to our mother’s tearoom. Our mother loved this room. She said it was her own little escape from the realities of being a Luna. When I step inside and close the door, Amelia turns to me and deflates. I rush to her, hugging her tightly.

“Whatever you’ve decided, I’ll support you,” I tell her. Her arms tighten around me, and I feel her body shudder as she fights her tears.

“Thank you,” she whispers, taking a couple of breaths before pulling back. I watch my sister stand tall again.

“I’ve decided to stay and take over as Alpha of this pack.”

Hunter told me that it was a possibility, but I didn’t think my sister would ever agree to it. It’s never been what she wanted.

“Amelia, are you sure?”

She nods. “Calvin was correct about one thing. It is my birthright, my place, to take over as this pack’s Alpha. I will raise my daughter here and...if someday I have a son, then he can take over the pack as well.”

I begin pacing, thinking through her decision. She watches me, then frowns. “You said you would support me.”

“And I do, Amelia. That’s not what’s concerning me,” I say, walking to her and taking her hands in mine. “You’re not a fighter, Ame. And you’re pregnant. What will happen is someone challenges you for the position?”

“I’ve spoken to Beta Matthew. He will support me in this, but I need your support too, Sophie.”

“Do you really want this, Amelia?” I ask her.

“Between you and me? No. I don’t. But I’d rather stay here and be an Alpha than return to a pack with a man who doesn’t seem to know me at all, even after more than two years. You heard him, Sophie. He sounded just like I imagine Alaric sounded before he attacked and killed our father. I can’t be mated to a man like that.”

“You’re going to reject him?” I ask, appalled. She could lose her pup, and it would only weaken her more.

“No, not yet, not as my mate anyway. Not until my little girl is born. Then, we’ll see. I’m going to begin training, even though I know I’ll be limited.” She looks down, wringing her hands in a way I recognize as my sister being extremely nervous.

“Can I count on your support?” she asks, looking back up at me.

“Always. You are my sister, and I will always stand by your side.”

She smiles at me, looking at me as if she’s seeing me for the first time. “You really are the Legend, aren’t you?”

“UGH! Not you too!” I say, making her laugh. “Do you I have to call you Alpha now?” I ask, jokingly.

“Nah, you’re my sister. You’ll always be my little Soapy,” she says my father’s nickname for me, that one she gave me when she was too young to say my name. My throat tightens and my eyes burn as a tear slides down my cheek.

I throw my arms around her, hugging her as closely as our protruding bellies will allow. When I pull back, she takes my hands in hers.

“Will you stand with me when I tell the pack? Will you stand beside me?”

“Where else would I be?” I ask her. “But what about Calvin?”

“He’ll go home and run his pack, and I’ll stay here and run mine,” she says, her lips pressing tightly together. My sister has always been more like my father, kind and gentle, but firm when needed. I was more like my mother, strong-willed and

determined. However, in this moment, I see my mother clearly in the set of my sister’s face.

When we walk out, Amelia still clutching my hand, Calvin is waiting in the wings.

“Amelia, what’s going on? Will you just talk to me?”

She turns and looks at him, emotionless. “I’m about to make an announcement, Alpha Calvin. You may want to be present and hear what I have to say.”

She doesn’t wait for his response but turns and walks back into the dining hall. The moment I step in, my eyes find Hunter’s. He’s been waiting for me, and I know

The One He Claimed Chapter 122

The One He Betrayed Chapter 5: New Alpha

Sophie

"May I have your attention, please?" Amelia asks, her tone quiet, but firm. The room responds immediately.

"We have all been through a massive ordeal, one that is trying and heart-breaking. But these are the times when we, as a pack and as a family, pull together to become stronger, strengthening our bonds to our pack and each other. I know you are all feeling the loss of my parents. Our parents," she says, turning to smile at me, "but I don't want you to feel that you are alone. I have decided that, as the oldest child of Alpha Carter and Luna Amy, I will take my place as your Alpha."

Instantly the room begins murmuring and chatter begins among the pack. Behind me, I hear Calvin suck in a breath. I glance at him as Amelia raises a hand for quiet.

"I know that it's unorthodox for a woman to be Alpha, but as my father did not have a male heir, and this pack needs a leader, I am willing to take over the role."

"For how long?" someone in the room asks.

"That I don't know, but I'm willing to remain in this position until such time as I have a son who can take over the role of Alpha."

"Amelia..." Calvin says. He steps up on her other side, taking her arm. "Amelia, stop this. We need to talk about this."

"No, Alpha Calvin, we don't," she says, turning back to the pack.

"Will you support me, as your Alpha?" she asks the room.

I see the pack's uncertainty. Amelia is already a Luna of another pack. This isn't just unprecedented because she's a woman, she's also a leader of another pack.

"I support my sister as Alpha of this pack," I say, my voice ringing out loudly.

"I support Alpha Amelia as leader of this pack," Beta Matthews says, standing his mate right beside him.

"Damn straight I support her! It's about time a woman became Alpha," Nikki says, standing up, a smiling Robin standing beside her.

"I support Alpha Amelia," he says, wrapping an arm around his mate.

Hunter smiles at me as he stands. "I support Alpha Amelia as leader of this pack."

The other Alphas and Lunas all stand and give Amelia their backing as does the rest of the pack.

When the entire room is on its feet, Amelia addresses them again. "Thank you all for your support. I know the Alphas and Lunas here must return to their packs today. But I would ask that you stay just a bit longer while I am formally inducted as the Alpha of this pack," she says to them.

We all agree and as Calvin pulls Amelia aside, Hunter comes up to me, making sure that I'm okay and that I know that he's here for me. I hug him tightly, feeling even more sorrow for my sister who doesn't have this with her mate. My sister is so much stronger than most people give her credit for, mistaking her kindness for weakness.

When the stage is set, I stand beside Beta Matthew, watching as Amelia makes her way to the stage. I notice that her hands are holding her stomach as she walks, and I wonder if the baby is moving around a lot.

When she arrives on the stage, Beta Matthews holds the cup, as I lead the ceremony and give Amelia the words to say. As Alphas, we both know them, but it's tradition for someone to have the new Alpha repeat the words in front of the pack. Usually, it's the outgoing Alpha having their son repeat the words, but today, it's me and Amelia. My sister's words ring out strong and true and there is no hesitation in her. She has made her decision.

Beta Matthews slices her palm and lets her blood drip into the cup. I suddenly realize that her connection to her mate will snap when the first person drinks her blood and accepts her as their Alpha. They will still have the mate bond, but he will no longer be her Alpha.

I panic, looking over at Hunter. Amelia can't show any weakness up here on stage.

'She rejected him before she came out. That's why she was a little unsteady on her feet,' he says to me in the mind link.

I look back at my sister, even more impressed with her now, knowing what she just went through.

It was better than having her react on the stage in front of everyone,' Hunter says, confirming my thought. But it still doesn't mean that my sister isn't suffering and no one, not even me, realized it.

I stand beside her, silently giving her my strength, as the pack comes forward, accepting her as their Alpha. As each person accepts her, I feel her strength increasing and when the last person drinks, you'd never know that she just rejected her Alpha a couple of hours ago.

"My pack," she says, addressing the group. "This is no time for celebration, unfortunately. We are all still grieving, and we must protect our borders from another attack. I will be working with Beta Matthews to look over our patrols and I will be asking Beta Caroline to begin running safe room drills at once. We need to be safe and you, my pack, are my first priority."

I look around, but Calvin is nowhere to be seen. I wonder how

he's handling all of this. Part of me wants to feel sorry for him, but the other part feels like he brought this on himself. His selfishness and greed have lost him his mate, possibly forever.

When she walks off the stage, Amelia thanks all of the Alphas and Lunas who came to support us during our grief, thanking everyone again for being here and supporting her.

When it's time for us to go, I hug my sister tightly. "If you need anything, you let me know," I tell her.

"I'll be needing a new alliance between our packs," she says to me, then looks at Hunter.

"And you'll have it. Let me know when you're settled and we'll talk," he says.

"We'll also be including you in our Alpha meetings now, Alpha Amelia," Dutton says.

"Of course, please include me on any meetings or alliance discussions and I will be there," she says. I can tell that everything is starting to weigh on my sister. She's still dealing with her grief, she's pregnant, she rejected her mate as her Alpha, she took her oath as an Alpha and has taken on the responsibility of being the leader of this pack, a job she never wanted. I pull her into another hug.

"You can do this. You are stronger than you know," I whisper to her. She nods, squeezing me tightly before letting me go and stepping back.

"I'll call soon," I tell her, and she nods again, waving goodbye to us and the others as we drive away.

"Will she be okay?" I ask Hunter. Ezra and Luna June are in the

backseat, returning to the pack with us.

"She has a long road ahead of her," Hunter says. "But we'll support her in any way we can, Soph."

"Where was Alpha Calvin? I didn't see him after the ceremony started," I say.

“He left. After she rejected him as her Alpha, he left, unwilling to watch her take her oath as Alpha of another pack,” Ezra says.

“But he’s the one who suggested it!” I say, shocked.

“He obviously hadn’t considered the ramifications of his greed. It’s not uncommon for Alphas to want something and to not think it through before pushing ahead,” Luna June says softly.

“Not all Alphas are like that,” Ezra says to her.

“No, but Alpha Calvin just got an ugly lesson on the negative side of greed. I just hope that he isn’t a vindictive man,” she says.

I see Ezra and Hunter press their lips together tightly.

“Why? What would he do?” I ask.

Hunter reaches out and takes my hand. “She didn’t reject him as her mate, Soph, only as her Alpha”

“And?” I ask.

“If he decides he wants to make her suffer for rejecting him, he could cheat on the mate bond, weakening her and possibly making her lose her pup,” Luna June says to me, sadness in her eyes.

“Would he do that?” I ask Hunter, quietly, sickened at the thought of my sister having to suffer more than she is.

“Calvin’s...an unknown. He’s been leaning toward our side of making change, but he obviously still has some old-school ideas about what and how things should happen. He could go either way, Soph. He could accept his own part in this, or he could blame Amelia and want to make her pay for what he would consider embarrassing him.”

“Either way, it will be hard for him to return home without his Luna. His pack will go into mourning, some may want to leave him. Just based on my interactions with your sister, I’m guessing that her pack adores her, nearly as much as your pack adores you. If that’s the case, they may blame Calvin for not being able to keep their Luna, and may turn against him,” Ezra

says.

The One He Betrayed Chapter 5 New Mana

I sit back, thinking about the mountain that my sister has to climb.

“I wish there was more that I could do to help her,” I say softly.

Hunter pulls my hand to his lips. “We’ll do everything we can, Sophie.”

I nod, getting lost in my own thoughts the rest of the way home.

When we arrive, Ezra leaps out of the car. “I’m going to shower and then I want to go check on Margot. If you need me, I’ll be in the pack hospital.”

We walk inside, and introduce Luna June to everyone, making sure we have a room set up for her. Ezra has barely made it to the stairs to his room when we hear her.

“WHERE IS HE? WHERE IS THAT ALPHA ASSHOLE?”

Ezra stops, and turns back, a slow smile spreading across his face.

“There’s my sweet mate now.”

he felt my range of emotions. I nod, letting him know that I’m okay.

The One He Claimed Chapter 123

Chapter 123: Thank You

Ezra

I hadn’t realized how sick with heard her voice and something

/ I was for Margot until I

de me relaxed. Not only is

she okay, but she’s out for blood, My blood. Good. I’d rather fight her while she’s standing on her own two feet than while she’s lying unconscious in a hospital bed.

She turns when she hears my voice, bearing down on me hard.

“Who do you think you are, huh? How dare you mark me! You think you can just put your mark on me, and I’ll calmly submit to you?” she yells, slapping her palm hard against my chest. I have to fight not to smile. D**n, it’s good to see her fire back.

“I told you I wasn’t going to let you die,” I tell her calmly.

“That wasn’t your decision,” she says, smacking me again. Because I’ve marked her, I can feel her anger, and the hurt, but underneath that, there’s a twinge of happiness that I’m still here and that she is too.

“Joshua didn’t get to win. He didn’t get to have you in life and death. He didn’t deserve you and you deserve better than dying because of him,” I growl, putting my hand over hers and holding it against my chest.

She narrows her eyes at me. “And then, you don’t even have the decency to be there when I wake up? I have to hunt you down so I can yell at you?” she continues.

I press my lips together and look away from her. I didn’t want to leave her, but Alpha Carter was a good Alpha, he deserved the respect of my attendance at his funeral.

I feel the shift in her as she reads my face. She turns, looking around, suddenly realizing there are others in the room.

“Mother?” she asks, looking aro

Hunter watching us. “What’s

! and seeing Sophie and on?”

Hunter puts a protective arm around Sophie.

“We weren’t the only ones who were attacked, Margot. Alpha Robin was attacked as was Alpha Dutton,” I say, and she turns back to me.

“What happened?” she asks softly.

“When Alpha Carter sent warriors to help Alpha Dutton, Alpha Alaric attacked him.”

She sucks in air and turns to look at Sophie, then her mother before looking back at me. Sophie has tucked her face against her mate and Luna June has tears in her eyes again.

“Alpha Carter?” she asks, her voice small.

“And Luna Amy,” I confirm, watching grief and horror fill her face.

“Mother,” she says, turning and going to her mother, holding her as her mother begins to cry softly again. She turns to look at Hunter and Sophie.

“Oh, Sophie, I’m so sorry. Is there anything I can do?”

“We just returned from laying them to rest,” Hunter says to her. “I need to take my mate upstairs. A lot has happened. Your mother and Alpha Ezra can fill you in.”

She turns and looks at me, her arm still around her mother.

"I brought your mother here together," I tell her.

hoping you'd both be happier

I feel her surprise but also appreciation. "Thank you."

An omega comes up, letting us know where Luna June's room is and I grab her bags, following June and Margot to her room. Margot sits with her mother but looks up at me.

"Come find me when your mother is settled and you want to talk," I tell her, setting the bags down and stepping out, closing the door behind me. I've only taken a couple of steps when the door opens. I turn and see Margot stepping out.

"Erza..." she steps up to me. "I'm not happy about wearing your mark without giving my consent, but... thank you for saving my life."

"I know we have a lot to talk about. That isn't how I wanted to mark you and I'm not expecting you to mark me. But I couldn't let you die. I just couldn't," I say, reaching out to stroke her cheek. I can feel her resistance to the pull of the mate bond, but I can also feel her desire and her gratitude. "When you're ready. I didn't force this on you because I wanted to. Yes, I want you. I really want you, Margot, but not like this. You've been forced enough in your life. I would have preferred that you make the decision and I hope that one day you will decide to mark me and become my mate. But that decision will be yours and I will not force that on you."

She leans into my palm, reaching her hand up to press my palm to her cheek and closing her eyes. "Thank you for bringing my mother here. You were right about us needing to be together now. And I need to get back to her."

"Yes, you do," I say, waiting for her to pull away first. I can feel the resistance to pull away but she does, and she steps back.

"I'll see you soon," I say, turning to head back downstairs. Now that Margot is awake, I need to focus on making sure my pack is safe and coming up with a plan for Owen's pack lands.

P

Hunter POV

I take my mate up to our room. The stress of the last few days is weighing on her. Rather than tucking her in and leaving her alone, I scoop her into my arms and sit on the bed, holding her.

I can feel her exhaustion and I don't like what all this stress may be doing to our pup, so rather than leaving her when she falls asleep in my arms, I reach out to Lucas in the mind link to find out what I'm missed.

'Alpha, we've buried Joshua's pack members, and our pack members are ready to be laid to rest. Brooklyn got two of the mates to wake up, but we had one of our warriors die because of his injuries, his wolf was unable to heal him. His mate is now in the recovering mates' ward.'

I had been too far away to know whose connection had snapped, but I'd felt it while we were gone.

'What about our borders?' I ask.

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"Agreed" he says. He pulls back, ready to chose the mind in T I hold it open this time. Like me te wants me Din

Two things. First, what do you think of offering the G** position to Penny before she turns agmeer?

I have no problem with that. She stepped up as a leader while you were away I think she'd make a great addition to the team and..." he chuckles in the mind inkura Wat would we have promoted a female to a ranked position

Yeah she would," I say, then proceed to tell him about Amela taking over as Alpha

'Whoa! That's...isn't she pregnant? What about Alpha Calvin?'

"Yes, she's pregnant, but all of the Alphas put their support behind her. And Calvin went home to his pack.'

He's silent for a moment. 'I don't understand him. With

everything I've had to do to

never, ever, let greed or power be thinking?"

Kinsley to trust me, I would

come between us. What was

'I'm betting he's wondering the same thing right about now,' I say, 'but it brings me to my next item that I wanted to talk to you about. It looks like the remaining Alphas are planning to open up the vacant packs to anyone who wants them. It will be a fight, as it should be and the strongest, last person standing, would take over the pack. You and Kinsley should talk about whether or not you want a chance to become an Alpha, Lucas. You'd make a damn good one.'

I can feel the shock of my words through our pack link. But when he answers, his surprise is covered with a joke.

'You trying to get rid of me, Alpha?'

'It would be a devastating blow for me and this pack to lose you, Lucas. But you deserve the opportunity if you want it. I wanted you to know, that no matter your decision, I support you. Owen's pack will be first, but Joshua and Elias' packs are now without a leader and as soon as we're back to full strength and take out Alaric, that pack will also be without a leader. That's a lot of opportunity for Betas and G**s to take over as Alphas. Think about it. Talk to Kinsley about it. Having you as an Alpha and ally is a close second to having you as my Beta.'

That night, we laid our pack members to rest, lighting the pyres as the sun set and letting our pack members speak about and remember our beloved family. This time,

Sophie put aside her own grief and like the amazing Luna she is, she went around and consoled our pack members, as did I. However, I watched as the pack gravitated to her, wanting her to hold them, to comfort them in a way that I, as their Alpha, can't do. My mate has a special gift of making others feel loved, and cherished, even when she, herself, is feeling wrecked with grief.

'That's because I have a mate who holds me together when I fall apart. A mate who gives me a strong foundation to stand on hold me up when I get weak,' she says and arms around me in the mind link.

'You, my mate, are never weak,' I tell her.

'That's only because my mate is always there to support me and help me stay strong. I don't know what I would have done without you these last couple of days, Hunter.'

'I never intend to let you find out, Sophie. I will always be here, in any way that you need me.'

Our pack members grieved well into the night, the mournful howls of those who lost their loved ones, surrounding the packhouse until the early morning hours.

The next morning, I get up, ready to put the war behind me and start moving to a future where we give our pack members the opportunity to earn their own right to become an Alpha. But first, I make a phone call.

"Alpha Zahn, this is Alpha Hunter. What can I do for you?"

The One He Claimed Chapter 124

Chapter 124: Flutters

Sophie

I'm not sure why it feels better to share my grief with the pack, but it does. Maybe it's because we're stronger together, able to support each other, or just because we all love each other so much, but whatever the reason, as much as I'm hurting, I want to help others heal from their losses too.

It once again says so much about Hunter as the Alpha and leader of this pack that everyone has bonded together, is working together, to make sure no one feels alone at this time, especially the pups and mates who lost someone. I've already had requests from the two new surviving mates to have their homes moved to what they've started to call the 'survivor center'.

Now that Leah has been marked by Brutus, she will be moving out. After checking with Brooklyn, she also wants to stay closer to Dr. Caspian, so their home is available. That

leaves only one that needs to be built. I make a mental note to talk to Hunter about having the warriors build another couple of homes out there. Mates die for other reasons besides war, and we know that our battles aren't done yet. If nothing else, Alaric must die. But Aiden is still out there as well!

I spend most of the morning after we lay our pack members to rest consoling the still grieving pack members. Some are still too distraught to return to their duties. I make a note of those and work with the omegas to cover kitchen and duties as well as toll before returning to patrols. I know it will spread our patrols thin to lose even more of our warriors while we have so many in the pack hospital, but our pack needs time to grieve and those who are strong enough are willing to work harder to keep the pack safe.

Kinsley returned to the packhouse last night for the funerals, but she's resting in her room this morning. Once I finish checking on the others, I go to see her, knocking on their door.

"Come in," she says, and I step into their bedroom. I've never been here before, but I can see Kinsley's touch everywhere. I'm sure Lucas didn't care what the room looked like, wanting Kinsley to be happy here, and maybe she didn't add her touch until the two of them came together, but now, their space feels very homey, very much like Kinsley. I bet Lucas loves coming home to his room with her every night.

"I wanted to check on you. Hunter said you and your pup are safe, but Sybil is still quiet," I say, walking up to the bed and sitting on the edge.

Kinsley takes my hand. We haven't had any time alone together since the war.

"I know I said it last night, but there was so much going on, Sophie, that I want to say again how sorry I am about your parents."

"Thank you. They were good people. They deserved better."

"Lucas said that Hunter is going to let you give the killing blow," she says, looking surprised.

"Yes. I asked to do it. He deserves to die at the hands of the daughter of the man he killed. Obviously, I can't fight, but Hunter will capture him and give me the chance to end his life."

"Tell me about Amelia, or Alpha Amelia now, I guess," she says.

Because it's Kinsley, I tell her everything, including my own fears about Calvin retaliating.

"I'm with Lucas on this one. He and I talked about it briefly last night and I don't understand how Calvin could work so hard to gain trust, to so easily toss it aside," she says.

"I don't know, and I don't know what will happen with Amelia. I'm afraid for her. She's pregnant, alone basically, and her Beta was our father's Beta. They didn't have any sons to take over as Beta and their daughters have all found their mates and moved on. Her Gamma is younger, but maybe could move up, but I'd be worried about him challenging her for the Alpha position at a time when she's vulnerable."

"These are very interesting times, aren't they?" she asks. "And it all started with you," she says smiling at me. I ignore the reference to me being 'the legend', and shift to a discussion about how she's feeling. She thinks she feels Sybil moving around in her head a bit, but nothing concrete yet and that Dr. Felicity said the baby is doing well.

"Have you felt your baby move yet?" she asks me.

"I think so, but I'm not sure, have you?" I ask her.

"I think so. I wasn't sure if it was me healing or if it was the baby," she says.

"I wasn't sure if it was my stress making my stomach flutter, but if we're both feeling it..." we squeeze each other's hands and smile hugely.

"Hunter is going to be so excited when I tell him. Shaw won't stay away from my stomach after that," I laugh.

She laughs. "Dario either."

Speak of the wolf...

'Sophie, can you come to my office when you get a moment?' my mate's voice flits through my mind.

"Alpha's looking for you?" Kinsley asks when I refocus.

"Do I have a dopey smile on my face?" I ask her.

"The smile of a woman in love," she clarifies.

I stand and look at my Beta, the woman who is probably my dearest friend. "What do the doctors say about when you'll be well enough to get out of bed?" I ask her.

"That depends on Sybil. If I have to heal at a human's pace, it'll be closer to a week. But if she starts to resurface and heal me, then it will be much faster. My wounds aren't so severe that she can't heal them, it was protecting our pup that exhausted her."

"She's a good mother, just like you," I say, leaning over to hug my friend. "Take care of yourself. I'll come visit every day, just to keep you updated."

"If there's anything I can do from here, let me know. It's going to be boring being stuck here all day. Lucas said he'd try to come visit but with everything going on..."

"I'm sure he's just happy to have you back over here and not in the hospital."

"That makes two of us," she says

I say goodbye and head to Hunter's office, rubbing my belly and thinking about what I want to tell him..

When I get to his office, I can tell my mate is agitated. He's up and pacing which is very unlike him. However, when he senses me, he stops, smiles, and walks to me, pulling me into his embrace. No matter what's on his mind, he always sets it aside to show me how much he loves me.

When he pulls back, his eyes narrow. "What's that fleeting little thought in your head you're trying to hide from me?"

It's sort of like playing hide and seek in my head, and since Hunter is a master seeker, keeping a secret from him is nearly impossible. So, instead, I open my mind and let him see my conversation with Kinsley.

His eyes go wide and Shaw's presence flashes into them. He looks down at my stomach and then drops to his knees before pressing his cheek to my stomach. He begins purring loudly and when he stops, I can still feel the fluttering in my stomach.

He looks up at me with wonder in his eyes before turning to face my stomach.

"Hello, my beautiful baby boy. I love you so much already. You're so strong. Be good for your mother," he says as he rubs his hands on my slight bump.

When he looks up at me, his smile is radiant and all I can feel through the bond is his love and happiness.

He stands, kissing me deeply, the kiss becoming possessive as we both feel our son still fluttering in my stomach.

"I hated being away from you before, but now, I'm going to struggle not having you with me all day so I can feel our son moving around. I mean, I knew it was real before, but now..." he says, taking my hand and leading me to his chair. He sits, then wraps his arms around me, laying his hands over my stomach while he rests his chin on my shoulder. Shaw begins purring again and we both feel our son respond to his father.

We sit like that for several moments, enjoying this quiet time, just the three of us. But since I know we still have so much to do, I turn, kissing his cheek.

“Did you want to see me for a reason?” I ask.

He sighs and sits back, but his hands remain on my stomach, moving around and trying to follow the fluttering feeling of our son.

“Yes, Alpha Zahn called me.”

That gets my attention. “Why?”

“He wants to come for a visit. And he wants to bring his mate.”

The One He Claimed Chapter 125

Chapter 125: Zahn’s Request

Hunter

“Is his mate even able to travel?” Sophie asks.

It’s the same question I had and one that I asked Alpha Zahn myself.

“He said he would take it slow to get here. He’s willing to stay as long as she wants,” I tell her.

She turns and looks at me. “As long as SHE wants?”

“That’s what he said.”

“What does HE want?” she asks astutely.

I lean in, nuzzling my mate. As agitated as I was after my phone call with Alpha Zahn, just seeing Sophie and feeling our pup moving around inside her, has settled me. Nothing in the world feels better than having my entire family in my arms, like right now. The icing on that fantastic cake is that my mate is smart and intuitive. Her train of thought is the same as mine.

“He said, and I quote, ‘I want what you have, Alpha Hunter’. To which I snarled, thinking he meant you,” I tell her, nipping her neck gently. “Mine,” I say softly, needing to say it after having yet another Alpha say something that felt like a threat to take my mate from me.

“Yes, I am. And I always will be,” Sophie says, snuggling into me. “So what does he really want?” she asks. “Because I’m taken; marked, mated, and forever yours.”

Shaw begins to growl possessively in our chest. It feels good to have Sophie so willingly express her desire to be ours.

“So what does he want?” she asks.

“When I nearly hung up on him, he clarified that he wants what WE have. He wants this, Sophie,” I say, nuzzling her and feeling grateful yet again that I took the stand that I did so that I can have moments like this with my mate.

This time when she looks at me, there’s a frown on her face. “His mate jumped off a cliff to get away from him, Hunter. What is he hoping to achieve?”

I start to reply but feel a wave of guilt coming from my mate.

“What is that? What do you feel guilty about?”

I feel my mate pulling into herself, as if she’s trying to make herself smaller on my lap.

“Hey, I’m right here. What’s going on?”

“Do you remember when we were at the Committee of Alphas, and I was asking about who each of the Alphas was? Do you remember me asking about him?”

I think back to that time. I had a lot on my mind, mostly preparing myself to fight my way out of the committee to keep Sophie safe if needed.

Then I remember. “You said you saw him catch his mate. That he was the reason you ran and that’s how you ended up back here.”

She nods. “I saw him, Hunter. I saw what he did to her. I saw how brutal he was to her, and I did nothing. I just ran away. I left her there to suffer and she tried to kill herself. If I had intervened...”

I snarl before I can catch myself. “If you had intervened, Sophie, there is no doubt that you would have been forcibly marked as well. I’m assuming that Zahn had a hunting party with him?”

She nods and I feel her guilt weighing on her. “Some legend, huh? I see someone in trouble, and I run.”

“Now, you listen to me, Sophie Reynolds. You were in a very different position then. You weren’t a Luna, and you didn’t have a mate or your family to support you. You were alone and any number of she-wolves on the run have done the same thing.”

“Nikki didn’t. Nikki rushed in and protected Allison. She didn’t run and hide like I did. She could have, but she didn’t.”

“Nikki came on the scene when Allison was fighting, and Allison had Letti fighting with her. There were three of them, Sophie.”

I can tell my words aren't making an impact on my mate and I want her to realize that she didn't let Zahn's mate down. She did what she had to do to protect herself.

“What was happening when you found them? Was she fighting against the group?” I ask.

She shakes her head. “No, he had already caught her.”

“He had her pinned down?” I ask, trying to understand what she walked into. I know whatever she saw was traumatizing enough that she had run, and she's been carrying this guilt with her all this time.

She closes her eyes and turns in my lap, needing to be close to me. I wrap my arms around her protectively.

“He was mating her, and the others were watching and cheering. She was crying and he yanked her head up and told her never to run from him again before he marked her hard. He was angry and the whole thing was so horrifying, so violent,” she says, her body starting to shake.

“Okay. Shhhh. You're safe. I just needed to understand. You're safe, Sophie.”

She presses her face up against my throat, breathing in my scent. Shaw begins purring at her, calming her.

‘What the fuck does Alpha Zahn think we're going to do for him?’ Shaw asks me.

‘I have no clue. If Sophie is this upset having witnessed it, I can't imagine what his mate feels having gone through it. And then, waking up, still in her own personal hell, after trying to kill herself. I have no idea what he thinks coming here will achieve for him.’

I stroke Sophie's hair in the way I know she likes. I can almost feel Hedda starting to purr at the sensation.

“Do you want me to tell him no, Soph. I will. We don't have to help him,” I say, but she sits up and looks at me.

“No, but we do have to help her. That's what we do, right? We protect those who need protection. She needs our protection, Hunter. She needs to be protected from him. I don't know what that means, or what it looks like, and I swear Hunter, if he comes here and tries to hurt any of women under our protection, I'll kill him myself. But if she's here, we can help her. She will be among other women who are healing like Kinsley and

Brooklyn. I may not understand what it's like for her, but I can give her a safe place to be with others who do. We could even put her in the survivor center while she's here."

"I don't know if Zahn will go for that," I tell her.

"He won't have a choice. If he wants our help, if he wants MY help, then he'll do what we tell him to do, or he can shove his mate bond up his ass."

I fight hard, really hard not to smile at my mate's anger. She's being very serious, and I know she means everything that she's saying, but damn she's cute when she's fired up.

"You want him to shove his mate bond up his ass?" I ask.

She pulls back and sees me fighting my laughter. Her eyes narrow, but then I see her lips twitch. "It's a fractured mate bond. It would hurt like hell if we shoved it up his ass," she says, and I burst out laughing.

I pull her to me, both of us needing this bit of levity.

"Oh, goddess, Sophie. I love you so much."

"How much do you love me, Hunter? I think you should show me," she says seductively.

I spend the next hour showing my mate just how much I love and adore her.

The One He Claimed Chapter 126

Chapter 126: New Arrivals

Sophie

After Hunter showed me how much he loves me and wow does that man love me, I needed to get back to the pack.

As I walk to the door of his office, I turn. "I don't even know Alpha Zahn's mate's name," I say.

"I didn't either. It's Jocelyn."

"Jocelyn. Not his fated mate, right?"

"No. I don't know about his first mate, it's possible she was. But this one was one he hunted down as you said."

Even more reason for Jocelyn to not want to be mated to Zahn. I have no idea what he expects to gain by coming here.

“Oh, and thinking of Jocelyn reminded me, we need more homes built at the survivor center. The surviving mates are asking to leave the packhouse,” I tell him.

“I figured. I’ll talk to Lucas about getting them built quickly. Is Leah moving out?”

“I’m going to confirm with her and Brooklyn that they don’t want the house they’ve been living in, but Brutus has a room here. Otherwise, I’m sure he’d be willing to build them a house on the pack lands,” I say.

He looks at me thoughtfully. “You know, that’s not a bad idea, Sophie.”

“What’s that?”

“Building houses for pack members who have pups or just don’t want the craziness of the packhouse. We’ve always had space for everyone, but we’re getting bigger, growing with the number of ranked females who keep coming to our borders. Maybe others would want their own space, away from the hustle and bustle of the packhouse.”

I’m just about to turn away, still thinking about what he said, when I get a mind link from the border patrols.

‘Luna, there’s a man here who is asking for a Sophia. He’s got two she-wolves with him, none of them are marked.’

‘What’s his name,’ I ask frowning. Sophia was the name I used in the diner when I was on the run.

It’s quiet a moment before he comes back. ‘He says you may remember him as Jethro or possibly Jaime.’

“Sophie?” Hunter asks, obviously part of the mind link.

‘Does he smell like a lone wolf?’ I ask the patrol.

‘Yes, and the she-wolves smell like them too,’ the patrol says, as I turn and head out of Hunter’s office.

‘Ranked?’ I ask, beginning to jog. I hear Hunter growl behind me and turn, watching him strip quickly and shift before Shaw walks up and bumps against me. He lays down at my feet, a clear indication that he’s coming too and that I’m supposed to get on his back.

‘Not ranked, but definitely scared and they’re in pretty bad shape Luna,’ he says.

‘We’re on our way,’ Hunter says in the mind link as Shaw gets up with me on his back and begins running to the borders.

"I can jog, Hunter. Our son isn't so big that I can't," I say as we go. All I get is Shaw's protective growl. I shake my head but drop it. Now that he's felt his son move, I'm guessing this will be my new norm. Overprotective Shaw and Hunter.

When we get to the border, I can see that the patrol was right. These girls look practically emaciated. They don't smell like omegas though.

Warriors, but exhausted, starving warriors,' Hunter confirms in my head.

I get off of Shaw's back and after glancing at the women who look terrified, I focus on Jaime.

"So, what name are you going by these days, Jethro or Jaime?" ask him, smiling.

I watch the tension in his body relax at my calm greeting.

"Jaime. And you, Luna? You never mentioned that you were the legend that everyone was talking about," he says casually, making the women look at him in surprise.

'Relatives?' I ask Hunter who has shifted back to his human form. I see him lift his nose in the air.

Yes. Sisters, I'd guess.'

He had mentioned sisters when we'd met at the diner, in what feels like a lifetime ago.

"I didn't know anything about being a legend back then. I was hiding, remember?" I ask.

"I do. I'm glad that you remember too. I'm hoping that you'll remember my kindness to you and help my sisters," he says.

"Sophie, how about an introduction," Hunter says.

"My apologies. Hunter, this is Jaime. We met while I was on the run. He was hiding with a group of humans, if I remember correctly. He came back after they left the diner to check on me and to warn me about the ranked members hunting she-wolves on the run."

"You looked after my mate? I am indebted to you," Hunter says.

"I didn't do anything, truly, other than make sure she was okay. Lone wolves look out for each other, and she was a young, Alpha female, alone."

"All the more reason that appreciate your assistance," Hunter says. "I'm Alpha Hunter, Sophie's mate. Welcome to our pack. You all look like you need food, a shower, and a warm bed."

"I'm not asking for myself, just a safe place for my sisters," Jaime says.

"We have plenty of room for you too, Jaime, if you're tired of being on the run. Hunter and I were just talking about ways to expand our housing so that we can accommodate those who need our assistance, whether it's short-term or forever," I say, turning to the she-wolves. They're both young, younger than Jaime, and I think one is underage.

"I'm Luna Sophie and you are welcome here. May I have your names?"

"I'm Beth and this is Chloe," the older of the two says. Even her voice sounds weak.

I take a chance and walk up to them, opening my arms and offering comfort. They both look at Jaime before falling into my arms and sobbing in relief. I see Jaime look down; his lips pressed tightly together. Everyone stays silent while I calm and soothe the girls. It's not uncommon for those who find us to break down from the relief of finally being safe.

"Come with me," I say, when they stop crying. "That goes for you too, Jaime," I say, looking over at him.

"Thank you, Luna," he says, then looks at Hunter to ensure that he's okay with it too.

"She's the boss. I just work here," Hunter says, smiling at Jaime.

I snort, but as with all females coming into the pack, I take the lead.

"Let's get you something to eat. While we do that, we can get you a room, some clothes, and once you've showered and rested, we'll talk," I say, turning to make sure that Jaime is following us.

I notice him looking at my stomach. "A lot has changed since I last saw you."

"That feels like a lifetime ago. And I guess it was," I say, smiling at Hunter. Jaime catches the exchange.

"So, he's one of the good Alphas?" Jaime asks me.

"He's the best there is," I say proudly, smiling at my mate. The patrols aren't surprised, but Jaime and his sisters are.

Hunter smiles warmly at me, but Jaime turns to him. "We should talk."

"Is it urgent? You don't look much better than your sisters."

"Maybe we can talk over lunch and then I can rest. I'll admit I'm pretty tired."

“Dead on your feet seems more accurate. You’ve been protecting them?” Hunter asks him.

“Once I found them, yes. It’s a long story,” Jaime says.

“One that can wait for now,” I say as we make our way into the packhouse.

“Luna, we have some fresh faces,” Kinsley says, gingerly walking up.

“Are you allowed to be out of bed?” I ask her.

“One hour, Luna. That’s all I’ve given her,” Dr. Felicity says from behind Kinsley.

“Fine, you can spend your one hour eating with us and figuring out a room situation,” I say to Kinsley before turning to the girls.

“Would the two of you like to share a room, or separate rooms?” ask them.

They look at each other. “We’d like to share.”

“Two rooms then,” I say to Kinsley, as several omegas walk out with food.

“Two?” she asks.

“Their brother and my friend, Jaime,” I say, turning to look at him.

I frown at the look on Jaime’s face, looking at Hunter who is smiling at me.

“Never a dull moment around here,” Hunter says. I follow Jaime’s gaze and see Penny, staring back at him, both of their eyes wide.

“Do you two know each other?” I ask Penny.

Penny shakes her head but doesn’t look at me. “No, Luna.”

I frown, looking at Hunter, but it’s Jaime that speaks.

The One He Claimed Chapter 127

Chapter 127: Introductions

Jaime

“Kinsley, can you make sure Beth and Chloe get something to eat?” I hear Sophia’s voice. No, not Sophia, Sophie. Luna Sophie. She’s a Luna now.

“Jaime, why don’t we go find someplace to talk?” Alpha Hunter says beside me.

I can’t pull my eyes away from the beautiful woman in front of me. Why didn’t she say it back to me? Why didn’t her wolf call out to her mate?

I feel rooted to the spot, unable to move. When I’d smelled the scent of rain, the scent I love, I thought it was going to rain. I had no idea that my mate’s scent would be the clean scent of a gentle rainstorm.

“She’s underage, Jaime,” Alpha Hunter says quietly to me. I watch as Luna Sophie walks over to my mate and whispers quietly in her ear. She nods, but her gaze remains riveted on mine.

“How underage?” I ask, not sure how I can survive years before my mate turns eighteen and recognizes me as her mate. Although, if her stare is any indication, she must recognize me at some level.

“Just a few weeks. Come on, it’ll be easier for you to fight the pull to your mate once you’ve eaten and gotten some sleep.”

“I’m not hungry,” I tell him. The only thing that matters at this moment is the woman standing in front of me. The woman who is being led away by Luna Sophie

I take a step forward. “Easy, Jaime. She’s going to join us for lunch,” Alpha Hunter says. I have to fight the urge to growl at him for trying to keep me from my mate. When I turn to look at him, I see his wolf is forward, ready to control McCoy if needed. “Get a hold of yourself,” he growls softly.

I close my eyes, and shake my head, trying to clear my mind. Then I take a deep breath and it’s the wrong thing to do. I clench my fists and focus. I’m in Luna Sophie’s pack, my sisters are safe...my sisters! Oh goddess!

My eyes flash open and I see them sitting at a table talking to a woman as they watch me.

“Are you two okay?” I ask them.

“Go Jaime. We’ll be fine. Beta Kinsley is going to look after us. Go figure things out with your mate,” Beth says.

I look at Chloe. She’s younger, still underage, and has been terrified ever since I found them. Even being with me hasn’t helped her to feel more confident. I’m hoping being back in a pack will make her feel more secure. She gives me a tentative smile and I see the woman, Beta Kinsley, wrap her arm around her protectively, as if recognizing that my sister needs the comfort and support of a ranked member.

"I won't be gone long. If you need me..."

"They'll be fine, Jaime. You brought them here so we could help them. Let us do that," Luna Sophie says.

When I turn, I see my mate looking at my sisters and I sense her jealousy.

"My sisters. Beth and Chloe," I say and her eyes flash back to mine.

"Come join us, Jaime," Luna Sophie says, as she guides my mate away.

I look at Alpha Hunter, who smiles. "I told you. She's the boss."

"You're a strange Alpha," I say absently, as I follow the pull to my mate.

"Not so strange. I merely love and respect my mate. She's an intelligent, strong, Alpha female and, as you pointed out, she's the legend. Not many could have lived up to that reputation, but my mate does, every day."

I see Luna Sophie look over and smile lovingly at her mate. When I look, he has the same loving look in his eyes for her.

Alpha Hunter looks over at me. I'm not sure what expression he sees on my face, disbelief probably. "If you decide to stay here, you'll get used to it. We love each other very deeply and we're not afraid to show it outwardly."

When we walk into the room, I realize this is Alpha Hunter's office. It smells strongly of him, of Luna Sophie, and of recent sex. Since Luna Sophie doesn't seem upset in any way, I'm assuming that sex was consensual and what Alpha Hunter said is the truth.

I follow my mate to a table. She sits at a corner, and I sit beside her at the head of the table where I can easily see her.

"Hello Jaime. I'm Penny," she says, as Alpha Hunter pulls Luna Sophie into his lap across from Penny. I guess they're here to make sure I don't do anything stupid. Or maybe they're here to help my mate feel comfortable.

"Penny. I love that name," I say reaching out my hands to take hers. However, I suddenly realize that my hands, like the rest of me, are covered in dirt and grime. My mate must be disgusted with me.

I start to pull my hands away, but she reaches out to take them.

"My hands are filthy," I say, not wanting her to dirty her hands with mine.

“Nothing that some soap and water won’t wash away,” she says. “I’m underage,” she explains, “but Sable, my wolf, feels a very strong pull to you and your wolf.”

“McCoy is my wolf, and he obviously recognized you as our mates. Alpha Hunter said you have a few weeks before you turn eighteen?”

“Yes, just about three weeks,” she smiles, holding my hands.

“Penny has become one of the leaders of our pack, Jaime. She’s an incredible warrior,” Alpha Hunter says, making me proud of my mate. She’s not even an adult and already she’s making a name for herself.

“Where are your parents? Should meet them, after I shower, of course,” ask.

She looks down, her thumbs rubbing over my knuckles. “I was like your sisters, on the run for a long time. My father agrees with the old ways of claiming ranked members. He’s our pack’s Ga**a. I didn’t want that for myself and neither did my mother. So, she helped me get away. I’d been on my own for a while when I ran into Luna. She was on the run too,” she says, smiling at Luna Sophie.

“I met her not long after I met you, Jaime. After you warned me, some Alphas and other ranked members found the diner. I ran and Penny and I helped each other until we got here.”

My mate snorts. “She’s being generous. We were riding the trains, and when I jumped, I injured myself. I told her to go without me, but she refused, carrying me until I was healed enough to run on my own.”

look at Luna Sophie, feeling incredibly grateful to her for protecting and helping my mate. Then I look at Alpha Hunter. “I’d say your mate paid your debt to me by helping my mate,” I say, understanding better now the impact that my simple check-in with Sophie made on him.

“How about we don’t keep score, and we just agree to continue to help those who need assistance?” Luna Sophie says.

“A perfect answer as always, my mate,” Alpha Hunter purrs as someone knocks on the door. Luna Sophie hops out of her mate’s lap to let in the omegas who are carrying trays of food. The moment I smell it, my mouth waters and my stomach growls loudly.

“How long has it been since you’ve eaten?” Penny asks.

shrug. My sisters were very weak when I found them, so I gave everything that McCoy caught to them. “My sisters needed it more than I did.”

She pulls her hands away from mine and I suddenly feel lonely and cold.

“Eat. I’m not going anywhere,” Penny says.

As I begin eating, I thank the omegas, making sure my sisters got something to eat as well.

“Yes, Beta Kinsley made sure that your sisters ate. The sweet younger one fell asleep at the table and one of our warriors carried her to their room.”

I stand up. “Is she alright?” I ask, instantly alert.

“She’s exhausted, Jaime. Sit, eat. I promise, your sisters are being well taken care of,” Luna Sophie says.

“The warrior...” I begin.

“None of my warriors or anyone in my pack would dare to hurt another pack member, or someone under my protection. Relax, Jaime. My mate is right, you and your sisters are now under my protection. Nothing will happen to any of you, my word as an Alpha,” Alpha Hunter says.

He seems genuine, and Luna Sophie said he was the best Alpha out there, but these are my sisters.

“How about I go check on them?” Penny asks. “You finish eating and when we’re done with Alpha and Luna, can show you where they are, so you can find them on your own.”

Now I’m torn. I don’t want her leaving. What if she doesn’t come back?

“I can show you his room as well, Penny. It’s nearby,” the omega says.

“Oh,” Penny says turning to me. “I thought you’d want to stay in my room.”

“I...yes, yes I would,” I say, excited at the idea of sleeping with my mate in my arms.

She smiles a brilliant smile, making my heart race and d**k twitch.

“Then I’ll be right back,” she says, leaving with the omegas.

I watch her go before turning back to the table.

“Now, you said you had something you wanted to talk about?” Alpha Hunter asks as I begin eating again.

“Yes, Alpha. There are rumors floating around about an attack on the local Alphas. Some packs are recruiting members to attack,” I say.

“We’ve already had the war, a couple of days ago,” he says.

“This was yesterday. I didn’t catch the Alpha’s name, but I did hear another name, someone who seemed to know you. His name is Koden,” I say, cutting off when Alpha Hunter snarls viciously.

The One He Claimed Chapter 128

Chapter 128: Getting Settled

Beth

Everything about this pack feels different. When Jaime found me and Chloe, we’d been on the run for a while, I’m not even sure how long. I just know that we’d been chased for what seemed like forever.

Word of the omega who’d been publicly claimed spread far and wide and for some reason, my Alpha decided that it was the way things were going to be in our pack. Jaime had left long before, having had issues with the new Alpha. Jaime is a good man, a strong warrior and women have always flocked to him because of that. Our new Alpha apparently found it intimidating that a warrior garnered as much attention as he did, so he made Jaime’s life hell until he finally left.

At the time, it was the right thing to do. Alpha Leo would have killed Jaime, I know that now. Alpha Leo may be strong, but he’s not a good man and that was only confirmed when he decided that all claims in our pack would become public. And that was when my parents had had enough. Our father is the Lead Warrior, so there was no way he could leave the pack unnoticed for any length of time. However, he set it up so that our mother could take us to ‘visit’ our aunt for a couple of weeks with the excuse that we were searching for my mate.

Instead, she drove us out to the forest, and then we began our trek away from our pack. When we were far enough away, she bought us a train ticket and that was the last time we saw our mother. I didn’t know it until Jaime found us, but when my mother returned without us, Alpha Leo killed her and my father saying that they betrayed him. Jaime, still having friends in the pack, heard about it and came searching for us. I’m not even sure how he found us. We’d been hiding for so long and had become weak from lack of food. Chloe is still underage so being away from our family, being out alone in the world, had been extremely hard for her.

When Jaime found us, he said he knew of a place where we could be safe.

“They’re taking in ranked females,” he told me the night he found us. He’d told us about our parents, and he and I stayed up talking after Chloe cried herself to sleep.

“What about you, Jaime. We just got you back and now, we’re all that we have. It’s just the three of us.”

“I’ve been on my own for a long time, Beth, and I’m not being hunted. Unmarked females are. Even if you’re not a ranked member, you’re not safe out here and Chloe needs security. I’ve never seen her look this lost and sad,” he said, looking at our sister.

“We just found out our parents were killed because they helped us get away,” I say.

“She looked that way before I told you, Beth. She’s not like us. You and I are strong. She’s always been gentle, needing the security that the pack offers. Look, if they don’t take you, we’ll move on. I’m not leaving you alone. I just, I need to know that the two of you are safe.”

That had been weeks ago and while Jaime was able to catch food for us, we weren’t sleeping, and we were running so much that what little food we had wasn’t enough.

I recognized the difference in this pack the moment the Alpha and Luna arrived. He’d carried her in his wolf form, and I knew as soon as she stood that it’s because she’s pregnant.

My first shock was to realize that Jaime knew her. The second was that the Alpha let her take charge. Then, of course, there was the shock of Jaime finding his mate. I wonder how that will change things for us now.

I was astonished when Chloe relaxed in the arms of Beta female and literally fell asleep at the table.

“What a sweet dear. You’ve been through so much, haven’t you?” an omega asks me.

I nod, my eyes filling with tears. The woman wraps her arms around me, and I just break down, right there in the middle of the dining hall.

“My name is Leah. If you need anything while you’re here, you let me know. You’re safe now. Our Alpha and Luna

3 Will make sure

of it. They are good people who truly want to help others who need it.”

“Brutus, can you carry this little one for me. I’m sure Dr. Felicity will have my hide if I try to,” Beta Kinsley says.

“Oh, I can carry her!” I say, ready to jump up.

“Nonsense. My mate can carry her. He’s another good man,” she says, smiling up at her mate. It’s almost creepy how happy everyone here seems to be.

He smiles at her, leaning down to kiss her before looking at me. “My mate makes me a better man.”

She snorts at that. “Come on, we’ll get you settled. Unless you’re still hungry?”

They’d given us a normal amount of food for an active wolf in a pack, but Chloe and I haven’t eaten in so long that neither of our stomachs could hold that much food.

When I stand, a wave of dizziness flows over me, and I reach out to grab the table.

“I’ve got you,” Leah says kindly. “Your body is probably all messed up from not eating. We’ll have you back to normal in no time,” she says smiling. “My daughter has started working in the pack hospital and her mate is a doctor. We also have Dr. Felicity who can look you over, but for now, let’s get you showered and into bed. A good night’s sleep cures a lot of ailments.”

I follow behind Beta Kinsley who is walking behind Brutus carrying my sister. Chloe looks like a much younger pup in his big arms.

“How are your wolves, Beth? Are they still here or have they gone silent?” Beta Kinsley asks me.

“Mine is weak, Chloe’s is gone. She has been for a couple of weeks now.”

She nods. “We’ll talk to Dr. Caspian, but I’m pretty sure that once the two of you get stronger, your wolves will return and become stronger as well.”

A woman walks up to us, quickly going to my sister and looking her over, checking her pulse.

“She’s probably okay for tonight, but I’ll want to see her first thing in the morning,” the woman says, looking up at Beta Kinsley.

“Your hour is up, Beta.”

“Yes, Dr. Felicity,” she grumbles. “As soon as I get these girls settled, I’ll get back in bed,” she says, making me frown.

Then the woman turns to me. “Hi, I’m Dr. Felicity. Do you mind if I look you over briefly? I don’t want to have an emergency call because I didn’t check you over when I had the chance,” she says.

I nod and she listens to my heart, looks in my eyes, and feels for my pulse. “Do you or your sister have any injuries that I need to know about tonight?” she asks.

“No.”

“Okay, get some rest. I’ll look you over more thoroughly in the morning. If you need anything at all, if you start to feel ill for any reason, let someone know and they’ll mind link me.”

“Thank you.”

We start to walk away, and she looks at Beta Kinsley.

“I’m timing you, Beta,” Dr. Felicity says. “Don’t make me get Beta Lucas.”

Hook at Leah and frown, but she’s smiling at her Beta.

“We were attacked recently, and our Beta fought, even though she’s pregnant. She was injured and has just been released from the pack hospital, but she’s under strict instructions to only be out of bed for one hour,” Leah says.

Beta Kinsley turns and looks at me. “It’s dreadfully boring to be sitting in bed when you know there’s so much work to do. And you’ve seen our Luna. She’s pregnant too,” she says.

“But she didn’t take the slash across the stomach that you did, Beta,” Leah says, kindly but sternly.

I’m not sure what’s more awe-inspiring, that both ranked females are pregnant, that a pregnant Beta fought in a battle, or that an omega is speaking to her Beta as if they are equals and no one is batting an eye.

They show us to our room, Brutus turning to look at Beta Kinsley. “Do you want her on the bed like this?” he asks.

“Let me get another blanket to put her on, that way we won’t have to wash the sheets again tomorrow,” Leah says, swiftly moving out of the room. Beta Kinsley goes into the bathroom and then her eyes go unfocused.

“Okay, Leah is going to bring some toiletries for you, along with some clothes,” Beta Kinsley says.

I hear footsteps and assume it’s Leah, but when I turn, I’m surprised to see my brother’s mate.

The One He Claimed Chapter 129

Chapter 129: Girl Talk

Beth

"Hello. May I come in?" Penny asks. She's carrying the blanket that I'm guessing is for Chloe.

"Of course. It's not my room."

"Yes, it is. For as long as you choose to stay here. Or if you become a permanent member of our pack, we can see what other rooms are open and you can choose which room you want," Beta Kinsley says.

"Your brother was worried about you. I told him I'd come check on you. Oh, and Dr. Felicity said you have five minutes, Beta."

She sighs. "Can I leave them to you, Penny?" Beta Kinsley asks.

"Of course, I'd like to get to know my mate's sisters," she says smiling at me.

"If you need anything at all, Beth, let any pack member know, and they'll contact me or Luna Sophie. Now, I have to go before Dr. Felicity sends my mate after me," Beta Kinsley says before walking out.

"Here you go, Brutus," Penny says, laying out the blanket for Chloe.

He gently lays her down before stepping back. "Do you need anything else?" he asks me.

"This is more than I had last night. It's perfect, thank you," I say, just as Leah comes back in, her arms full of things. Brutus is in front of her in two steps, taking most of the load out of her arms.

"What's all this?" Penny asks, walking over. "Oh good! We have clothes, nightgowns, shampoo, conditioner, toothbrushes, toothpaste, hairbrushes, hair ties. Oh Leah, you thought of everything."

"I have a daughter. I know what young women need," she says smiling.

"I can look after them, if you two want to go," Penny says to them. I'm not sure why she wants to be alone with me, but I get the impression that she's trying to get them out of here so she can speak to me. I hope she's not a horrible person. There has to be at least one in this pack, right?

When they're gone, she turns to me, still smiling. "I'm Penny. We haven't been formally introduced."

"I'm Beth."

"Beth. It's nice to meet you. I...I know you've been through a lot, and all of this must be overwhelming for you, especially if you're as exhausted as Jaime is. But I was hoping that maybe we could talk, just briefly, while you get ready for bed?"

I nod. "Sure."

She turns and looks at Chloe. "Is she a sound sleeper?"

"She hasn't been lately, but when we were at home she was, why?"

"What do you think of me bathing her while you shower? She'll feel better waking up clean in the morning," Penny says. Okay, maybe she's not so bad.

"I think she'd like that."

"You will too. As tired as you are, you'll still be able to smell her after you shower."

"We smell that bad?" I ask.

She shrugs. "You've been on the run for a while now, right? I was there. I know how it is. I remember my first shower when I was finally safe. It was incredible and I had no idea how bad I smelled until I got out and smelled my clothes. I threw them away," she says, making me laugh.

She follows me into the bathroom and starts to run the water in the bath.

"So, you're my brother's mate?" I ask her.

She nods and looks up at me. "I'm not eighteen yet, so I don't feel the full draw of the mate bond, but my wolf already loves his scent."

"My brother is a really good man, I say protectively.

She smiles softly. "I got that already. I'd love to hear your story sometime. I have my own that I'd be willing to share if you ever want to know. But I'm an only child, the daughter of a Ga**a. I never had any siblings. So, I'm hoping that we can be sisters?"

"You're going to accept my brother as your mate?" I ask, surprised.

"Of course. Why wouldn't I?"

"He's a lone wolf."

She shrugs again. "Haven't we all been lone wolves at one point or another? I'm hoping that he'll decide to stay here with me, and I know a large part of that decision will be whether or not you and Chloe decide to stay here too. So, I want to make sure that the two of you are happy, so that he's happy. But more than that, lost my family too. Being in this pack has made a huge difference to me, being part of a bigger family again. But I miss the smaller, more intimate family that others have. I'd like for us to have that, the four of us."

"I'd like that," I say softly. I'm starting to realize that my brother hit the mate jackpot with Penny.

While I strip out of my clothes, Penny goes to get Chloe, and I help her undress my sister before she carefully lays her in the warm water of the bath.

"Do you need help?" I ask her.

"Probably with her hair. I can bathe her while you shower and then you can hold her while I wash her hair. Then, you need rest, and I need to get back to your brother. I told him I wouldn't be gone long."

"He's a worrier, my brother," I say, stepping into the shower and moaning obscenely.

I hear Penny laughing. "I told you it was fantastic. You never know how amazing warm water is until you don't have it."

"You're so right," I say, beginning to work the shampoo into my hair. I have to wash it three times before it finally rinses clean, then I slather the conditioner on it.

"So, tell me about yourself. Tell me about Jaime," she says.

While I scrub my body, I tell her about our family and about the Alpha being jealous of Jaime.

"Your father was a Lead Warrior?" she asks, and something in her tone has me looking out of the shower.

"Yes, why?" I ask, seeing her smile.

"I can't wait to spar with him and see how good he is," she says excitedly.

"He's really good. I personally think that's another reason Alpha Leo was intimidated by him. I think Jaime could have defeated him in a challenge."

"He's that good?" she asks.

“He was. I’m not sure how long it’s been since he’s trained, but he’s still very strong,” I say, stepping out of the shower, and seeing Penny still smiling as she carefully bathes Chloe.

I quickly wrap a towel around myself and kneel down beside her, reaching in to hold my sister. She gets the shampoo and like me, we have to wash Chloe’s hair several times before it comes clean, emptying the water in the tub and refilling it. My sister barely moves. She must be so exhausted, and I have to admit, now that my stomach is full and I’m clean, I’m struggling to keep my eyes open too.

We finish getting Chloe bathed and Penny picks her up and holds her while I dry her off. I get the brush and begin to

untangle the knots from her hair before we get her dressed and into the bed, pulling the extra blanket off.

“Here, sit. I’ll brush your hair,” she says.

She gently begins to untangle my hair. I expected more questions, but maybe she realizes that I’m too tired to keep talking. I feel like I’m in a sleep haze and when there’s a knock at the door, it seems much too difficult to open my eyes or to answer.

“There you are,” I hear my brother’s voice.

“I was helping your sisters get settled in. Chloe is a heavy sleeper. She didn’t even wake up when we bathed her,” Penny says softly.

“Beth looks like she’s asleep in the chair,” he says.

“Once she was clean, I think her exhaustion hit her,” she says, and I hear her set the brush down.

“I’ll get her,” my brother says, and I smell his familiar scent, coated with sweat and grime.

“You need a shower,” I mumble to him, feeling his body move against me as he chuckles.

“Sleep, Beth. You and Chloe are safe.”

I feel the blanket pulled up over the two of us, the scent of clean linens making me snuggle even deeper into the pillow and soft bed.

“Come on, my mate. Your sister is right, you need a shower, and I just happen to know someone who is quite adept at getting people clean,” Penny says.

I hear my brother's soft growl before the door closes. I fall asleep thinking how lucky it is that we arrived here so that Jaime could find his mate.

The One He Claimed Chapter 130

Chapter 130: Amelia's Agreement

Hunter

The information that Jaime had for me was interesting, but not totally unexpected. I knew Koden was still out there, I knew Aiden was still out there, and Alaric is as well, for the time being.

The biggest question I have is the timing. It's a bit too convenient that I hear about the three remaining Alphas wanting to gather their forces and attack, at the same time that Alpha Zahn, who made a point of not participating in the war, wants to come 'visit' my pack.

"What are you thinking, Hunter?" Sophie asks. She's still in my lap and I realize that as I've been thinking, my hands have been protectively rubbing over her stomach, shifting to the spots where I can feel my pup. I love feeling my son moving around, but it's making my need to protect become much stronger and I'm afraid Sophie is going to find me suffocating soon.

"Alpha Zahn," I say, still deep in thought.

"It's very convenient, isn't it?" she asks, bringing my attention to her. I'm still not used to having a partner in my life. I went so long without Sophie, trying to work things out on my own that it still takes me by surprise when she gets where my thoughts are going without me having to tell her.

I focus my attention on her, kissing her deeply for always understanding me. It's a heady feeling to know that the person you love most in the world gets you.

"Yes, it's too convenient," I confirm when I pull back. "Why now? Why did he wait until now to reach out? He has to know that the others are trying to pull their forces to come at us again."

"Do you think he's trying to get inside information? Trying to find our weaknesses?" she asks.

"He could be and using the guise of wanting to help his mate would be a good entry into our pack. I don't know Zahn very well, but I don't remember thinking he wasn't s**d like Owen, which means this could be an intentional invasion of our pack to gain intelligence for an attack.

"Why don't we ask him?" Sophie asks.

I look at her and frown. "Do you think he'll tell us if that's his plan?"

"No, but he doesn't know that we know about it, does he? If you confront him, his response may tell us what we need to know. And sadly, it would mean that he really doesn't care about his mate, and that she is disposable.

"What do you mean?" I ask.

She shrugs. "The best time for the others to attack would be when Zahn is here, when he's able to help them gain access, right? He said he wants to stay as long as necessary, which could mean he wants to gain our trust so he can get that intel."

I think through what Sophie said. Zahn's request had been strange to begin with, but now, if I add this part in, it all makes sense, which pisses me off.

"We need to talk to your sister. We may need to move up our attack on Alaric."

I watch my mate as she thinks through our options. I catch the two waves of concern and smile. I'm not surprised by either of them.

"Depending on what Zahn says, we'll still let them come. If we can help Jocelyn, I know you want to do that. And since our pack is strong and none of them will trust Zahn while he's here, we could make sure he stays only in the places we give him access. As for your sister..."

"She needs to be a part of that attack, Hunter. You know that as well as I do," she says.

"How close is she to delivering her pup? Do you know?"

"Six to eight weeks, I believe. She's at least a month ahead of me, maybe two."

"In six weeks, Alaric will be back to full strength," I say, not liking that plan at all.

"Let's talk to Amelia. I doubt she'll be willing to involve Calvin, but maybe she'd be willing to attack earlier if she knew it meant keeping her pack safe."

I look at my mate thoughtfully. "What would you do? If you were in Amelia's situation, what would you do?"

I watch her as she thinks through her answer, listening to her thoughts as she does. I love my mate's mind. She's so intelligent but also so compassionate. Her mind is a beautiful place.

"It's hard for me to say, exactly. I'm not as far along as Amelia is, so for me, right now, I'd attack while Alaric is still weak, not give him time to come at me again. And given Alaric's thoughts about women, he will attack again, because he won't think that Amelia is capable of running a pack. He'll underestimate her, just like he underestimated Nikki," she says, looking at me.

I kiss her again, because I caught the thought that HER mate would never have put her in the position that Amelia is in, and she's right. Calvin screwed up, and I'm still shocked at how much of a mess he made by speaking without thinking. He obviously never put his mate ahead of himself or his pack. If he had, he would be sitting with his mate in his lap right now, just as I am, rather than living hours away from her. Nothing in this world is worth me losing Sophie. And even if I hadn't lost her, would never have tolerated being separated from her for long periods of time. She's mine and I want her close to me, always.

Sophie must catch the tenor of my thoughts because she turns, deepening our kiss. By the time she pulls away, she's straddling me, and her arousal is scenting the air around us.

"Should we continue, or should we call your sister?" I ask her.

She sighs. "If I agree to call Amelia, do you promise we can continue this later?"

I lean in and nip at her neck, my own desire for her s**g when she lifts her chin to give me her throat. "The night I leave you wanting, not fulfilling every need and desire you have, my love, is the night that I am dead. I love hearing you screaming my name almost as much as I love feeling your body contracting around me as I empty myself inside you," I purr, nibbling on her mate mark.

"Keep it up, Alpha, and you'll have to ease this ache right now."

I glance at the clock. While I know that Amelia doesn't keep 'office hours' as an Alpha, I also know that she'll want to spend the dinner and evening hours with her pack, bonding with them.

"I don't like rushing when I'm inside you, Sophie, so we'll put this on hold until tonight when I can take my time and reward you for being patient," I say, licking my way up her throat to her chin and finally taking her mouth again.

"I'm not very patient, but I also know that your rewards are worth every moment of torment that I suffer," she says breathily when I pull away.

I smile at my mate, whose eyes are still closed, and her chin is still lifted enough to be submissive to me. Goddess, I love adore this woman.

However, since we have something important to do and I need to focus on someone other than my mate, I lift her, turning her around so she's sitting with her back to me. Maybe after we finish with our call to Amelia, I can just stand and bend her over my desk. The idea makes me rush to dial the main number for Amelia's pack.

When the warrior answers, I let him know that Sophie and I want to speak to Alpha Amelia.

"Alpha Hunter, Sophie, is everything alright?" she asks when she answers.

"Amelia, how are you?" Sophie asks before I can answer her.

She sighs. "Tired."

elia's Agreement

"Is everything okay there?" Sophie asks quietly. I sit back, letting the sisters talk before we get to the reason for the call.

"So far, yes. Beta Matthew has been great. Ga***a Caleb is the one I'm most worried about. But, so far, he's behaving."

"How about Calvin? Have you heard from him?" Sophie asks.

"I have. I haven't returned his calls though."

"Do you need anything from us?" Sophie asks.

"Sleep, the ability to shift, a mate who doesn't feel the need to abandon me," she says the last part bitterly. "Sorry, what can I do for you?"

Sophie turns and looks at me.

"Alpha Amelia, we wanted to talk to you about plans to attack Alpha Alaric."

She sighs in a way that's almost identical to Sophie's. "You're going to want to attack before I do. I was hoping to deliver my pup before we attacked his pack."

I tell her what Jaime told us about the Alphas rallying together. Sophie then tells her about Alpha Zahn's request and the timing of it coinciding with the news of the Alphas rallying together.

"Zahn is closer to Calvin than any of us," she says thoughtfully. I notice she says us, as if she's part of our group, not her mate's group. The ping of sadness I feel from Sophie lets me know she caught it too.

"I could ask Calvin, if you'd like," she says.

"That's not necessary. I intend to call him myself to see how he responds to us knowing about this planned attack. But it does mean that if we wait, it not only gives Alaric time to recover but also time to collect his forces, and possibly the aid of the other Alphas to retaliate."

Amelia sighs again. I know the weight of being an Alpha, I know the toll it takes. I can't imagine what it's like for her, as a pregnant female, having recently separated from her mate.

"I was hoping to be able to fight, to be able to participate in the battle, but I'm not sure that I can if we push it up. I'm not willing to risk my pup. Alaric has already taken too much of my family from me," she says sadly. I wrap my arms around Sophie, knowing she's feeling that same sadness, although I won't allow Sophie to fight, not when I know that Alaric and any of the other Alphas will go after her.

"I already told everyone that Hunter will fight and let me deliver the killing blow, Amelia. You and I could do it together," Sophie says.

"It's not the same, Soapy. You aren't an Alpha," Amelia says.

"But she is an Alpha wolf, just like you and just like me. If your pack was okay with me fighting the battle and capturing Alaric so Sophie can kill him, they should be okay with you doing the same, Amelia. We were planning to renew our alliance, correct?" I say, as Sophie turns and looks at me with hopeful eyes.

"Yes, that is correct," she says.

"It's not uncommon for packs to fight together in a war, and when that happens, they follow the Alpha closest to them. In this case, it would be me, or perhaps Dutton, if he joins us as well. Your pack would still see you and Sophie deliver the killing blow."

"How would that work? There is only one killing blow," Amelia says.

"Not true," Sophie says, and I smile behind her back, watching my mate take charge.

"When we killed Owen, Hunter captured him; held him and offered to let Brooklyn deliver the killing blow. She refused, but her mother, Leah, wanted to do it. She found her second chance mate, who is a warrior. He helped Leah rip out Owen's throat, but it was Brutus who severed his head from his body a moment later. We could do that, Amelia. I could do the soft tissue killing and you could sever the head. We'd both participate in the killing blow."

It's quiet on the other end of the line as Amelia thinks through what Sophie said. She starts to speak again, but I pull her against me, letting her give Amelia time to think.

“That could work,” Amelia finally says. “I really think that could work.”

“Let us talk to Zahn. If he says he’s truly coming to repair his relationship with his mate, then I want Alaric out of the picture, leaving only Aiden and Koden.”

“And Camden. I guarantee that he’ll cut bait and leave if we attack. I remember how much he wanted Nikki, even from a young age,” Amelia says.

“Three is still better than four,” I say.

“And our parents’ deaths will be avenged,” she says, in a tone that is more savage than anything I’ve ever heard from Amelia before.