

The One He Claimed Chapter 151

Chapter 151: Unexpected

Jocelyn

I'm so angry. So very angry that my life is what it is. Why couldn't I just die? Why is the Moon Goddess punishing me? What did I do that was so bad in my life that I deserved this?

Zahn didn't give me a choice about going to this pack. Like I want everyone in the world to see how broken I am, how incompetent I am that even throwing myself off a cliff to get away from this man didn't work. And yet, here I am.

When we arrive, I'll admit, I'm a bit surprised to see that it's not just the one Alpha and Luna, but several. And unlike most ranked couples that I've seen, none of these women seem fearful of their mates.

I was disappointed when I found out the legend, Sophie Meyers, the woman whose name I yelled when I jumped off the cliff, had been claimed by a mate. She'd been on the run for so long, had basically disappeared, that she'd almost become a martyr to those of us who were still on the run. I know I thought she was dead. But she had had the guts to do what the rest of us hadn't. She'd run and taken the chance of living on her own. And the Alphas were never able to find her. Until Alpha Hunter did, apparently.

And she doesn't even seem upset about it. If anything, she seems...happy. She's not trying to hide the baby bump she's sporting. Her Beta has one too, and so does one of the other Lunas.

Her Alpha surprised, me even more though. The vehemence of his response to me, his quick need to protect his mate, was beyond that of protecting his pup. I didn't do anything to make him think I would hurt his pup. Hell, I didn't do anything to make him think I'd hurt his Luna, and yet he dressed me down,

basically threatened to leave me to die in the woods, just for sneering at her.

And she had been the one to ask him to let my attitude go. Even after I showed my obvious disgust in her, she still tried to get him to let her help me. And that other Luna, an Alpha wolf if my weakened senses are correct, stood by her, strongly speaking out for Luna Sophie, and her mate hadn't said anything about it.

These people are f***g nuts.

But I was happy that they gave me the choice of not having Zahn with me. The man won't give me a moment to breathe. He's constantly in my space, in my face, trying to convince me that he's sorry for what he did.

F**k off, I say, and apparently, little Sophie Meyers agrees. I feel a bit smug that Zahn agreed to follow her rules thinking he wouldn't have to, and now, her Alpha, Alpha Hunter, is insisting that he do it. Yet another f**ing shock. Alpha Hunter stood up for his Luna to me and to Zahn. He said that SHE gets to make the decisions. I don't believe it. There's no way that any Alpha would defer to his Luna for anything. But I'll do what I said I would do, what that Alpha female, Nikki, said I should do. I'll reserve my judgement for now, especially if it gives me some space from Zahn.

When my entourage wheels me into the pack hospital, there's a young woman and a man waiting for me. The woman is obviously an omega, and she's wearing a mate mark. I can't be sure, but I think that the doctor is her mate.

"Dr. Caspian, Brooklyn, this is Luna Jocelyn," Luna Sophie says.

"Just Jocelyn," I say on instinct. I don't want to be known at Zahn's anything, least of all his mate and Luna.

"Jocelyn, I'm Dr. Caspian and this is Brooklyn. We'd like to run some tests on you, see how you're healing after your ordeal..." "My ordeal? You mean my failed attempt to kill myself?" I snap.

I hear a low growl behind me and turn to see Luna Sophie watching me. "My pack members are willing to help you, they will do whatever they can, and they will be respectful to you while they do so. I expect you to be just as respectful to them." It's a gentle correction, but a serious one.

"It's okay, Luna. I imagine that anyone who tries to take their own life has a lot of anger and hurt inside them. As Luna Sophie

if you said, we'll do our best to help you in any way we can, agree. Everything we offer is your choice. Here, you make the decisions," the doctor says.

"I doubt that. Sounds like Luna Sophie wants me to get seen," I say, looking at her. I've become accustomed to people doing whatever they want with me because I can't exactly stop them.

"No. It's your choice. If you don't want to be here, we'll turn around and go get you settled into a room. Kinsley has your options ready to discuss, if that's your choice."

I frown, surprised yet again, before looking back at the doctor and Brooklyn. "What can you do for me?"

"I won't know until we run some tests on you, things like xrays, blood work, and maybe other tests depending on what you tell us in your initial examination. But I can assure you that we'll talk to you about everything that we would like to do before we do it, get your agreement and discuss your results with you before developing a plan of action."

I look up at Sophie and nod. "Okay, I'll stay."

"Alright, then I'll pass her off to you two. Link me when she's ready if I'm not here," Sophie says.

The young woman, Brooklyn, comes to push the wheelchair.

"Luna Sophie," I call as she turns away.

"Yes, Luna Jocelyn." I wish she wouldn't insist on calling me that.

"Thank you."

"You're here so we can try to help you. That's all I want for you, Jocelyn. I hope you'll let me and my pack do what we can for you."

I nod again and Brooklyn wheels me into a room as Dr. Caspian holds the door open for us.

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Chapter 152: Meeting Brooklyn

Jocelyn

"I'm going to leave you and Brooklyn alone so that she can help you put on a hospital gown. Knowing what you've been through, Jocelyn, I'm guessing being naked in front of a man is not comfortable for you."

"Thank you," I say, surprised that he cares.

"I'll have Brooklyn ask the initial questions and then we can talk about what your options are and the tests that I'd like to run. How does that sound to you?"

"That sounds fine."

"One question before I leave, so I have an idea of what I'm up against. Is your wolf still present?" he asks me. It's one of the reasons I jumped off the cliff. My wolf, Cassidy, had gone silent after Zahn forced his mark on me. He's not our fated mate, and she hadn't wanted to submit to him.

"No."

He nods, handing Brooklyn a clipboard and kissing the side of her head before walking to the door. Well, I guess I was right about the mate part.

“That will make your healing more difficult and slower, but not impossible,” he says to me, before leaving and closing the door.

“Okay, let’s get you changed,” Brooklyn says, and she helps me to stand before helping me to get undressed. I don’t look at her. I don’t want to see her face when she looks at my distorted body.

“Your wolf could still come back,” she says. She’s obviously a sweet girl, soft spoken, but she has no idea what I’ve been through.

“I doubt that. She went silent when I was marked and mated.”

“That doesn’t mean she won’t return. Sometimes it takes time and healing on the human side,” she says.

“No offense, Brooklyn, but you’re an omega. What could you possibly know about a ranked member losing their wolf in a public claiming?” I ask her. I keep my voice soft, not because of Sophie’s warning, but because the girl is obviously sweet and innocent. The Beta in me wants to protect her.

She pulls back and frowns at me. “You don’t know who I am? What happened to me?”

I have no idea who she is or what happened to her, and I tell her So.

She huffs out a laugh. “I thought that would be better, meeting someone that didn’t know me or what happened to me. Now, I realize that for you to understand, I have to explain what happened.”

“Should I know you?” I ask her.

“Maybe not. You were unconscious when it happened, I believe, and then you’ve been recovering in your pack, so word may not have spread to you.”

She stops what she’s doing and looks away, as if remembering whatever happened to her. Her lips press tightly together, going white, before she begins.

“Alpha Owen decided he wanted me as his mate, but he said that since he was a ranked member that it had to be public. On my 18th birthday, he pulled me on to the stage, mating me in front of the entire pack. When he marked me, he threw me aside and said I wasn’t strong enough to be his Luna. Then he left my torn and bloodied body on the stage to die. My mother,” she chuckles. “I still don’t know how she did it, but she carried me back here all by herself. Alpha Hunter and Luna Sophie accepted us back, kept us safe, and refused to allow my father onto the pack lands. I received treatment and began healing. I lost my wolf that day, so yes, I understand exactly what happened to you.”

"Has your wolf returned?" I ask her, shocked at what happened to her. It's horrific.

"She has. Finding Cas, Dr. Caspian, had a lot to do with that. He's our fated mate. And he's so perfect."

"You let him mark you?" I ask, as she helps me onto the bed.

"Yes. He was so patient with me, took his time and let me be the one to decide when I was ready. And now, I'm so happy. Your story may not end the same, but just because something terrible happened to you, Jocelyn, it doesn't mean that it has to define who you are. You can change the story of your life, the direction your life will take. Here, in this pack, you'll be given that opportunity, if you choose to take it."

"So, Alpha Hunter and Luna Sophie are the real deal?" I ask her.

"Do you not know their story?"

"No."

"Oh, it's a true love story. I adore their story. Everyone does."

As she gets me settled into the bed, she tells me about Alpha Hunter claiming his Luna privately and bringing her home to the pack. She explains how he gave everyone twenty-four hours to decide if they were willing to live with a Luna who had been claimed privately and if not, they could leave. After that, if they challenged her, they would be killed.

"That's why I ended up leaving the pack. My father was friends with our old G**a and believed in the old ways. He didn't even try to protect me when Alpha Owen claimed me. He even held my mother back, not letting her come to me."

"Where is your father now?" I ask.

She looks me in the eye and there's a strength there that I didn't notice before.

"Dead. I killed him."

That shocks me.

"And Alpha Owen?"

"Also dead. Alpha Hunter brought him back from the council meeting after Luna Margot knocked him out for attacking Luna Sophie. He wanted Luna Sophie. Longer story about how he almost caught and claimed our Luna when she was on the run, but suffice it to say, he wanted her. Rather than killing Owen, he gave me the option to do it."

“And did you?”

“No, but my mother did,” she says, smiling.

“Your mother, who I’m assuming is also an omega, killed an Alpha?” I asked shocked. Even if the Alpha was being held, most omegas wouldn’t have the strength to behead an Alpha, especially an omega who lost their mate.

“Well, she and her second chance mate did. She ripped out his throat and Brutus severed his head from his body.”

“Your mother found her second chance mate? What is with this pack? Does everyone find their mate here?”

“This pack is special. After you’ve been here for a while, you’ll feel it. It’s impossible not to. At first, you won’t believe it, you’ll think it’s fake. Everyone who comes here seeking sanctuary does. But over time, you realize that it’s not just our Alpha and Luna, not just our Betas, it’s everyone, it’s everywhere you look. There is so much love, so much camaraderie in this pack. It’s a wonderful place to live. Our Alpha and Luna have created something very beautiful here.”

I settle back in the bed as Brooklyn begins asking me questions about my injuries and what treatment I’ve already received. While we talk, I think about what she’s said. She has no reason to lie and based on my experience in Zahn’s pack, the hospital nurses are the ones who know everything that is going on in the pack. So, if this woman, who has arguably been through more trauma than I have, has healed and is doing so well, perhaps, over time, I can heal too.

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Chapter 153: Zahn’s Hostility

Hunter

I watch as Zahn gets himself under control while Sophie, Nikki, Allison, and Kinsley walk away with Jocelyn.

He turns and glares at me. “I didn’t think you were serious about letting her keep me from my mate.”

“You asked for our help. You’re getting it. Not only was I serious about letting Sophie do this her way, but I was also serious. about keeping you under 24-hour surveillance,” I say as Brutus and William, another large warrior, walk up. “Sophie is in charge of your mate now. She gets to say if and when you see Jocelyn. Since it doesn’t look like Jocelyn wants to see you, I’d suggest that you get settled in. I hope you brought your computer with you so you can get some work done.”

“How is she supposed to fix my mate bond if we aren’t together?” he growls.

“Neither of us ever said we were going to fix your mate bond, Alpha Zahn. We said we would try to help you and right now, the person who needs help, is Jocelyn. If you don’t like it, you’re welcome to leave.”

“I’m not leaving without my mate,” he growls,

“Then I guess you’d better get settled in like Hunter suggested,” Kayce says.

“What are you two doing here anyway?” he growls at them.

“Visiting friends. You should try it sometime, if you have any, that is,” Robin says, taunting him.

“Let’s get one thing straight, Alpha Zahn. I don’t trust you. I don’t trust your motives for being here. But my mate wants to try and help yours, so you’re here. That can change at any time. If you truly want to help your mate, which is what you said you wanted, then I suggest you let Sophie work her magic. That doesn’t mean that Jocelyn will ever accept you as her mate, but it does mean that your mate will heal, physically and mentally. What happens after that is still unknown,” I say, standing my ground against Zahn. I guess he really had no idea how much Sophie’s decisions matter in this pack. Obviously, he’s not given Jocelyn any ability to make her own decisions while she’s been with him.

“Don’t even think about trying to keep my mate from me. I came here in good faith, for your assistance. Not so you could steal my mate.”

“I have a mate. I don’t need yours,” I say.

“And let’s be honest, Alpha Zahn, it’s not like Luna Jocelyn is exactly trying to stay with you. You need Hunter’s help because your ways aren’t working. Why don’t you try accepting his way, Sophie’s way, before you started acting all high and mighty about your first fifteen minutes in this pack. We all saw your mate’s disdain for you. If you’d have bothered to pay attention, you would have realized that you didn’t see any of that from our mates,” Lucas says.

“Our mates are here to visit with their friends, but they also came to help your mate, Alpha Zahn. You have three incredible Lunas and a Beta willing to give their time to work with your mate, who obviously still has a lot of trauma. Do yourself and your mate a favor, sit back, relax, and let our mates help yours,” Kayce adds.

I watch as Alpha Zahn heaves in air, trying to gain control of his anger. When his fists finally unclench, I know he’s at least somewhat in control.

“Fine. Show me to my room, please.”

He turns and goes to the car, pulling bags out of the trunk. I go to help him, grabbing several bags, crutches, and a cane. When we get into the packhouse, I stop.

"You can leave Luna Jocelyn's things here by the door. I'm not sure where she's staying yet."

"She's staying with me," he growls, his fists clenching again.

"That's up to her, not you," I tell him.

"I believe my mate has come up with several options for Luna Jocelyn, one of which is to share a room with you. But as Alpha Hunter says, it will be up to your mate to decide," Lucas says.

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"Perhaps you give your mates too much authority," he snaps.

"Perhaps you don't give yours enough," I snap back.

"A woman should have no authority to make decisions..."

"Tell that to Alpha Amelia. She's taken over her father's pack. Did you hear?" Robin asks, still taunting.

"And did you hear that she and her allies defeated and killed Alpha Alaric for killing her parents?" Kayce adds, leaving out the part about me being one of her allies.

I watch Zahn's eyes widen in surprise. "A woman Alpha? Who would ever ally themselves with a she-wolf?"

"I would," all three of us say at once.

"As a matter of fact, I had planned to contact Alpha Amelia while I was here to see if it would be possible for me and my mate to sign an alliance agreement with her," Robin says, smiling an unpleasant smile. He's enjoying provoking Zahn. I have to admit, the man is a disgrace to Alphas.

"You AND your mate?" Zahn sneers. "What kind of Alpha are you?"

"The kind that loves and respects his mate, who is also an Alpha female and who, I'd wager, could kick your a*** in a fight if she wasn't carrying my pup," Robin says, stepping forward. Kayce puts a hand on his chest.

"Perhaps you should go to your room, Alpha Zahn. We've given you a lot to think about," I say, trying to diffuse a fight. I'm not opposed to beating the s**t out of Zahn, but

I'd rather it wasn't within minutes of his arrival. I really do want to give him a chance to see the changes that I know will happen in Jocelyn. Maybe if he sees it firsthand, he'll realize that the old ways, his ways, are wrong.

Zahn turns to head toward the side of the house for ranked members.

"Alpha Zahn, I've put you on the warrior's side of the packhouse," I say.

He stops and turns to glare at me. "And why is that?"

"First, I don't trust you around my mate, my Beta's mate, or my G**a. Second, your mate will be given the option to stay on the Alpha floor. If she agrees to be placed in a room with you, then we'll consider moving you to a more comfortable location," I say with no apology.

"Your Ga**a?" he asks.

I smile, holding myself back from taunting him like Robin has been. "I promoted a female to my Ga**a position. Her mate is the son of a Lead Warrior and once she comes of age and they mate, I know they'll be a powerful G**a couple." I don't mention anything about their possible promotions because Zahn knows nothing of us planning to take over the other packs.

He scoffs. "A woman AND a pup? I thought you were supposed to be some strong, powerful Alpha. Sounds to me like you're weakening your pack every day. No wonder Joshua attacked you."

I step up, getting in his face. "Joshua is dead. Anyone who comes for me or my pack, will end up with the same fate. You may think that my ways are weakening this pack, but pay attention, look around you. My pack is happy, strong, and unified. Every member of this pack would die for another. Every one of them would lay down their lives for me and for Sophie. And just like I told Jocelyn, I very much doubt that you can say the same."

I hold his gaze until he looks away. "Where is my room?"

"This way, Alpha," Brutus says, stepping up and gesturing towards the warrior's side of the packhouse.

Kayce and Robin come to stand on either side of me as Zahn is lead away.

"You sure this is a good idea?" Kayce asks me.

"No. But I'm taking precautions."

"Maybe Jocelyn will decide she wants to leave, and you can boot them both off your pack lands," Robin says.

"I could only be so lucky."

We've just turned around to head to my office when our mates come through the front of the packhouse.

"How did it go?" I ask Sophie, opening my arms for her.

She walks in without hesitation, and I wrap my arms around her. "She's not going to make it easy."

"If it was easy, she wouldn't need you," I tell her, holding her as I go through her mind, feeling her worry that she won't be able to help Jocelyn.

'You can only do so much, Soph. She has to be willing to help herself too,' I say in the mind link.

'I know,' she replies, but it doesn't ease her worry. Not even a little.

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Chapter 154: Choices

Zahn

I'm furious. I've never, ever known an Alpha who defers to his mate. For anything. I thought for sure that Hunter was just letting Sophie feel like she was in control of the situation. However, I was sorely mistaken. How dare they think they can keep me from my mate. She's MY mate!

Adding insult to injury, I wasn't even given a guestroom fitting my station as an Alpha? And they are giving Jocelyn the choice to see me or not? No f**king way. I'll never see her again!

'I'm pretty sure that's what she's hoping for,' Kortan, my wolf, says in my head.

'Can't you do something?' I ask him, not for the first time.

'What is it you want me to do? She hates both of us. Even Cassidy hates us. She wanted her mate. We weren't her fated mates. I don't know that she'll ever forgive us.'

'We need a Luna,' I grumble.

'Maybe that's your problem,' he says.

'What's that?'

'You want a Luna. You don't care if it's Jocelyn or not. She does.'

'We need an heir, Kortan.'

"Short of raping her, Zahn, we're not getting one. Maybe we should accept her rejection and let her go," he says sadly.

Not for the first time, I think back to my mate, my fated mate, Caralyn. Why did she have to kill herself?

Kortan whines in my head. I loved that woman, loved her with everything in me. But she never returned that love, never trusted me to be a good mate to her.

I can feel Kortan questioning the claiming process again. The public claimings. They were standard, everyone did them, it was the law. But my mate wasn't the only one to kill herself after being claimed. Alpha Ezra's mate had killed herself too. And there were others, others who lost their mates and either went into isolation or began hunting for a new mate, like I did.

'We should have waited for our second chance mate,' Kortan says. This is an old argument; one we've had many times.

'We didn't and now we have a mate. We need her to accept us.'

'Perhaps the problem isn't hers as much as it is yours,' Kortan says dryly.

'What are you talking about?'

'Perhaps rather than expecting her to accept us as we are, we need to consider changing our ways.'

'Why would we do that?' I ask.

I get an image of the three Lunas, standing next to their mates when we arrived. All of them had been touching their mates in one way or another. The women hadn't flinched away or snarled at them. And I'm pretty sure that all three of them were pregnant. They had seemed...happy. I can feel Kortan's desire to make his mate happy. We care about Jocelyn. Not like we did for Caralyn, but I don't want her to die. She's a Beta, she'd be a good Luna, but I'll admit my own flash of jealousy at how the three women interacted with their mates. I want that. I want my mate to seek me out, to seek out my affection, my touch. I wish I'd had it with Caralyn, but now, I need to figure out how to get it with Jocelyn.

'Then we should do what the other Alphas suggested. We may not like their ways, we may not agree with them, but they have what we want. I think we need to see how it is that they achieved that,' Kortan says.

I lay down on the bed, staring at the ceiling. Kortan is right. I don't agree with their ways, but I can't disagree that they have what I want. They have Lunas who obviously love them, and they have their pups in their mates' bellies. All of these Alphas will have heirs long before I do, possibly before my mate even allows me to touch her.

Jocelyn POV

"Well, Jocelyn. I have good news and bad news," Dr. Caspian says.

"Good news first."

"Your blood work looks good. You're healthy, although I'm going to recommend some vitamins for some deficiencies you have. You don't have any lingering infections, although it seems that you had some at one point, is that correct?"

"I think so. I was unconscious for a long time."

"That makes sense. Now for the bad news," he says and puts up several x-ray images. "Whoever set your bones either didn't know what they were doing, or they were overwhelmed with the large number of bones that were broken. Without your wolf, it would have been up to the doctor to set the bones properly and in a lot of instances, that didn't happen," he says.

"Is that why I can't walk, and I still have pain all the time?"

"Yes. I don't think there's any way to remove the scarring. When your wolf returns, because I think she will, she can heal the worst of it, but you'll always have scars from your... incident."

"Let's call it what it is, doctor. I tried to kill myself. It was a suicide attempt."

"Right," he says. "So, what I can do, if you agree, is to sedate you and begin to slowly rebreak and reset your bones. I say slowly because without your wolf, the healing process will be long and slow. You'll have to heal at a human pace and for the bones to set, it will take a couple of months. I would do it in phases, left leg, right leg, left arm, right arm, and in that way, I can

immobilize one part of your body, and you can heal before we move to the next."

"Months?" I ask, having attached to the biggest concern of everything he said.

“Until your wolf returns, yes. Now, my understanding is that you have the option to remain here as long as you’d like. If you decide to stay, I’d guess that your wolf will return more quickly.”

“Why do you say that?” I ask him.

He shrugs. “This pack is special.”

“That’s what your mate said.” I watch as a huge smile spreads across his face.

“Brooklyn would know.”

I look back at the x-rays. You don’t have to be a doctor to see what a mess my body is.

“When could we start?” I ask. If there’s an option to get my body back to something closer to normal, I want to do it.

“If you agree, we could start tomorrow. You can choose which leg, but based on your injuries, it looks like you landed on your right side. There’s more damage there,” he says, drawing a line with his finger from the hip bone to the toes. “I would suggest starting there.”

“What about my ribs,” I ask. Breathing is still painful, and any twisting is limited.

“We could start there, if you choose to, but that recovery will be more difficult. My suggestion would be to wait and see if your wolf returns. A three-day recovery is a lot easier than a two- month recovery if I have to rebreak your ribcage.”

“Okay, let’s do it,” I say.

“I’ll get everything prepared. I’ll let Luna Sophie know that you’ll be here for a couple of days,” he stops, focusing on me. “I understand you may not want to see your mate. If that’s the case, you may want to speak with Luna Sophie about having guards placed on you. In my experience, Alphas don’t appreciate being told what they can’t do and if you’re his mate and you’re in pain, he’ll feel that, and his natural instinct will be to come here to protect you.”

I scoff at that. “Protect me. Yeah, that’s what he’ll do.”

“No matter the relationship between the two of you, you wear his mark. He’ll feel some level of protectiveness over you.”

I doubt that, but I don’t say anything. I have to admit that this doctor seems to know what he’s talking about. I hope he’s right and can heal me.

“Now, there is one thing you should know. I am leaving soon to go to Alpha Dutton and Alpha Amelia’s packs. Alpha Amelia is due to have her pup in a few weeks and my understanding is that they don’t have a good obstetrician there. Therefore, I’ll be gone for a few weeks until she delivers. I will leave you in the care of Dr. Felicity here, but mostly that will be for any type of emergency. I won’t leave until I’ve released you from the hospital and when I return, I’ll resume your care and treatment.”

“Alpha Amelia?”

He smiles. “Yes. She took over her father’s pack after...well, Alpha Alaric killed her father, and her mother followed him to the Moon Goddess’ realm.”

“A female Alpha?” I ask, shocked. “I can’t imagine that anyone is supporting her.”

“You’d be wrong. Alpha Hunter and Alpha Dutton both signed alliance agreements with her and both attacked Alpha Alaric with her.”

I frown. “They agreed to go to war with a female Alpha who is pregnant? What did her mate say?” I don’t usually gossip, but truly, this is unheard of.

“I’m not sure, I wasn’t there,” Dr. Caspian says, but I get the impression that he does know, he’s just not willing to say. I like him more because of that.

There’s a knock at the door. “Come in, Brooklyn,” Dr. Caspian says, smiling as his focus moves to his mate.

“Jocelyn, Luna Sophie is here.”

Dr. Caspian looks at me. “She needs to know what our plan is. Are you comfortable talking to her about that or would you rather I do it privately?”

I shrug. “It’s fine.”

Sophie walks in tentatively, a small smile on her face, glancing at Dr. Caspian before looking at me.

“So? Good news I hope?”

I nod at my x-rays that are still on the wall. She turns and sucks in air at what she sees.

“Apparently, I’m humpty-dumpty after he had his great fall. But Dr. Caspian says he’s going to bring all the king’s horses and all the king’s men and try to put me back together again.”

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Chapter 155: Different

Sophie

Jocelyn's x-rays look like a child tried to make a stick person using real sticks, except there was no way to really put them together, so they just poke out at all angles, in the basic image of a human body. I can't imagine how much pain this woman is in. No wonder she's so snarky. I would be too if I were living with this kind of pain, especially with no wolf to help ease it.

"So, you have a plan. Good. You're comfortable with moving forward?" I ask, confirming that she's making the decision. I don't want her to think that she is being coerced in any way.

"Yeah. If it helps to alleviate even some of my pain or gives me a chance to walk with less pain, then I'm willing to try," she says.

"Okay, we'll have you here first thing in the morning. For tonight, what are your thoughts about where you'd like to stay? Your choices are with Alpha Zahn, in the packhouse in a separate room from Alpha Zahn, or in what my pack members call the Survivor's Center." I make sure to call him Alpha Zahn, not her mate, since I know she doesn't consider him her mate.

"What's the survivor center?"

I explain about the surviving mates wanting to be away from the noise of the packhouse.

"That sounds...peaceful, actually. I think I'd like to stay there, but I probably should tell Zahn what my plan is."

"That's up to you," I tell her, reinforcing that she's in control of her decisions.

"Let's do that first, and then I'd like to rest."

"Okay," I say, getting her wheelchair and helping her to sit.

As we walk, I point in the direction of the survivor center, letting her know where she'll be staying in relation to the hospital. "It's actually closer to the pack hospital than it is to the packhouse. We didn't do that intentionally, but it works, since our surviving mates tend to struggle with healing after losing their mates and need to come see the medical staff more often than others."

"How did you get them to survive?" she asks.

“Brooklyn. That young woman is amazing. She realized that the pups who lost a parent and had another one lying in the hospital were struggling and she brought them in so they could be with their surviving parent, usually the mother. It helped the pups, and it seems to have pulled several mothers back into consciousness. I probably don’t have to tell you that those women are struggling a lot with their loss. Don’t be surprised if you come across them crying. It’s still raw and hard for them. The pups too, although Kinsley and I are working to set up something where they can spend some time with Hunter and Lucas, so they still have a positive male role model in their lives and have someone to come to if they need or want to talk.”

“That’s different.”

“We do things differently around here,” I say.

“I’m starting to realize that,” she says as we walk up to the packhouse. I take her through a side door, since I can’t up the stairs in the front and then go in search of my mate.

He must sense me searching for him because he comes looking for me, a big smile on his face. Then he looks at Jocelyn.

“Luna Jocelyn, I have your bags here. Have you decided where you want to stay?”

“Yes, Alpha, Luna Sophie offered me a place at the survivor center.”

“I’ll have your things sent over there.”

“She wants to speak to Alpha Zahn first, Hunter,” I tell him.

“Did you want to use your office, Soph?” he asks me.

“That’s what I was thinking. It would give them some privacy.”

“I’ll have Brutus bring him down,” he says, leaning over to kiss me. When he pulls back, he smiles at me, stroking my cheek.

“You’re wanting to play hide and seek with your son, aren’t you?” I ask him, feeling his desire to touch my stomach.

“Yes,” he says, smiling back.

I chuckle. “After I get Jocelyn settled, I’ll come sit in your lap so you and our son can play.”

“Perfect,” he growls low and possessively, making my body shiver. He kisses me again, before stepping aside.

I push Jocelyn towards my office. "You really do love him, don't you?" she asks me.

"With every ounce of my being," I say without hesitation. "He's the most incredible man I've ever met. I know this may not make sense to you, but I'm proud to be Hunter's mate."

"I don't understand it, you're right, but I'd have to be blind not to see the love between you two. He obviously adores you."

I smile. "Yes, he does. Now where would you like to sit? Do you want to stay in the wheelchair or move to a chair?"

"I'll stay in the wheelchair. I don't intend to take too long. But... uh, would you stay with me while I tell him?"

"If that's what you want."

"It is. You seem determined to let me make my own decisions and I'm pretty sure he's determined that I'll do what he wants me to do."

"I'm happy to stay. He doesn't get to make decisions for you in this pack, nor will he be allowed to bully you into doing what he wants you to do."

She nods, looking like she's starting to believe me about being in charge of her decisions.

"Where are your friends?" she asks.

I smile. "They're testing out our new G***a male. He was someone I met when I was on the run, a lone wolf. His father was a Lead Warrior and apparently a very good one. He's a natural leader and both Robin and Kayce wanted to test how good he is. Nikki and Allison never miss a chance to tease their mates or cheer them on. I think this time they'll be teasing them. Jaime really is that good."

"Ga**a male? Isn't he just the Ga**a?"

"No. Our G*a is his mate, Penny."

She stares at me in astonishment. "Your **a is a female?"

"Yes."

"And your sister is an Alpha?"

"Yes."

She frowns again. "Who are you people?"

I shrug. "I'm just Sophie Reynolds. Hunter says I've always been stronger than I realized. I say I'm stronger because I'm mated to him, and he gives me the foundation to be strong. Maybe it's both. Maybe we're an example of what a good mate bond can look like. I know that both Robin and Nikki and Kayce and Allison are striving to create something similar in their packs to what we have in ours. But Hunter stood for me, stood to make the changes that we desperately needed in our society, and because of that, our relationship and our pack continues to strengthen."

"Not everyone agrees with those changes," she says.

"No, they don't, but all we can do is continue to push change forward and hopefully, in our pup's generation, things will be different."

The One He Claimed Chapter 156

Chapter 156: Telling Zahn

Sophie

There's a knock at the door and I look up to see Brutus. He steps aside and Zahn rushes in, crouching in front of her.

"Jocelyn. Are you alright? What did the doctor say?"

"Alpha Zahn, why don't you have a seat," I say, knowing that Jocelyn is already tired, and he blew into the room like a tornado.

He stands and turns to me. "Do you mind giving us some privacy?"

"I've been asked to stay, so I'll be staying. Why don't you have a seat, Alpha?" I suggest again.

He growls, a low, irritated growl, before complying. I feel Hunter's presence strengthen in my mind. If Zahn isn't careful, my mate will come flying through that door. I'm hoping it doesn't come to that. Jocelyn needs peace, not arguing and fighting.

Zahn collects himself and sits, reaching out to take Jocelyn's hand. She quickly pulls it away.

"I just wanted to let you know what's going to be happening, Zahn. Dr. Caspian is going to do surgery on me tomorrow. Depending on if or when Cassidy returns, my recovery time will be very slow. He can't do everything at once, so, he'll be focusing on one part of my body at a time. Starting tomorrow, he's going to rebreak and reset the bones from my right hip to my right toes. Without Cassidy, it will take me two months to heal before I can have the next surgery."

"Two months! No way, Jocelyn. You're not ing to be here, recovering, for two months! I can't be away from the pack that long," he says.

"I understand. I will stay....."

"NO!" he jumps to his feet, his fists clenched. "I will not allow you to stay here while I return home."

"Alpha Zahn, please have a seat," I say, keeping my voice calm.

"You stay out of this," he snarls at me and that's all it takes. One moment, he's standing in front of Jocelyn and I, snarling, and the next he's against the wall being held off his feet by the throat. Brutus and William come in and flank the doorway.

"Never threaten my mate," Hunter snarls in his face.

"Get off me," Zahn snarls back.

"Let's go," I say to Jocelyn, knowing that my office is probably about to be destroyed. However, before I get outside the office door, Robin and Kayce step in, nodding to me as we pass. Nikki and Allison are outside and fall into step with us.

"Well, whatever you said sure did pi** him off," Nikki says. "Where are we headed?"

"The Survivor's Center," I tell her, hearing something smash in my office.

"Do you have anything really important in there?" Allison asks me.

"No, but hopefully Hunter will get him outside pretty quickly."

"I'm sure the guys will help. Your mate won't be looking too pretty for a couple of days," Nikki says to Jocelyn.

"He's not my mate. Not by choice, anyway," Jocelyn says.

I see several warriors jogging to the back of the packhouse and I know that Hunter got Zahn outside. I'm guessing they're going to punch it out.

"Are you worried about your mate?" Jocelyn asks, turning to look up at me.

I smile as Nikki and Allison snort.

"No. Hunter is very strong."

"So, is Zahn. He's an Alpha, too."

"Trust me, he isn't as strong as Alpha Hunter. All three of our mates train every day. I didn't realize it until I was mated to Robin, but now I can see the differences in Alphas who train regularly and those who don't. Alpha Zahn doesn't train daily, does he?" Nikki asks.

"No, he doesn't. A couple times a week, maybe."

"Trust us, it will be no contest. Hunter will win that fight. Easily," Allison says.

It makes me proud that my friends see what a great Alpha Hunter is. I mean, I see it in their mates, but it's nice to know that others see it in mine too.

"This is a nice area, Sophie. I don't remember it being like this when we were here," Nikki says

"Did we just not come over this way?" Allise take looking around

"No, when Leah and Brooklyn came back, they wanted a place away from the packhouse, but I wanted to make sure that we could keep them as safe as possible, so we created this little walkway. Now that the others have moved out here, it gets more foot traffic and, well, since those pups need as much happiness in their lives as possible, we've planted little flowering bushes and some stone benches for people to have some quiet space. It's why Kinsley is talking to the group about starting a garden. I think it will be a nice place to plant not only vegetables but also some flowers and it will give them something that they can do to help but may also be therapeutic for them as well. I'm sure they'd appreciate your help too, Jocelyn, if you want to participate while you recover," I tell her.

She jerks and looks up at me. "I don't know anything about gardening."

Allison shrugs. "You can still dig holes, get your fingers in the dirt, plant some seeds, and cover them up. Then, eventually, you can prune the plants as they grow. We have a small garden in our pack and a lot of our pack members enjoy the peacefulness of gardening. I've been thinking of expanding it so more of the pack can participate," Allison says.

"I love that idea. I need a garden in my pack too, Alli. Will you come visit, help me find a spot, and give me some ideas on how to get started?" Nikki asks her.

*I'd love to!"

"We may need your help while you're are too." I tell her as Kinsley walks up.

"Good afternoon, Luna Jocelyn. We have your room ready, and some warriors already brought your things."

“Thank you.” Jocelyn says, pushing herself to stand. She carefully turns, using the wheelchair to keep herself steady.

“Truly, thank you. I didn’t know what to expect when I got here. but you’ve been nothing but kind to me. I’ve been given more freedom today than I’ve had in a very long time. I’m not sure how I’ll ever be able to repay you, but I’m truly thankful.”

“You can repay us by letting yourself heal. Take all the time you need, relax, regenerate, find yourself again, Jocelyn. It truly is all that we want for you, I tell her.

She nods and turns back, her host, Sandy, bringing out her crutches and cane. Jocelyn takes the cane and slowly begins making her way inside.

As I watch, she stops, lifting her head to the sky and taking a deep breath of air.

Nikki nudges me, leaning over to whisper in my ear. “Your magic touch is already working.”

The One He Claimed Chapter 157

Chapter 157: Pack’s Response

Hunter

No one, and I mean NO ONE, threatens my mate. I knew Robin and Kayce would back me and I should have foreseen it, but I didn’t, probably because I was furious with Zahn for making any sort of aggressive move toward Sophie. But the entire pack rallied to protect her. Word spread fast that Zahn had threatened Sophie, and it wasn’t long after I got him outside and started whaling on him that nearly every member of the pack surrounded us.

Robin and Kayce pulled me off of him before I could kill him. By the time they did, his face was a bloodied and bruised mess. I can’t see his ribcage, but I know I heard several c**ks as I punched his ribs, breaking them. His wolf won’t be healing him any time soon.

I stood over him, panting with my rage. My knuckles are bl**dy, but Shaw is already healing me. He’d been snarling in my head, wanting to shift and rip Zahn’s throat out for snarling at Sophie.

“Never, ever, threaten my mate again,” I snarl at him, pulling away from Robin and Kayce. They let me go but stay close.

Zahn sits up slowly, wiping blood from his lip as he looks around.

"You heard our Alpha. No one threatens our Luna," a warrior says. It's only then that I see the pack surrounding us.

"No one hurts our Luna," another warrior says.

"No one lays a finger on our Luna, or we will kill them," another warrior growls.

"I didn't touch your Luna," Zahn growls. Seriously, the man doesn't know when to shut up.

"But you did snarl at my mate. It was a threat, and you know it. Do it again Zahn, and I won't be the worst of your problems. You see this pack? They are here because they love their Luna. I didn't call them, they heard what you did, and they came to rip you apart. I would suggest that you think very hard about your reasons for being here and what you hope to accomplish while you're here. Because if you threaten Sophie again, you won't be leaving this pack. Ever," I snarl, turning to walk away. "Get him out of my sight."

Almost as one, the pack moves forward. I don't know or care what they intend to do with Zahn. I just know that I need to check on Sophie. She'd stayed out of my head during the fight, and I was glad. I needed to focus on not killing Zahn, not yet anyway. He's been warned and I meant what I said. If he threatens my mate again, I'll kill him. Or maybe I'll just toss him to the pack and let them rip him to shreds.

"That was impressive," Kayce says, falling into step beside me and looking back over his shoulder at the pack.

"Which part? The part where Hunter went nearly feral and almost killed Zahn or the part where the pack showed up in force?" Robin asks.

"Both. But since I understand the nearly feral part, I was referring to the pack. You really didn't call them, Hunter?"

"I did not," I say, still seething. I need to find Sophie.

"Hey," Robin says, putting his hand on my arm. It's instinctual. I'm still furious, so I whip around and snarl at him.

"Easy, Hunter," he says, raising his hands. "I'm your friend. I was just going to suggest washing your hands before you go find Sophie. You don't want her worrying about you," he says, and I look down at my hands that are covered in blood.

"Sorry," I say, frowning.

"Don't be. I've gone nearly feral at the thought of Camden still being out there and wanting my mate. It's not the same kind of threat, but it's a threat nonetheless."

“Thank you both, for pulling me off of him. I don’t want to go to war with another pack if I can help it. But if he does it again...”

“You have witnesses, lots of them, that he was warned,” Kayce says.

I nod, walking into the nearly empty packhouse.

“Alpha, our Luna was headed to the Survivor’s Center,” one of my omegas says to me.

“Thank you, Eliza. I’m going to wash up and go find her.”

“She seemed okay, Alpha. Not injured at all,” she says, trying to comfort me, but obviously worried about her Luna.

I stop, and smile at her. “Alpha Zahn did not lay a hand on her, otherwise, he’d be dead. I’m sure she’s okay, but after I wash up, I’ll make sure of it.”

That makes her smile. “Thank you, Alpha,” she says, as if I’m doing her a big favor by checking on my mate. And maybe I am. Our pack obviously adores Sophie.

I wash my hands while Robin and Kayce wait patiently to join me. Their mates are with mine. As I step back out, I see a large group of warriors dragging Zahn back to his room.

“I can walk,” he growls. I hear the thump of a fist punching into flesh and then the air whooshing out of Zahn’s mouth. Obviously, my warriors aren’t putting up with his s** anymore either.

I lead Robin and Kayce down the trail that Sophie created to the Survivor Center. It’s a nice, calm space and I can feel my mind starting to relax even before I see my mate and her friends coming our way.

Her smile does the rest, and I feel the tight band that was squeezing my heart let go as the world fades away and all that’s left is Sophie.

I walk up to her, pulling her into my arms. “Are you okay?”

“Of course I am, Hunter. You made sure of it. Are you okay?” she asks, wrapping her arms around me. Our son is keeping me from pressing her as tightly as I’d like, but since I can feel him moving around, I don’t mind.

“I’m better now,” I say, not letting her go. I bury my face in her hair and take deep breaths of her orchid scent.

“We need to get Sophie a magic wand,” Nikki says, bringing me back to reality.

“Yeah, with all that pixie dust she’s spreading around, she needs one,” Allison says.

I pull back and smile down at my mate. “Pixie dust?”

“Jocelyn thanked Sophie for helping her,” Nikki says, and I raise an eyebrow.

“Even by your typical standards, that’s fast, Sophie.”

She shrugs, not taking the credit she deserves for being the incredible woman she is.

“She said we’ve given her the freedom that she’s been wanting and missing. How’s Zahn?”

“Alive,” I growl.

“You should have seen it, Nikki,” Robin says.

“What did I miss?” she asks as if it’s a big deal that Robin got to see something she didn’t. Their relationship back home must be a constant competition. A fun one, I’m sure, but constant. I’m glad that’s not the relationship I have with Sophie. I prefer to have open love to open competition between us.

“The entire pack showed up, ready to take out Alpha Zahn,” he tells her.

“What?” Sophie asks, looking up at me.

Inod. “They came on their own and word spread FAST. No one messes with this pack’s Luna. They basically threatened Zahn that if he so much as looks at you wrong again, they’ll tear him apart,” I say, stroking her cheek, once again so proud that I’m mated to this perfect woman.

The One He Claimed Chapter 158

Chapter 158: Zahn’s Request

Hunter

“Whoa! **n Sophie. Could you set the bar a little lower? I have to up my game back home,” Allison teases.

“I doubt that, my love. I’m quite sure the entire pack would rally behind you if someone threatened you,” Kayce assures her.

“I don’t know…” she says, but Kayce pulls her to him, kissing the top of her head.

“I do.”

Nikki turns to Robin.

“Absolutely,” he says, answering her unasked question. “The pack would support and protect you in an instant. It’s the only thing that helps me to sleep at night with Camden still out there.”

“He’ll never take me from you,” she purrs at him.

“I’ll kill him if he tries,” he growls.

“So, Jocelyn is settled for the night?” I ask Sophie.

“She is. I think she’ll enjoy the peacefulness here and Allison is going to help us get the garden started before they head back home,” she says.

“I guess I know what we’re doing tomorrow,” Kayce says drolly.

Allison smacks his arm good-naturedly. “We can do it, Kayce.”

“You’re pregnant, Allison. You’re not going to be shoveling dirt and moving heavy plots of grass. We can help,” he says, grabbing her hand and kissing it.

I look at Sophie, raising an eyebrow. I don’t want her digging holes in her condition either.

“I know. I’m not sure I could dig up anything anyway with little Hunt in the way,” she says.

“That’s my boy, keeping his momma safe,” I say, putting my hand against her stomach and feeling my son respond immediately.

The rest of the evening was much more relaxed. Zahn stayed in his room, and I had dinner sent up to him. I’m not sure if he ate or not and I don’t care.

The next morning, however, he surprised me by being up early. He’s still a mess, his wolf not being able to heal all of the bruises on his face or the cuts on his lips. I’m sure his wolf is focusing is on his ribcage which he’s still holding as if he’s in pain.

“I want to see Jocelyn. I know she’s going in for surgery today.” He looks down, his lips pressing together. “I want to ask her if I can stay in the hospital in case something happens.”

Well, maybe me pummeling him into the ground yesterday finally made something connect in his brain.

“Sophie has already gone to get her. We can meet them outside the hospital, if you’d like.”

“Yes, thank you,” he says, and I know this must be very hard for him. He’s an arrogant Alpha and deferring to his mate’s choices and thanking me for allowing him to speak to her is a lot for him.

I lead him to the pack hospital and it’s only a few moments before I hear Sophie and Jocelyn talking as they head this way.

“It was the best night’s sleep I can remember having in a long time, Luna Sophie. I think your pack is right. There is something special about this pack.”

“The pack members make it special,” Sophie says, once again not taking credit for her role in our pack.

“That’s true, but it’s the leaders who set that expectation, wouldn’t you agree?” Jocelyn asks.

“Yes, Hunter is a great Alpha. The pack adores him,” she says, making me smile.

“Sophie, do you not know how to take a compliment? I’m talking about you,” Jocelyn says, sounding a bit aggravated that Sophie isn’t getting her point. “The pack adores you, Sophie. They may adore your mate as well, I’m not sure. But I know they adore you. It didn’t take me any time to realize that.”

Their conversation cuts off quickly when they emerge from the trees and see me and Zahn standing there. I nearly didn’t see the softness on Jocelyn’s face before she shut it down, her face going hard when she sees Zahn. She looks surprised at the state her mate is in.

Sophie looks at Zahn and then at me with a question on her face. However, she doesn’t stop, trusting me to keep things civil.

“Jocelyn, I’ve come to ask your permission to be here during your surgery. I’m your mate, and I want to be here for you, in case something happens, but also just so you aren’t alone when you wake up.”

“I won’t be alone. Lunas Sophie, Nikki, and Allison have all agreed to take turns sitting in my room during my recovery.”

Zahn’s eyes flash to Sophie, and he nods but for once, he doesn’t say anything snarky. I’m not sure if he’s finally figuring things out, or if he sees what I’m seeing. The pack is starting to congregate around Sophie. They’re protecting their Luna from what they perceive as a threat.

“While I appreciate their attention and concern, I am your mate, Jocelyn. I would like to be there,” he says.

She looks thoughtful for a moment then turns to Sophie. “What happens if he tries to interfere?”

“He’ll be removed from the hospital.”

Jocelyn looks thoughtful for a moment. “I’m not su. I want you in my room, but I can’t keep you out of the hospital,” she says.

“Actually, you can,” Zahn grits out, and I watch his hands clench before he forces himself to relax again. “It’s apparently up to you if I can be here at all.”

Jocelyn looks at me, her face showing her surprise. I nod, letting her know that the decision is hers.

“If you want to be in the hospital, that’s fine. But I don’t trust you alone in my room with me.”

“Can I be in the room if someone else is with me?” he asks.

Jocelyn looks up at Sophie. “That’s up to you,” Sophie tells her.

“If the Lunas are willing to have you in the room with them, that’ s fine,” Jocelyn says.

“A Luna and two warriors or a Luna and one of the Alphas,” I say, not willing to allow this man to be close to my mate alone again after the way he treated her. I know Robin and Kayce won’ t want that for their mates either.

“We volunteer to take turns,” Brutus says.

Sophie and Jocelyn turn, seeing the large number of warriors who have congregated behind them, spreading out in a protective arc. Sophie turns and looks at me in surprise, but I just wink at her. She really has no idea how much this pack adores her.

“I intend to take the first shift once Jocelyn is out of surgery, Alpha Zahn. If you agree to Jocelyn and Hunter’s terms, you may sit in the room with me. But I will warn you, if you do anything to impede her healing or try in any way to change the course of her treatment, you will be removed.”

Almost as one, the warriors step forward. It’s a simple, yet powerful show of support for their Luna and it doesn’t go unnoticed by Zahn.

“Agreed. I just want to be there, to make sure that nothing goes wrong.”

“Very well. We need to get going. Today’s surgery is going to be a long one and Dr. Caspian wanted to get started early,” Sophie tells him.

“I’ll be here all day, Jocelyn. I won’t leave the hospital or your side,” he tells her.

She nods as Sophie begins wheeling her inside the pack hospital. Then, Jocelyn turns, looking at the warriors who are still taking a protective stance around Sophie and by association, Jocelyn.

“Do you still think it’s Alpha Hunter that the pack adores?” she asks Sophie.

Sophie turns and looks at our warriors. “I think they adore both of us, as much as we adore them.”

I feel the instant wave of pride and love from the pack at Sophie’s words.

I smile as Zahn and I follow Sophie and Jocelyn inside. My mate truly has no idea what a remarkable woman she is.

The One He Claimed Chapter 159

Chapter 159: Nerves

Sophie

I made sure that Jocelyn was settled, and I stayed with her while she was prepped for surgery. She didn’t want Zahn in the room at that time, so he remained in the waiting room. I was surprised that he didn’t even grumble about it.

“You were right about your mate,” she says to me.

“Which part?” I ask, not sure what’s she’s referencing.

“About his strength. He beat the shit out of Zahn.”

“He threatened me. No one in the pack will allow that. You saw that.”

“What does it feel like to have that level of security in your life?” she asks sadly.

“Well, I don’t bask in it. That security is a two-way street. I have to give to the pack as well. When they don’t feel safe, I need to be there for them, to make sure they know that they are safe.”

“Like what you’re doing with me?”

“Exactly,” I say, sitting on the edge of her bed and smiling at her.

She looks away, her lips trembling. "I'm scared, Sophie."

I take her hand, clasping it in both of mine. "About which part, in particular?" I ask softly. I can smell her fear and hear it in her voice.

She huffs a laugh. "I guess I do have a lot to be fearful of, but today, it's this surgery. Do you think I've made the right decision?" she asks, looking to me for guidance.

"I think that if Dr. Caspian didn't believe that he could help you, he wouldn't have offered to do these surgeries. He's very good at what he does. He's kind, gentle, and caring. He'll do everything in his power to help you heal, Jocelyn. You can trust that. If it were me, I would try, knowing the kind of doctor that Dr. Caspian is."

She nods, quickly brushing a tear from her cheek that leaked out.

"You know, that doesn't mean that you'll be perfect, but better is good, right? I saw your x-rays. You must be in so much pain, especially without your wolf."

"Yes, I am. It's like the Moon Goddess is punishing me for trying to leave this world before she was ready."

"It probably feels like that. But you're here now. And while I know you'll be in a lot of pain for the next couple of days, your healing will begin and here, you'll have peace. Hopefully, that peace and your healing will allow your wolf to return."

"Everyone here seems to think she will."

"What's her name?" I ask.

"Cassidy," she says smiling. "Damn, I miss that sassy wolf. You get used to having them in your head, you know. And when they're gone..." She stops, her voice getting choked again. "It's very lonely," she finishes, looking down.

"You're not alone, now. I know that's not the same thing, but while your body is healing physically, you can also focus on healing your mind. I think sometimes that's what helps our wolves to resurface. It's almost like you have to give them a place that they feel safe returning to, does that make sense?" I ask her.

"It does, actually," she says, giving me a half smile as Dr. Caspian walks in.

"Good morning, Luna, good morning, Jocelyn. Are you ready for today?" he asks, coming over and assessing her.

"I'm nervous," she says honestly.

"I'd be shocked if you weren't. The good news is, I'm not. I know it will be a long day, but I'm ready to go if you are."

She nods, then looks at me. "I'll be here when you get out. Dr. Caspian or Brooklyn will keep me updated on your status. Even if you aren't awake, just know that I'll be here."

"Thank you, Luna."

"You know, if you want me to call you Jocelyn, you should start calling me Sophie. That's what friends do," I say as Dr. Caspian prepares the bed to move.

"Is that what we are?" she asks.

"It's what I'd like to be," I tell her honestly. She's been through a lot. I don't think she really has anyone in her life that she feels comfortable or safe with. Here, hopefully, she'll have both.

She looks at me a moment. "Thank you, Sophie."

"You're welcome, Jocelyn," I say as Dr. Caspian pushes the bed out of the room and down the hall to surgery. I wait until she's in her room before turning to walk out to the waiting area. The moment I see Hunter I walk into his embrace.

"How is she?"

'Nervous,' I say in the mind link, not sure if she'd want Zahn to know how she was feeling. "Dr. Caspian just took her back," I say so that Zahn can hear.

"Do you know how long she'll be in surgery?" he asks me.

"Dr. Caspian seems to think it will be an all-day surgery. He'll give me updates throughout the day..."

"I'd like to be informed. She didn't say I couldn't be informed of her progress," he says.

"That's fine. I don't intend to stay here, since I'll be with her. tonight when she comes out. Will you be staying here in the hospital, Alpha Zahn?" I ask.

"Yes, I'm not leaving until she does....as long as she allows me to stay," he clarifies.

I look at the warriors who are on guard duty. "How long will the two of you be guarding Alpha Zahn?"

"We have day duty, Luna," one warrior replies.

“Okay, when I get information, I’ll relay it to your guards. I won’t be asking Dr. Caspian or Brooklyn any clarifying questions, Alpha Zahn, because their focus needs to be on your mate. So, I will tell you what I know, and that will be all that we’ll get until the surgery is complete tonight.”

He nods, looking at the guards, then back at me. “Very well.”

Hunter leads me outside before saying anything. “You’re going to need a nap today, Soph.”

“I know. I’ll probably lay down in the early afternoon after I get an update from Dr. Caspian. I’m taking the first shift tonight, basically whenever she’s done until midnight. Nikki and Robin are taking midnight to four am, since Nikki still has some morning sickness and wants to be back in her room by then. Allison and Kayce will be there from four until six, when the warriors will return, and I’ll relieve Allison at eight tomorrow morning.”

“Depending on what time she finishes up today, I’ll be there with you, Sophie. I trust our warriors, but I don’t trust Zahn.”

“I don’t think Robin or Kayce trust him with their mates either,” I say, smiling.

“Not a bit,” he says. “Do you have work to do this morning?”

“Some,” I say, already feeling tired.

“How about you bring it into my office, and we can work together,” he suggests.

“You just want to play with your son,” I say, smiling.

“We played last night while you were asleep,” he says smugly.

I look up at my mate. “You did?”

He laughs. “You sound like Nikki. Like you’re insulted that you missed out.”

“Well, I just...I thought him moving around would wake me up.”

“You were pretty tired, but I’ll never say no to playing with my pup,” he says.

“I think he’s sleeping now. He’s pretty quiet, but when he wakes up, I’m sure he’ll be happy to play with his daddy.”

The One He Claimed Chapter 160

Chapter 160: Picnic

Sophie

When we get back to the packhouse, I get my things and go to Hunter's office. He pulls me into his lap and rather than get work done, I lean against him, letting his steady heartbeat and breathing lull me to sleep.

'Luna Sophie,' I hear in my mind. I open my eyes, groggy with sleep.

'Yes.'

'Luna, it's Dr. Caspian. I wanted to let you know that I've repaired Jocelyn's hip and I'm moving to her thigh bone.'

'Thank you, Dr. Caspian,' I say before the link closes.

"How long was I asleep," I say, sitting up in Hunter's lap and stretching.

"Several hours. I didn't realize you were so tired, Soph."

"It's been a busy few days. Plus, our little man here is starting to get uncomfortable at night and having my face up against your throat helps me to sleep," I say, reaching out to the warriors to relay Dr. Caspian's message so they can tell Zahn.

'Is he behaving?' I ask them.

'Yes Luna. He's been pacing, but he seems a bit better with this news.'

'You know to let Hunter and I know if he does anything?'

'Of course, Luna. But we won't allow him to disrupt Luna Jocelyn's surgery.'

'Thank you both,' I tell them.

'Any time, Luna.'

"Everything okay with Zahn?" he asks when I finish talking to the warriors.

"Yes."

"Good. And maybe we need to rethink how we sleep at night, Sophie. If laying on your side isn't comfortable..."

"You can't hold me in your arms all night, Hunter."

"Want to bet? I'd be happy to hold you all night long, Sophie."

I smile up at my mate. "How are your legs, Hunter?" I ask, knowing they must be numb from me sitting on them for so long.

"My legs are fine, Sophie. I'm worried about you. You need your rest and having Jocelyn here is stressful."

"I'm fine, Hunter. And I think maybe things with Jocelyn will settle after this. I hope so, anyway. I know you'll continue to deal with Zahn. He's the biggest stress in all of this."

"I've got Zahn covered. Are you going to spend some time with Allison and Nikki this afternoon?"

"Yes. I know they're only here another day or so and Allison was going over to the Survivor's Center today to look at where to start a garden and tell the others how to do it. I'd like to go see how it's coming along."

"Why don't we go together. We can bring some food and have a picnic with our friends."

"I love that idea," I say, smiling up at my mate and feeling much more refreshed after my deep sleep.

"And I love you," he says, kissing my nose.

We get some food, more than I was expecting Hunter to get, and head over to the Survivor's Center. When we get there, I see our friends have already cleared a large area for the garden.

"Wow! You did all this in one morning?" I ask, seeing the women who live here watching as several pups help Robin and Kayce dig up the area for the garden.

"We had some great helpers," Nikki says, smiling at the pups who all seem to be excited to be around two Alphas and two Lunas. I can see that Robin and Kayce are guiding some of the older pups to help while Nikki and Allison are holding some of the younger ones in the shade and watching. Now Hunter's large amount of food makes sense. He somehow knew that the moms and pups would be here.

"We brought food," Hunter announces.

There's a lot of excitement as I walk up to the freshly dug up garden area. "I can't believe you've accomplished so much already," I say as several pups rush up to me, wanting to show me what they did to help.

"You've got some great helpers here," Robin says again, smiling at the pups that were working with him.

“You do. I’m thinking of recruiting some of these helpers to come to my pack now that Allison wants to expand our garden,” Kayce says, smiling down at the pups that are helping him. They all light up and I’m so thankful to my friends for helping to bring some happiness to these pups. They’ve had a hard time, losing a parent and living with a parent who is suffering through their own grief and loss.

Hunter puts down the food and he and I are excitedly shown around the newly dug up garden area. I have a pup holding each hand and Hunter swings an older girl onto his back, picking up a younger boy and holding him on his hip, while still managing to hold the hand of yet another pup. I realize that he and I could easily have five pups and still manage them easily in their younger years.

He growls softly in my head. ‘Six. I’m sure I can manage to carry one more.’

I smile as I let the pups lead me around the area, ohhing and ahhing over the work they’ve put in. When we’ve seen everything and told them how incredible they are and not to let Alphas Robin and Kayce steal them away from us for being such good helpers, we head back to where Allison has set out the picnic for all of us.

Nikki has a pre-teen pup in her arms, fast asleep. She continues rocking him as we walk up.

“You have a special touch, Luna Nikki. Jared hasn’t slept this well since....well, since I lost my mate,” his mother says.

“Sometimes, they just need a different parent and that’s what Alphas and Lunas are really, parents to the pack,” she says. I can hear Bree, Nikki’s wolf, purring softly to the pup, keeping him in his deep sleep.

Robin comes over and runs his fingers over the top of the pup’s head before leaning down to kiss the top of Nikki’s. The rest of us sit, the pups either pressing tightly against us or sitting in our laps while we eat.

I smile at Hunter, realizing that we should probably plan to do this more often with Kinsley and Lucas and now Penny and Jaime as well. It will be good for the pups to have some normalcy and Kinsley and I were already planning to do something, but this feels right. It feels good.

“How is Luna Jocelyn?” Sandy asks, just as I get Dr. Caspian’s next update. This time, he sounds much more tired than he did before.

‘Luna Sophie, Luna Jocelyn’s thigh bone has been reset along with her knee. I’m moving down to her shin bone and foot next.’

‘Thank you, Dr. Caspian. Are you sure you’re okay to continue? You sound exhausted.’

“Yes. I am tired, but her bones are setting nicely. I want to continue because I think very soon, she’ll be nearly or completely pain free in this leg.”

‘Thank you, doctor,’ I say and close the mind link.

I relay the message to the group around us, then link the warriors in the hospital.

‘Is everything still okay there?’ I ask.

‘He’s getting more restless, Luna. We’ve let Alpha know and he’s going to stop by after you finish your picnic.’

I can feel how pleased the warrior is that we’re spending time with the pups here and I realize that he is the brother of one of the women in this group.

Rather than rushing back to the packhouse, we all settle in, Robin and Kayce telling the pups stories as the younger ones fall asleep and the older ones sit quietly, listening. Hunter excuses himself to go check on Zahn, but I stay, enjoying the peace and calm that I feel here in the Survivor Center.

It’s a great afternoon, and I’m so glad that I get to spend this time with my friends and that they are the special people that they are. They recognized that these pack members, even though they aren’t their pack members, needed some time and comfort. And my friends, being the wonderful people that they are, offered it to them without question.