

The One He Claimed Chapter 181

Chapter 181: Alpha Warrior

Hunter

The morning after Jake and Letti arrived, Sophie, Jocelyn, and I- get in the car to drive to Amelia's pack. I had intended to drive anyway, knowing that Sophie would be uncomfortable on Shaw, even for the hour it would take to get to Amelia's pack. But once Jocelyn decided to join us, there was no question. She's still unable to shift with her bones still so misshapen.

I know that Sophie is excited about seeing her sister, her new niece, and about seeing the pack. She really wants Lucas and Kinsley to win Alaric's old pack, not only so they become an Alpha and Luna, but also because it will help her know that her sister is safe with good Alphas on either side of her pack.

It takes longer to drive than it would have to run in wolf form, but thankfully, they are expecting us when we arrive.

"Alpha, Lunas, our Alpha is expecting you. She's in the middle of warrior training and felt that Luna Sophie would be okay finding her way out back, but if you'd like her to greet you, we'll let her know."

"I'm pretty sure I know the way, thank you, Darius," Sophie says, smiling at the guard.

"It's nice to see you again, Luna," he says as we pull away. This pack loves my mate almost as much as ours does.

"I don't remember ever coming into this pack from the front," I say as we drive. "Nothing looks familiar."

"Well, it would be faster for you to come in wolf form," Sophie says, and I can feel her excitement at being able to see her sister and meet her niece.

When we get to the packhouse, there are a couple of omegas waiting for us.

"Luna!" they exclaim as Sophie gets out of the car. She rushes over and hugs them while I get the bags out of the car.

"Would you like us to show you to your rooms or would you like to go out back and see Alpha Amelia?" they ask.

"I'd like to go to my room, if you don't mind. I'm still struggling with a bit of pain, and I believe that Dr. Caspian is still here, is that correct?" Jocelyn asks.

"Yes, Luna, that's correct."

"Just Jocelyn," she says.

"Yes, Jocelyn. We can let Dr. Caspian know that you're here."

"Thank you. I just want to rest for a moment, then say hello to Alpha Amelia before I go see him."

"Did you say that Amelia is out back? I want to see her first and where's my niece?" Sophie asks them.

"She's out back as well," they say "Where's Alpha Calvin?" I ask.

Both omegas' lips press together "He went back to his pack right after the birth of Alpha Athena," one says.

"He's due to return with his warriors for the overview of Alpha Alaric's pack tomorrow."

I can tell that neither omega thinks it was a good decision on Calvin's part to leave so soon after the birth of his daughter. I have to agree. Anything that he needed to take care of could have been done over the phone. I know it will take a war to pull me away from Sophie after our son is born.

I chuckle at my mate, putting my hand on her back. She's practically bouncing with excitement to see her sister.

"Come on, let's go see her before you burst with anticipation," I tell her.

As we walk out onto the back porch, I see Amelia walking through the crowd of warriors, giving them instructions and feedback. Her back is to us and her left arm is tucked against her body while her right arm is moving around, directing and showing the warriors what she's saying as they spar.

When she turns to face us, I'm in awe. She looks exactly like what I'd expect an Amazon warrior to look like. Her left arm is tucked against her body because she's carrying her daughter who is nursing at her breast while she directs her warriors. I've never seen anything like it and Sophie's description of her sister comes back to me.

"Warrior Alpha indeed," I say.

Instantly, I feel a wave of hot jealousy flow through Sophie, just as she snarls angrily. I see Amelia's eyes flash up to us, but I turn quickly, taking Sophie's face in my hands, seeing that

Hedda has pushed forward.

"I can admire the woman and Alpha that your sister is without wanting her in my bed, Sophie. It's no different than how I feel about Nikki, Allison, or Margot. Your sister is coming into her own, much like you did. I'm happy to see her strength, that doesn't mean I want her. You, my mate, are all the woman I'll ever want or need."

I hold her gaze until I feel her jealous possessiveness start to ebb, then I lean down and kiss her. It's a demanding kiss, pushing my love for her, my pride at being her mate and soon to be the father of her pup, through the bond. When she finally relaxes against me, her arms going around me, I pull back, looking at her eyes to make sure that Hedda is settled as well.

"And I'll tell you another thing. You'd better never walk around our pack nursing our son for all to see, because I will rip every one of our warrior's eyes out if they so much as glance at what's mine," I say, Shaw coming forward and growling his own possessiveness of our mate.

That finally brings a smile to her face. "Sorry," she says softly.

"Don't be. I know a lot of this is pregnancy hormones. As long as you know, deep in your heart, that you are mine and I am yours."

She nods and I let her go.

"All good here?" Amelia asks, walking up to us. Athena has finished nursing, and Amelia has covered herself while holding her daughter against her chest, patting her back until she burps.

"It's good to see you Amelia," Sophie says, reaching out to hug her sister.

"It's good to see you too, Sophie, but I'm pretty sure you're here to see this little beauty. I may be biased, but I think she's the prettiest baby I've ever seen," Amelia says proudly, laying Athena down in her arms again.

"Oh, Amelia, she IS beautiful!" Sophie says, gently rubbing the top of Athena's head.

"Do you want to hold your niece? I need to get back to warrior training," she says to Sophie before looking at me. "You're welcome to join in, but we're almost done."

"I'll pass," I say, watching as Amelia passes Athena to Sophie and my mate immediately begins to snuggle with her niece.

Amelia nods, smiling sadly. I imagine it's because her mate isn't here. She heads back to her warriors, and I follow my mate, sitting beside her and wrapping an arm around her. I couldn't be more excited for the day when this is our son in her arms.

"You weren't kidding about your sister, were you?" Jocelyn says, coming up beside us.

I turn, seeing her watching Amelia direct warrior training for her pack.

"The option is available for you as well, Jocelyn. There are still several packs available," I say.

She nods her head, never looking away from the warriors sparring. "Definitely something to think about."

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Chapter 182: Mother

Amelia

I've had a lot of happy and a lot of sad moments in my life, but the most intense feelings of happiness and sadness came on the day of my daughter's birth.

Calvin had been at my side, encouraging me to push. Considering how things are between us right now, he'd been really great about it. And the moment they laid Athena in my arms, I'd cried happy tears. She's so perfect with her ten little fingers and her ten little toes. She has a button nose and cupid's bow pink lips that always seem to be sucking, even in her sleep. She makes the sweetest, softest sounds when she's sleeping or when she's nursing but when she's hungry, watch out. My girl has a strong pair of lungs on her.

The first person I'd wanted to share my happiness with had been my mother, and that's where the terrible sadness had come from. I realized that my daughter will never know what incredible grandparents she had. I can easily picture my father carrying her around everywhere, just like he did with Sophie and probably like he did with me. The sharp sting of grief had hit me quickly and unexpectedly and I'd started to cry.

Calvin is a good man in a lot of ways, but understanding female emotions isn't one of them. They make him uncomfortable and so, rather than wrapping his arms around me and hugging me like someone such as Alpha Hunter probably would have, he'd patted my arm and told me it would be okay and that it was probably all the hormones leaving my body. It had taken everything in me to not punch him in the face.

I wasn't surprised when he'd left the next day to go back to his pack. We'd talked about him wanting to claim the pack next door. I guess he wants to try and move the pack or maybe try to flip packs with someone else so that we can combine our packs. The problem is, I'm learning very quickly that I like being an Alpha and I'm damn good at it. I wouldn't say this to Calvin, because I'm not mean and I know it would hurt his feelings, but I'm a better Alpha than he is. So, even if he claims Alaric's old pack, I'm not combining mine with his.

My new favorite time of day is early in the morning, before everyone else is awake, when I sit in my rocking chair and nurse Athena. It doesn't matter how tired I am, or how many things have coming for the day, that time is ours, just her and me. I know she's a baby, but she's an Alpha baby, and when she looks at me, it's like she knows that I'm her mother, and that I will never let anything happen to her.

When Calvin left, I think the pack thought that things were going to relax a bit. They were wrong. Alaric's pack is up for grabs, and I have several warriors who want to claim it, my Gamma included. I'm not thrilled about him competing, but I also know he didn't do as well as he thought he would in the competition for the first pack. He didn't even make it to the final twelve. I know he's going to cause problems for me in the future, but those are problems for another day. First, I needed to deliver Athena and get my strength back, and now, I need to get my warriors prepared for the competition.

I didn't think Sophie would mind me not greeting her at the front door, and thankfully, I was right. Unfortunately, since I'm an Alpha and a young mother, I have to balance nursing my daughter with everything else that I need to get done. It didn't take me more than half a day to realize that nursing Athena would have to be done while I was doing other things or things wouldn't get done and my status as an Alpha would come into question, especially with Caleb looking for any reason to overthrow me. I wasn't sure how I felt about him and Calvin going to the competition together. Is Calvin secretly hoping to overthrow me so I have to return to being his Luna? I'm still not sure about that, so I'm biding my time and I'm watching Caleb carefully.

And that means, I nurse my daughter during warrior training. Because she's on a schedule, it's become a routine every morning that I carry her around while Beta Matthew runs training. Beta Caroline will usually hold Athena until she's ready to nurse and then take her again when she's done, but today, Sophie is here. I'm not sure what caused her to snarl so viciously before, but Hunter seemed to understand what was wrong and what his mate needed to feel better. Hunter seems to understand a lot more than Calvin does, or maybe he's just more confident in himself than Calvin is. Calvin and I didn't have an easy start and him not having any sisters or really understanding women at all was a huge barrier for us to overcome. And while I realize that he does truly care about me, it's not the kind of love that my parents had, or that Sophie has with Hunter. I'm happy for my sister, but every time I see her and her mate together, it makes my heart ache. I'm not sure that Calvin and I would have had that even if he hadn't claimed me publicly. It's just not who he is, which makes me wonder why the Moon Goddess mated me to him, Have I changed that much, or has he not changed at all?

Matthew calls an end to warrior training, and I follow my warriors back to the patio where Sophie and Hunter are sitting with Athena. Beside them is a woman I don't recognize, but I can see that her upper body isn't shaped properly. This must be Jocelyn.

"Hello, I'm Alpha Amelia. You must be Jocelyn. Welcome to my pack," I greet her.

"Alpha Amelia. It's a pleasure. I wasn't sure what to expect from the first ever female Alpha, but I have to admit, you're quite impressive," Jocelyn says.

"Thank you," I say.

"You've should have seen her when we first walked out. She was nursing Athena while she was directing her warriors," Sophie says, looking at Hunter who begins purring at her. Is that what got her riled up? Me nursing Athena publicly? She'll have to get over it while she's here. I have a pack to run.

"Well, I'm no Legend, like my sister," I say, teasing her.

"No, I call you the Warrior Alpha," Sophie says smiling up at me. Hunter kisses the side of her head as if he's praising her. Maybe it was jealousy before. I know from recent experience that every woman around you feels like a threat to your mate. I thought it was just me because things between me and Calvin aren't very settled at the moment, but maybe it was being pregnant. I'll have to see when he returns.

"Warrior Alpha. I can see it," Jocelyn says to me.

"Well, I am a warrior, or I will be once I get back into shape, and I am an Alpha, so I guess it fits."

Jocelyn tilts her head at me. "You're as humble as Sophie, aren't you? Must be a family trait to have strong women who don't realize the significant impact that they are having on others around them."

"What impact is that?" I ask her, as I go check on my daughter. She's sleeping happily in Sophie's arms.

When she doesn't answer immediately, I turn and see Jocelyn smiling at me. "Blazing the trail for the rest of us to follow. You're the first female Alpha in history. You don't see the significance in that?" she asks, challenging me.

"Honestly? I don't time have time to think about it. Between my parents' deaths, taking over the pack, waging war and getting revenge for my parents' deaths, having a baby, and getting ready for the pack competitions, I haven't had a lot of time. But now that you mention it...I guess it is sig

"Amelia has already paved the way for other women to take ranked positions in the packs," Hunter says, making me snort a laugh.

"Oh please, you'd have made Penny your Gamma with or without me being an Alpha."

"Yes, but you did it first," Hunter says smiling at me. "As Nikki would say, that makes you the trendsetter."

"I don't think I can hold her and stand up, Hunter," Sophie says.

"You must be close to your delivery, Soapy," I say. I'm pretty sure that her stomach is larger than mine was. Probably because she's having a boy.

I move to take Athena from her, but Hunter beats me to it. He carefully snuggles my daughter against his chest, then reaches out to help Sophie up. I can hear Shaw purring softly, keeping Athena settled. Even Hamil, Calvin's wolf, hadn't thought to purr at his daughter.

I'm once again struck by the differences between Hunter and Calvin. Calvin couldn't have looked more uncomfortable holding his own daughter, whereas Hunter looks like he's been holding babies for years. Who knows, maybe he has. He's a different kind of Alpha than Calvin is.

"Are you settled in, Jocelyn? Soapy knows her way around the packhouse, but if you need anything at all, you can ask me, or this is my Beta, Matthew," I say as he walks up to greet the group.

"Why do you call her Soapy?" she asks while Matthew tells Sophie she can't hog Athena while she's here. I smile, looking at my sister while she tells Matthew that his mate is here all the time and she's only here for a couple of days, so she gets as much time as she wants with my daughter.

"It's the name I called her when I was young. I couldn't say the 'f' in her name, so it came out as soapy. Then, our father started calling her Soapy and it stuck. Now that he's gone, I've started using that name again."

"You're as kind and empathetic as Sophie is too, I see," Jocelyn says.

"What do you mean?" I ask her as we walk inside.

"She must like the name and since your father is gone, you still give her that connection to your father."

"I hadn't really thought of it that way," I say.

"No, you probably didn't," she says cryptically.

"Are you planning to see Dr. Caspian while you're here?" I ask, changing the subject.

"Yes. My legs are healed but now I want to talk to him about starting surgery on my upper body. I want to get back to being whole and maybe, follow the blazing trail that the Warrior Alpha is making and fight for my own pack," she says.

“It would be nice to not be the only female Alpha. While the other Alphas are very supportive of me, it’s like being the only girl in a good ol’ boys club. It’s hard not to feel like the odd man, or in this case woman, out.”

“And yet, I’ve heard nothing but great things about you, Alpha Amelia. You’re doing a great job and from an outsider walking in, your pack feels settled. If they didn’t, I’d worry for you, but they seem to be rallying behind you as their leader,” she says.

I look around, taking a moment to feel what Jocelyn is feeling in my pack. Perhaps I don’t do that enough. Perhaps I don’t step back and just let myself recognize what I’ve done or that I’m doing a good job. I know I work hard for my pack, but I’m so busy doing, that I don’t take the time to see the impact of what I’ve done.

“Thank you, Jocelyn. I needed this level of perspective. How long are you here for?” I ask her.

“That depends. I need to ask Dr. Caspian when he can do my surgery.”

I stop, looking at her thoughtfully. “Maybe he can do the surgery here. I can keep you on the Alpha floor with me, so you won’t be bothered by the pack, although you will have a crying baby to contend with in the middle of the night. But my understanding is that you are healing quickly and well. Dr. Caspian doesn’t have to return to Sophie’s pack for another couple of weeks, and honestly, I can already tell that you and I are going to get along – well.”

She smiles at me. “I was thinking the exact same thing, Alpha. And let me talk to Dr. Caspian. If he can do the surgery here, I’d love to stay and see how you’re running this pack. Maybe I’ll get some ideas of how to run my pack, if and when I’m able to secure my own.”

“Good. Let’s go talk to Dr. Caspian,” I say, feeling lighter than I have in a long time.

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Chapter 183: Talking to Amelia

Hunter

Sophie is trying very hard to manage her jealousy and she’s doing an amazing job at it. I’m reinforcing her positive behavior with her sister because I know she’s struggling. I can’t hide my admiration for Amelia. I cannot imagine that if I was a new Alpha and a new mother or even a new father, that I would be able to balance everything the way that she is. But as I told Sophie, I can admire the woman and not want her in my bed. What I am realizing is that Amelia is more like Sophie than thought. And apparently, Jocelyn has picked up on that as well.

The two of them hit it quickly. I haven't spent a ton of time with Jocelyn, letting Sophie take the lead there, but the difference in her from when she arrived in our pack to now is significant. There's a confidence there that I wasn't there before, and I don't think it's solely because she's getting her body and her mobility back. I think it's because she's away from Zahn. I'll never understand a man who thinks that keeping his mate down makes him stronger. I know from experience that the stronger my mate is, the stronger I am as a man and as an Alpha.

I feel a wave of desire roll through Sophie and I turn to look at my mate. She's looking at me assessingly and I smile at her.

"What's going on in that pretty head of yours?"

"I'd never thought that seeing a man holding a baby would be sexy. But seeing MY man holding a baby and thinking about him holding MY pup in the near future..."

I growl softly as her thoughts move to us making more babies.

"You're right, it's a good thing we have space on that wall Hunter. You may have to build me another packhouse before I'm done having your pups," she purrs, loudly enough that others glance our way.

We're sitting in the general area of the packhouse, holding Athena while Amelia gives Jocelyn a tour of the pack. Today is a relaxed day for us before the chaos of tomorrow begins. I'm also planning to take some time to talk to Amelia about the trial and what she can expect. But before that, I need to calm my mate so she doesn't go scenting the entire packhouse.

I take her chin in my hand and lean in, taking her mouth in a dominating, possessive kiss, she responds instantly, but I don't let up until I feel her body relax into submission. It's not something I do often with my mate, not wanting or needing her submission, but right now, her emotions are all over the place.

When I pull back, I look at her. "Better?"

"Better."

"We need to reconsider you coming back here next week, Sophie. You're getting very close to delivering our pup and you know there will be a lot of she-wolves in the competition. You can't go off on them because you're feeling jealous."

"I want to be there, Hunter. You'll help me, right? What if I go into labor and you're not there?" she asks, and I feel the worry that she'd be alone during our son's birth flow through the bond.

"You're not delivering our pup without me by your side. Let's see how things go this week," I tell her. Maybe I can talk to Nikki and Allison, even ask Margot to keep an eye on her. I don't want to leave her overnight when she's this far along any more than she wants me gone, but with Lucas competing and Calvin apparently planning to compete, it's going to be a weird competition.

When Amelia and Jocelyn return, Dr. Caspian and Brooklyn are with them. Amelia takes a now fussy Athena and once again begins nursing her as she continues to go about her day. Jocelyn lets us know that Amelia has offered to let her stay and have her next surgery here and Dr. Caspian has agreed.

"As long as you or Dr. Felicity is available when my pup is ready to make his appearance, I'm fine with it," I tell them.

"I'll talk to Dr. Felicity and make sure that one of us is in your pack at all times," Dr. Caspian says.

Over lunch, we sit with our group, Amelia still directing her pack with a baby in her arms. While I know that I look forward to the day when I can hold my son and carry him around the pack with me, I also know there will be times that I'll be glad to pass him off to Sophie so I can focus. Amelia doesn't have that option, but she continues to take it in stride.

"You're right Sophie, she does look like a warrior Alpha, like the Amazons of old. Your sister is as impressive as you are. I'm sorry I didn't get to meet your parents. They must have been amazing people," Jocelyn says.

"They were," Sophie says sadly.

In the afternoon, I send Sophie up to our room to rest, while Jocelyn does the same as she's still recovering from her surgeries. While they rest, I spend time working with Amelia, talking about what to expect with the trial, that we have Jake presiding as our newest Alpha, and that we'd like her, as one of the Alphas in our alliance, to be there.

"It's a shame you can't do it here or in Alaric's pack. Everyone will already be here and rather than having everyone go somewhere else, we could have Zahn brought here," she says.

I stare at her a moment. "That's brilliant."

She chuckles. "When you're as busy and overwhelmed as I am, you find ways to make your life easier."

"How is it going for you?" I ask her.

She looks at me and I see the tears welling in her eyes before she looks away.

"Some days are easier than others," she says quietly.

"For what it's worth, I think you're doing a great job."

She smiles at that and looks up at me. "Thank you. Jocelyn basically said the same."

"She's not the only one. You've come into this pack, unexpectedly taking over, become a leader, separated from your mate, had a pup, created alliances, and the overall feel of the : pack is settled. Although, you know you have a problem with your Gamma, right?"

"Yeah, I do. I'm not sure how I feel about him competing for a pack. On the one hand, I'd like him out of mine. On the other, I prefer him in a position where I can strip his rank and send him packing if he acts out."

"I saw him compete. He's not good enough to win a pack. And you didn't ask my advice, but I'm going to give it to you anyway. You need to find your ranked members. Matthew is great, but he's past retirement age. Caleb is a festering sore that's going to explode at some point in the future and cause nothing but problems for you. You need people around you that you can trust and that are strong enough to support you when something goes wrong."

"Yeah, the problem with that is, everyone that I would be interested in promoting, is looking into competing for the packs. I'm not sure how long these competitions will continue, but let's just say it's three months. No one is going to accept a Beta or Gamma position while they have the option of becoming an Alpha."

"Just watch your back. I have no doubt that you'd be able to defeat him, but I'd be shocked if Caleb doesn't challenge you very soon."

"Thank you for the warning. I'll be careful."

That night, we spend more time with Amelia, Athena, and Jocelyn. It's a good, relaxing time for Sophie as we sit out back and watch the pups play while she sips her tea. That night, I remind my mate that she's mine, several times, and the next morning, the packs begin to arrive.

It's good to see everyone, even though we've all been together so much recently. And Nikki, being Nikki, had to say something to Amelia.

"Damn, girl! Make the rest of us look bad why don't you?"

"What do you mean?" Amelia asks, once again nursing Athena while she greets her guests.

"I can barely stay awake in the afternoons and here you are, toting your newborn around, nursing her while you direct guests and you pack."

"If I wasn't, I wouldn't have been here to greet you," Amelia tells her.

"I think all of us would have-understood that," Nikki says.

"Not everyone," Amelia tells her quietly.

"Hmm," Nikki says hugging her. "If you need anything at all, you let me know," Nikki says quietly. I can only hear her because Sophie and I are standing beside Amelia.

"And you?" Nikki says looking at Sophie, "You look like you're about to pop!"

Once everyone arrives, we spend the day going around Alaric's pack. No one has touched it since the battle, so there are still areas with smashed out walls and windows.

"What do you think?" I ask my Beta after we've toured the place.

He looks me in the eye. "I want it."

I smile. "Good. Make that shit happen."

"I plan on it."

That night, Amelia's dining hall is loud with everyone's excitement about the pack and before we leave in the morning, more than two hundred individuals sign up for the competition. I spoke to the other Alphas and they agreed to have Zahn's trial here after the competition next week. That will also allow us to have another new Alpha join the trial. I'm hoping it's Lucas.

As I look over the names of people who signed up for the competition, I frown. I go find Jocelyn, who is talking to Dr. Caspian and Amelia, preparing for her next surgery.

"Jocelyn, are you going to compete? I mean I know you're still healing, but I thought you were interested in competing for a pack of your own," I ask her.

"No. After seeing everything, I realize that I'm not cut out to be an Alpha. I love the idea of it, but I think you have to really want to be an Alpha to be good at it, and I just don't think that's for me," she says.

"What about a Beta?" Amelia asks her. "Have you ever considered being a Beta? I just happen to have a position available."

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Chapter 184: The Twins' Plans

Sophie

I know Hunter is worried about my jealousy and possessiveness. Well, he doesn't care as much about my possessiveness or Hedda's need to mark him nearly every night now making sure that everyone knows that he's ours. I think he rather likes that part. But the jealousy is difficult to manage, especially during these events when there are so many she-wolves around. I know, in my head, that the she-wolves competing have perfectly good reasons to be talking to Hunter, but my wolf doesn't like it at all.

On the day that the Alphas showed Alaric's pack to the contenders, I noticed that Margot stayed close to me. It took me longer than it should have to realize that Hunter asked her to watch over me. When it finally dawned on me, I turned to her.

"Are you here to make sure I don't attack anyone, or to make sure that I do something else that might be crazy?"

She looked at me and smiled. "I have no idea what you're talking about. How is it holding your niece? Are you getting excited about your little one?" she asks, expertly redirecting the conversation.

I just shake my head at her. "It's good. She's so sweet, so beautiful. I can't wait until I'm holding Hunt."

"I hope you'll let the rest of us hold him too," she says, her smile fading a bit as she looks past me

"Has anyone seen my mate?" Calvin asks, walking up and looking out in the direction of Alaric's pack. He hadn't arrived last night like I'd thought he would and when he didn't show up this morning, they'd started without him.

"She's with the other Alphas, showing the contenders the parameters of Alaric's pack as well as the packhouse and general areas," I say.

When he finally looks down at me, his face softens when he sees Athena. "There's my little girl. How is she doing?" he asks me, reaching out and stroking a finger over her little fist.

"Fine, as far as I can tell," I say.

"She's got an Alpha's appetite, that's for sure," Margot says, stroking Athena's head.

"Did you want to hold her?" I ask him. Hunter had been a natural. He'd held Athena as if she was our third or fourth pup. It made me even more excited to see him holding our son.

However, the moment I offer to let Calvin hold his daughter, he looks terrified. "Oh, uh...she looks comfortable. I wouldn't want to disrupt her nap," he says, taking a step back as if she's dangerous and might leap at him, attaching herself to his body.

"I'm just going to go find Amelia," he says, racing off.

"What was that?" I ask Margot.

"Not all men are created equal and not all men are comfortable around babies. Alpha Calvin seems to be one of those that isn't comfortable around babies. Although, I've known men who were terrified of hurting their daughters but when they had sons, they treated them like they were indestructible, so who knows with him. He's an odd one. I haven't been able to figure him out yet."

"I think Amelia feels the same way," I say, thinking of my sister. It really is incredible what she's doing here.

This time, the Lunas had gotten together to discuss the community center. Everyone has ideas and in general, I think we can include all of them. Everyone likes the idea of trails to run, as well as a playground and picnic area where families can spend the day and cook out while enjoying themselves. What we need now is to have someone leading the plans and making sure that things move forward. Because Margot is too far away, Letti is still trying to put a pack together, and Allison and I are too far along in our pregnancy, that leaves it to Tiffany and Tammi, or Nikki.

"Actually, Dutton is planning to take us away for a bit," Tammi says tentatively, looking at Tiffany.

"What's that look?" Nikki asks her.

Tiffany looks around as if making sure that no one is listening. We all lean in to hear what she's going to say.

"Do you remember the story of how we got here? About how our Alpha female sacrificed herself so that we could get away?" Tiffany asks.

I had forgotten, but now that she reminded me, I do remember. Allison, Nikki, and I nod. Margot and Letti hadn't heard the twins' story before.

"Well, Tam and I have asked Dutton if we can find out what's happened to her, if she's still being held captive by her father or if she's been marked. He hasn't been able to find out anything, but we owe it to her to try and help her now that we're in a position to do it. So, we're going to be heading to our old pack lands after this competition and the trial."

"Isn't that dangerous?" Allison asks. "I mean, you're both pregnant."

"It could be, but she sacrificed herself for us. What kind of Lunas would we be if we stayed safe in our pack and let her suffer. We wouldn't be worth our title. And honestly, I can't stop thinking about it. I've even started having nightmares about it. I don't know if

something is happening or if I just feel strongly that we need to help, but I can't rest until I know she's okay," Tammi says, Tiffany wrapping an arm around her and hugging her.

"Is there anything that we can do?" Margot asks.

"Actually, I think Dutton is going to ask Alpha Ezra if we can stay in his pack, your pack. It's closer to our old pack and he can run some patrols from there to see if he can find out anything at all. Tam and I both think that if we're there, someone who would be unwilling to talk to Dutton might talk to us," Tiffany says.

"What are you planning to do if you find out she's still being held hostage?" I ask them.

They both look around again and once again, we all lean in closer.

"We're going to kidnap her and bring her with us. At least here we can keep her safe."

No wonder they're being quiet about it. Kidnapping an Alpha female from her father is a huge deal. It's the kind of thing that starts pack wars.

"Has Dutton talked to our mates about this?" Nikki asks, frowning.

"I don't think so. I think he's hoping to not involve the alliance members in this so that you can all claim ignorance if something goes wrong and it goes to trial," Tiffany says.

"You two are risking an awful lot, you realize that?" Letti says.

"She sacrificed herself for us. We owe her a chance to have the same life we have," Tammi says definitively.

When our mates walk up, we change the conversation. I'm worried about my friends, but I understand the desire to help their friend. If I was in their position, I'm sure I'd have asked Hunter to do the same. And knowing my mate, I'm sure he would have.

We stayed one more night and while I knew that Jocelyn was planning to stay for her next surgery, I hadn't considered that she'd be a good Beta for my sister. But once Amelia asked her about it though, I'd realized that the two of them could make a powerful team. Both are strong, like-minded women who already seem to respect each other.

Over the next week, I become more and more uncomfortable, Hunt continuing to grow quickly and staying very active. I love feeling him moving around. That way I know that he's healthy, but it's not at all comfortable for me, even as an Alpha female. I spend most of my time in the nursery getting the last little things ready for him to arrive and more than once, Hunter has found me asleep in the rocking chair..

As excited as I am for Lucas and Kinsley to hopefully win their pack, I'll be thankful when this and Zahn's trial are over, and I can relax at home and wait for this little one to arrive.

The One He Claimed Chapter 185

Chapter 185: Beta to Alpha

Lucas

Today is the day. Well, the next two days are the days where I will truly see if I have what it takes to become an Alpha. Hunter has faith in me. Sophie has faith in me. And my mate has faith in me. I can't let any of them down.

When I'd first walked Alaric's pack lands, I hadn't seen the devastation or the amount of time it would take to rebuild what was broken in the pack. What I'd seen was opportunity. The opportunity to make something great out of what Alaric left.

Based on what I'd seen in Owen's lands, this pack is in better shape overall, but it's nothing like Hunter's and Sophie's pack. And while these pack lands are smaller than Hunter's, I think I can make something great out of this area. No, I KNOW I can make something great here. A place that is better for the people who used to live here and a place that is better for my son to take over one day when it's his turn to become an Alpha.

An Alpha. I never thought I'd say that about my son, but once the idea took hold in my head, I couldn't let it go. If Kins hadn't agreed with me, if she hadn't been one hundred percent engaged in this process, I would have walked away. She is too important to me to risk our relationship. I've worked way too hard to build what we now have together for me to throw it away for a title. I'm happy as Hunter's Beta. Hunter's a good Alpha and I'm a good Beta. The pack respects both of us and it shows.

"You've got this, my love. Especially today. Today is the easy day," Kinsley says, looking at me over her shoulder. I'm wrapped around her in bed, lost in my thoughts, not realizing that she was awake yet.

I kiss her shoulder before taking a deep breath.

"You won't," she says, watching me.

"Won't what?" I ask her, knowing that she must feel it through the bond.

"You won't disappoint me. You never have."

"That's not exactly true," I say referencing how I claimed her.

"That was different, Lucas. Times were different. This is a chance for us, for our children to be better, to be a part of something better. And that wasn't disappointment. You, my love, have never disappointed me. You've done everything in your power to make this bond between us what it is now."

"You were and continue to be worth it every day," I tell her.

"You should start today off right, Lucas, by reminding me of how much you love me," she purrs.

I slide inside her, not able to take as much time as I want because of the competition starting this morning, but by the time we're showered and headed to breakfast, my mind is settled for today.

When I walk in, I see Hunter across the room. He gives me an assessing look, then nods, apparently liking what he sees in me.

I get Kinsley some food, then get in line to find out where I fall in the order for the first round of competitions. I'm fourth in line to compete with Dutton as my referee. I'll be taking on one of Kayce's warriors. Since I have a little bit of time before my first competition, I grab some food and join my mate. Unlike at Jake's new pack where there was no other pack adjacent to it, we have access to Amelia's packhouse and kitchens, so while breakfast is an outdoor affair, it's hot food with all the normal breakfast options.

When we're given the announcement that the battles will begin in thirty minutes, everyone begins making their way over to the vacant pack. Each referee has their own space where the competitors assigned to them will have their battles. There isn't a time limit, but once one is done, the next one begins.

I get in line, introducing myself to the warrior that I'll be battling. There are more fighters this time, so we expect that it will take two full days before one of us wins our pack. Today will be easier because the rounds will take so long, and we'll have plenty of time to rest in between. Tomorrow will be much more grueling.

As expected, these rounds go more quickly and easily even though there are more of them, with those of us who are ranked members eliminating the omegas and warriors that we compete against. The warrior that competed against me was good, but not nearly good enough to become an Alpha.

It's after lunch when the first rounds are complete, leaving one hundred and ten of us to compete in the afternoon. I'm farther back this time, competing against one of Robin's warriors with Ezra as the referee.

These battles take longer as everyone in this round has already competed once and won. It's well past dark when the last group finishes and the competition winds down for the day.

“We’ll start at six o’clock tomorrow morning. Get your assignments and your refs so you know where to go. We expect tomorrow’s competitions to last even longer, so even though we have fewer of them, we still expect a full day with the battles taking longer with each round.

Even though I only fought twice, I fall into bed, mentally exhausted. I watched other competitions, wanting to see the skill that others had. The Betas, Alpha Calvin, and some Gammas will be my biggest competition. All the warriors are strong, but very few are strong enough to go against those of us who are ranked.

I spent some time watching Beta Miles, Dutton’s Beta. Of all of them, I’d say he’s my strongest competition. Normally, I’d think it would be an Alpha, but Calvin fights in an old school way. I’m not sure if it’s because his pack is segregated from the others and he hasn’t had a chance to learn other fighting techniques, but he seems limited and consistent in his fighting. He’s strong which is to his benefit, but his technique isn’t as varied as some of the rest of us.

Miles, however, is creative in his fighting approach. He’s a smart fighter, willing to take a hit to win the battle. I’m the same way, so if I end up going against him, I’ll need to be careful.

In the morning, fifty-five of us are ready to begin battles. Apparently, they offered to let someone compete twice in case there is a tie at the end of the competition. Then the person with the most points wins. I put my name in for an extra battle and I notice that Miles does as well. Alpha Calvin doesn’t and I assume that’s because he’s the only Alpha and he assumes he’ll win.

There are two opportunities to fight twice, and Miles and I both get chosen to take those on. I’m chosen to have an extra fight during the first round this morning, with Miles getting one later in the day. I’m thankful mine is earlier. Because I’ll be fighting twice, my first battle is moved up, so I have my initial fight in the matchup with Alpha Amelia as our referee.

It does take longer to win this morning, my first battle lasting an hour. Since my next battle is with Gamma Caleb, Amelia’s Gamma, I’ll have to shift to a different referee. I get a couple of hours rest, before my next competition, going around and watching some of the other battles, keeping an eye on my biggest competitors. Alpha Calvin, Beta Miles, and both Robin’s and Kayce’s Betas move to the next round. Then it’s time for me to battle Gamma Caleb.

I notice the other Betas come to watch my match, apparently taking in their competition, me.

“You’ve got this, baby,” Kinsley says, giving me a kiss for luck. It turns out that I didn’t need it. Caleb is another one that isn’t as good as he thinks he is. However, he doesn’t want to give in, even after I’ve obviously defeated him. I take him down two more times

before Alpha Robin calls it. Caleb becomes irate, screaming that Robin is cheating and that the entire thing is rigged.

It takes several Alphas' presence to finally get him to calm down and accept defeat. Like the poor loser he is, he doesn't shake hands with me, he just walks away in a huff.

Because we start early, we're able to start the next round before lunch. This time, I'm closer to the end of the competition because I battled twice. I still feel good, but now that we're down to twenty-seven, the battles are definitely lasting longer. This round, Miles takes the extra match, and he wins both of them.

Because we both won twice in our rounds, we're still at odd numbers and Kayce's Beta wins the toss for the next person to take an extra battle. While I'm interested in watching his matches, after mine is done, I realize that Miles and Calvin are fighting and most everyone who isn't fighting is watching them. When I walk up, I see Kinsley watching their fight.

"How long have they been going?" I ask her, noticing that Hunter is refereeing this match.

She looks at her watch. "Nearly two hours."

"Shit!" No wonder everyone is watching them. Both of them are pouring in sweat, but Calvin seems to be slowing down faster than Miles. Calvin is several years older than Miles, but I'm guessing it's more than that. Whether he doesn't train as hard, or everything going on with his mate and newborn daughter are taking a toll on him, it isn't long before I can see the tide of the battle turning in Miles' favor.

The battle goes on for another hour and by then, all the competitors in this round is done, even Kayce's Beta who had to fight twice. Everyone has gathered around to watch this massive battle.

Since I know my Alpha, I know he wants to call it, but he's hoping that Calvin will concede. I doubt he will. He's an Alpha and unlike Hunter, Calvin would not want to concede to a Beta. I watch as the other Alphas gather around, probably expecting the fight from Calvin. When Hunter calls it a tie, it takes Calvin a moment to realize that means that Miles won. Miles took an extra fight earlier and the whole point of that is to give one person the benefit if there is a tie as there is now. Not unexpectedly, Calvin begins complaining, saying he can still fight, but the other Alphas all step up, supporting Hunter, before Calvin finally concedes. To his credit, he was a gracious loser and shook Miles' hand before leaving the ring.

By the time that battle ended, it was well past lunch time, and the next round started. Each of these took longer and longer. In the end, it was me and Miles as the final two. It had been a long, exhausting day, but both of us wanted to be done, so we both agreed to fight.

As I expected, he was a formidable opponent. He and I had similar ways of fighting and when it was all done, I was able to hold out just long enough to defeat him.

When Alpha Kayce called me the winner, I stood there stunned.

"Congratulations. Best fight I've had all day man. You deserve it," Miles says a moment before Kinsley rushes into my arms.

"I'm so proud of you! I knew you could do it!"

"Alpha Lucas!" Hunter calls and the rest of the crowd quiets down. "Congratulations on winning your pack and becoming. part of the group of Alphas."

"Thank you!" I say, feeling overwhelmed with all of the emotions that are rushing through both me and Kinsley. So rather than do anything, I stand there, holding my mate, my Luna, looking out over our new pack lands.

The One He Claimed Chapter 186

Chapter 186: Zahn's Trial

Sophie

It was an exhausting day, but an incredible one to watch as Lucas won his pack. I'm so happy, so very happy for them, and also excited to know that my sister's pack will be surrounded by two strong allies. But I'm also sad that another one of my best friends will be leaving my pack, and maybe it's the pregnancy hormones again, but when Hunter and I finally went to bed last night, I cried in his arms again.

He didn't say anything, just let Shaw purr at me, calming me down until I feel asleep. When I woke up this morning, he was already gone, having tucked his pillow against me so that his scent would still be in my nose. I smile, thinking of my thoughtful mate, breathing in his scent.

And then, my mind begins going through everything that needs to happen today and I nearly shoot up out of bed. Today is the trial for Alpha Zahn.

I've just waddled my way out of bed when the door opens and the scent of pancakes, maple syrup, and butter waft into my nose, followed closely by an even better scent, pine. The scent of my mate.

"Good morning, beautiful," he says, walking in with a tray of food.

It's bizarre. Even as pregnant as I am, even as uncomfortable as I am, not having had my mate inside me in over a day has hot desire flaring to life, heating my core and making my arousal pool between my thighs. The man is so ridiculous gorgeous, so

loving, so caring, and as he smiles a knowing smile, I know he's also as connected to my thoughts and emotions as he always is.

He sets the tray aside. "Did you need something else before you eat this morning, my love?"

If I didn't have our giant baby in between us, I'd leap into his arms. Hedda's possessiveness flares, wanting to mark Hunter yet again.

"How about I take care of that ache, then Hedda can mark me as many times as she wants," Hunter, or maybe it's Shaw, purrs.

"Good thing you're already naked," he says, walking to me, turning me toward the bed and bending me over before removing his clothes and easing my ache. By the time he's done and Hedda has marked him again, pushing her venom into his body, finally feeling sated for now, our breakfast is lukewarm.

"I'll go get some more," Hunter says.

"No, it'll be fine. We both need to get ready for today," I say and over breakfast Hunter and I discuss what to expect today.

We'd had our warriors bring Alpha Zahn with them in a passenger van when they came for the competition. When he arrived, he'd gone straight to Amelia's cells which is where he's remained for the last two days.

"Lucas won't be able to vote, since he's technically still part of our pack. But he and Kinsley will be able to sit in and ask questions. Jake is obviously presiding, and hopefully Ezra has spent enough time with him that he feels comfortable with his role. It's fairly straightforward, as long as Zahn doesn't act like a fool."

"I'm pretty sure we all know that he WILL act like a fool. That's what he does."

"True, so then Jake will have to decide if the trial continues, if it has to stop, or if it continues without him there. And then, he'll accept the votes of the other Alphas and make the final determination on Zahn's punishment."

"That's a lot to ask of a new Alpha."

"It is, but Ezra is a good Alpha. Like me, he includes his Beta on most of the decisions in the pack, so Jake has some knowledge of how to preside over something like this. But, yeah, it's a lot of responsibility being thrust onto a new Alpha. However, the next time we have one of these, it will most likely be Lucas who presides, as long as it's nothing to do with our pack or his."

When we're done with breakfast, we head downstairs to find most of the Alphas and Lunas congregating in the back of the packhouse ready to head over to Lucas and Kinsley's new pack. It was a smart idea of Amelia's to just do it now, while everyone is already here.

Rather than rushing over to see my niece first thing this morning, I go straight to Jocelyn. She's standing beside Amelia but looks like she's feeling ill.

"You're going to be fine," I tell her. "I spoke to Hunter, and we can both stand beside you during the trial. Hunter said he'll make sure to stand between you and Zahn."

"Thank you, I just...I can't go back there, Sophie," she says, wringing her hands.

"You won't. None of these Alphas believe in forcing a mate to their will. Well, possibly one, but we'll see how he votes today," Amelia says, looking at Calvin who is holding his daughter and looking like he's afraid she's going to break in his arms.

Once everyone arrives, we begin to make our way to Lucas' new pack. When we get there, I realize the Alphas must have gotten up early to set up a trial room of sorts. It's not like the committee room, but in the dining hall, they've pushed tables and chairs against the wall except for one large, long table where the Alphas and Lunas will sit and two smaller tables, one that has one chair for Zahn, and one that has three chairs for me, Jocelyn, and Hunter.

Hunter and I get Jocelyn settled, as the other Alphas and Lunas take their positions at the head table, with Jake at the center. Hunter remains standing and a few moments later, Zahn is brought in by several warriors.

He snarls at the head table before looking around and finding Jocelyn.

"Jocelyn, stop this! You are my mate! ENOUGH!"

"Alpha Zahn, have a seat. This court has not been brought to order," Jake says, sounding confident and not at all like a brand- new Alpha.

"Look here, pup," Zahn sneers at Jake.

"Alpha Zahn, you have been warned to keep your mouth closed until you are addressed by this court. If you cannot do so, you will be removed and this court will continue without your testimony," Jake says, never once looking away from Zahn.

Zahn growls, but doesn't say another word, and once he is settled, Jake begins.

"It has come to the attention of this court that Luna Jocelyn is currently residing in Alpha Hunter's pack. The court understands that Alpha Zahn feels that Alpha Hunter is actively and maliciously keeping Alpha Zahn away from his mate, against both of their

will. For those reasons, Alpha Zahn waged a war against Alpha Hunter, which he and his pack lost. Alpha Zahn is that correct?" Jake asks.

"He brought me to his pack under false pretenses. He stole my mate from me, and he refuses to even let me see her," he snarls. From the corner of my eye, I can see Zahn trying to look at Jocelyn, but Hunter is artfully maneuvering his body to keep him from glaring at Jocelyn.

"And what pretenses were those?" Jake asks.

"To help me form a better mate bond with my mate. Instead, he took her from me and refuses to let me see her," he growls.

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Chapter 187: Verdict

Sophie

Jake makes a note on the tablet in front of him then turns to our table. "Luna Jocelyn, have you been forcefully kept from your mate? The court recognizes that you have Alpha Hunter and Luna Sophie at your table. If you would prefer to have them removed, we can do so."

"No, I want them here. I asked them to be here with me. And to answer your question, no, I have not been forcibly kept from my mate. I've finally been given the space from him that I've been requesting since he forced his mark on me against my will," she says.

"Which is the whole reason we came to Hunter's pack to begin with," Zahn yells. "So we could work through that."

"You had no intention of working through that Zahn. You and I both know that. You just wanted reinforcement that you'd tried and I'm the one who was unwilling to move forward. But that backfired on you, didn't it? Luna Sophie was very upfront with you about allowing me to decide when and how I spent time with you. You just thought that Hunter would step in and override her. Now that you know that he actually respects his mate and listens to what she has to say, you want to say he's keeping me from you. It's ME keeping me from you, Zahn. Accept my rejection and be done with this," Jocelyn says forcefully.

"Look at you, all high and mighty while you hide behind another Alpha," he sneers.

Faster than I was expecting, Jocelyn stands, her chair flying backwards and slamming against the other chairs and tables against the wall.

"I don't need to hide behind anyone. Now that I'm finally getting the medical treatment that I need, now that my wolf is finally getting strong enough that I can feel her presence again, I don't need to hide. What I need is for you to get out of my life. I never wanted you as a mate. You were never intended to be my mate. I would never have willingly accepted you as my mate and neither would my wolf."

"What will it take, Jocelyn? What will it take for you to return to our home with me?" he says, looking at her. "No matter how it happened, you are our mate. Kortan and I want you at our side. You are our Luna."

Jocelyn smiles sadly. "Do you know, I've learned a lot lately about what it means to be a true Luna, the way they interact with their pack, the way they care about their pack, how their mates treat them and respect them. Being around this group of women has taught me a lot about the life that I want for myself. I don't ever see myself having that life with you."

"You are my mate!" he snarls, standing up before the warriors close in on him, putting their hands on his shoulders and holding him back. I can feel Hunter, ready to attack if Zahn makes a move toward Jocelyn.

"Have a seat, Alpha Zahn," Jake says forcefully.

When everyone is seated, I look up at Alpha Jake.

"May I make a suggestion?"

"Of course, Luna," he says. I stand and look at Alpha Zahn as Hunter gets Jocelyn's seat for her.

"Alpha, if you want to make an impact on your mate, I think you should get on your knees and beg her forgiveness," I say.

"Excuse me?" he scoffs at me.

"Get on your knees, strip yourself bare in front of your peers, the other ranked members in this room, then publicly shame yourself for others to see by apologizing to your mate," I say.

"You see what I'm dealing with?" he asks the council as Jocelyn looks up at me frowning and I feel Hunter going through my mind, trying to understand the purpose behind my words. When he finds it, he nods at me.

"And why would I do that, Luna?" Zahn asks, as if my title means less than the dirt on his shoes.

"Because it's what you did to her, Alpha," I say with as much condescension in my tone as he used.

"I was there. I saw you in the woods. I saw how you shoved Jocelyn to her knees, stripped her bare in front of your pack members and shamed her by mating her and forcefully marking her as she sobbed and begged you to stop. If it's good enough for your Luna," I snarl, getting angry all over again, "it should be good enough for you."

I watch as my words sink in. Only Hunter knew that I was there. Even Jocelyn didn't know. I may have just lost a friend, but I needed to let the council know what he did.

"Public mating's were not against the law," he says quietly, but looks away from Jocelyn.

"That's what you're going to stand behind?" Nikki asks. "The law?"

"The law is what we live by," he insists.

"And what law says it's okay for you to force your mark on someone who doesn't want it?" Margot asks. I was glad to see her here. She's not technically Ezra's mate, but she was a Luna, so everyone agreed that she should have a place on the trial.

"The ranked members were on the run. None of us could find our mates," he snarls.

"But you did find your mate, didn't you Alpha Zahn? You found her and she chose to end her life rather than be with you. Isn't that correct?" Robin asks him.

"Caralyn was ill," he says.

"Was she?" Dutton asks. "Because I remember meeting her and I don't remember thinking that she was ill at all."

Zahn stays quiet, gritting his teeth so loudly that everyone in the room can hear it. Everyone knows that he's lying.

"Alpha Hunter, your pack is the one that was attacked," Jake says.

"That's correct," Hunter says. "Alpha Zahn knowingly attacked my pack when he knew that I would be away. However, I anticipated the attack and me, and my former Beta prepared for an attack. While Alpha Zahn's warriors were decimated, mine had minimal injuries that were healed by the time I returned home.

"The law," Jake stresses, "states that if an Alpha attacks another Alpha, wages war against their pack, or in any other way tries to overthrow them and that Alpha loses, it is up to the winner to decide the fate of the offending Alpha," he says, turning to Hunter. "What punishment are you requesting for Alpha Zahn, Alpha Hunter?"

“Alpha Zahn put my pack at risk, he has threatened my Luna on more than one occasion, and he has argued and fought every step of the process that Sophie and I have attempted to take to help heal Luna Jocelyn so that she can decide for herself what she wants to do with her life. For those reasons, I am requesting execution.”

I feel Jocelyn reach over and take my hand as Jake nods and looks down at the end of the table of Alphas and Lunas. This is it.

“Alpha Lucas, I understand that you have excused yourself and your Luna from this process, being Alpha Hunter’s previous Beta.”

“That is correct.”

“Very well, let’s start with Alpha Kayce,” he says.

They go down the line, all of the Alphas and Lunas agreeing with Zahn’s execution. It isn’t until the last person, Calvin, agrees that he finally snaps.

“Just you wait, Calvin! It’ll be you in this seat before you know it. Isn’t your mate already an Alpha of her own pack? I don’t see you getting her back anytime soon. Don’t wage war against any of these Alphas or it will be your head next!” he yells.

The warriors grab him, beginning to lead him from the room. However, he pulls himself to a stop, turning to face Jocelyn. This time, it’s obvious that his wolf is forward.

“I am truly sorry for the pain that we caused you, Jocelyn. Please, when Cassidy returns to you, let her know that as well. I don’t want to hurt you any more than I already have, so I accept your rejection,” Kortan says sadly

I can feel Jocelyn’s shock at the wolf’s words, but we stand, watching as he is removed from the packhouse. As soon as he’s out of the room, Jocelyn collapses with the pain of the severed bond.

Hunter turns to Jocelyn. “It’s your right to execute him, if you want to.”

Jocelyn shakes her head. “I just want it done.”

Hunter and the other Alphas go outside to execute Zahn while the Lunas surround Jocelyn, holding her. When it’s done, the Alphas return, and we stand back, helping Jocelyn to stand.

“I’m so sorry, Jocelyn. What you must think of me,” I say, feeling tears in my eyes.

“I think you did what any smart woman would do, what any of us would have done. You ran when you knew you couldn’t help me. If you had tried, you’d have failed and none of

us would be here right now,” she says, pulling me into a hug. “I’m thankful you didn’t, because now, I’m free.”

Her forgiveness finally gives me what I need to let go of the guilt that I’ve been holding on to for months.

The One He Claimed Chapter 188

Chapter 188: New Position

Calvin

Zahn’s words continue to resonate with me. While our situations are very different, there are still some similarities. I’m separated from my mate, now by her own choice. She’s created alliances with every Alpha that was here for the competition and trial, even the new Alpha, Jake. Today, I’m pretty sure that she’s planning to create an alliance with Alpha Lucas. I know that he and his mate, Luna Kinsley are staying to talk to Alaric’s pack members for a few days before heading back to Hunter’s pack to collect their things. And I know that she’s offered the Beta position to Jocelyn. She continues to increase her position in the werewolf community, creating bonds that will make her, and therefore her pack, stronger.

I watch my mate as she carries my daughter, nursing her while she goes about her day. While I hate that she’s so exposed to others in the pack, I have to admit, she is s** as f***k. I notice that all of these pack members respect her and no one, with the possible exception of Caleb, looks at her lustfully. That guy is a problem that needs watching. It’s why I went to Owen’s pack competition. I wanted to make sure he didn’t try to undermine my mate while he was there.

As I look at Amelia, I realize that I don’t know who this woman is anymore. Being separated from her has made me feel lost, like I no longer know my place in this world. I hadn’t realized the impact she’d had on our pack until she was gone. Now, all that cohesiveness, the pack connection, seems to have followed her here. This pack feels united, and our pack back home feels...as lost as I do.

How did I never know that my mate had such strength in her? How had I never seen this side of her? The compassion, the love for her pack is still there, that has always been present. But this strength? I didn’t know my mate possessed this kind of strength.

It makes me wonder; am I more like Zahn than I realized? Was I holding my mate back, keeping her from being the incredible woman I see in front of me? It was never my intention. I was comfortable with how things were, settled, and, if I’m being honest, complaisant. Now, I see that what my mate needs is a man who shows the same strength and compassion that she does, someone who is willing to stand beside her and pave the way for a new future, a different life for our pups. My mate has changed, grown

in the last couple of months, and if I intend to keep her, I'd better start making some changes too.

Hunter POV

It felt good to return to our pack, finally feeling settled. I know there are still many things that need to be done. Those things will always be there, but now, I'm not going anywhere until Sophie delivers our son.

Lucas and Kinsley stayed in Amelia's pack for two more days, talking to the new pack members and discussing their plans for how they intend to run their pack. I'm proud of Lucas, but I'm really going to miss him. He's been a fantastic Beta, always reliable, always at my side, always a good friend.

However, I need to move forward and right now, I need to meet with my Ga**as and offer them the Beta position.

When they knock on the door, I tell them to come in, moving from my desk to sit with them.

"Come in, have a seat," I tell them. "How is everything going?"

"They both give me a report on patrols, warrior training, and other things that happened in the pack while I was gone.

I listen, recognizing that together, these two are quite the power couple. If they accept, they'll make good Betas.

"You know that Lucas and Kinsley won their own pack. And while I'm very happy for them, and we'll be having a celebration for them when they return tonight, it means our pack is now without a Beta couple."

"Yes, Jaime and I have already been talking about that, Alpha. We have some ideas for you," Penny says.

Interesting. I'm curious who they chose, so I ask them for the names. They give me a list of warriors, all strong fighters, all of them are competing for their own pack. It's a good list though, other than leaving themselves off of it.

"Those are good names. Unfortunately, I, like the other Alphas, am struggling to offer lessor positions to warriors who are fighting for an Alpha position. And besides, I have someone else in mind."

"Who?" Jaime asks. Both of them look curious as if the idea of me promoting them never occurred to either of them, and maybe it didn't.

“You two,” I say, giving them a look like it should be obvious.

“Us?” Penny asks, turning to look at Jaime. “But...”

“I’m not even ranked,” Jaime says.

“Excuse me?” I ask, my brow arching indignantly. “Are you not my Gamma?”

“Well, I mean...” he backtracks.

“What we mean is, Alpha, we never thought that we’d be eligible given that I’m of Gamma blood and Jaime’s family comes from a group of warriors,” Penny says.

I tilt my head at them. “And what were the credentials of the group you just provided to me? Are any of them descended from Alphas or Betas?” I ask.

I watch as they open and close their mouths, looking at each other.

“Stop underestimating yourselves. If you’re going to be my Betas, I need to see more confidence in the two of you,” I say sternly, but it’s mostly to snap them out of their shock.

“Yes, Alpha. We’ll...” Penny looks at Jaime.

“We’ll talk to Beta Lucas and Beta Kinsley when they return, find out everything we need to know so that we can be the best Betas possible,” Jaime says.

“Alpha Lucas and Luna Kinsley, now. And they were incredible Betas, and I have no doubt that you’ll be just as good as they were. So, is that a yes?” I ask them.

They look at each other again. “Yes,” Penny says laughing.

“Good, we’ll have to make it official, but not until after tonight. I want the pack to be able to celebrate Lucas and Kinsley first, then we’ll make the announcement.

“Thank you, Alpha!” they say, standing up to leave.

“Don’t thank me. If you thought you worked hard for me before, you’re about to see that there’s more work for you when you become a Beta and until our Gamma position is filled, we’ll all be working overtime.”

“We won’t disappoint you, Alpha,” Penny says.

“I know you won’t. Congratulations,” I say, walking them to the door. As I close-it, I hear Penny whoop with excitement and hear the two of them laughing as they walk down the hall.

I finish my work, keeping a mental connection with Sophie. She's back in the nursery today, probably overwhelmed with all of the she-wolves that were around for the competition. Margot was a great help, making sure that Sophie didn't attack anyone needlessly for talking to me. And now that we're home, she's settling in quickly. I feel her nod off in the early part of the afternoon, and I go up to find her in the rocking chair once again.

I pick her up and carry her to our bedroom, laying her in bed and kissing her stomach, purring softly as I feel my son bump against my lips before covering her and heading back downstairs to check on the party preparations for tonight.

When I get downstairs, I realize that Penny and Jaime have already made sure that everything is set for tonight and I feel something settle inside me. I hadn't realized that I was nervous about losing Lucas, but he's been at my side since I took over as Alpha. I couldn't be prouder o like there was going to be a gapi with Sophie about to deliver our

However, I realize that I was righ and Jaime. They may not do thin Lucas and Kinsley did them, but this pack as Alpha. I couldn't be prouder of him, but when he won, it felt like there was going to be a gaping hole in my pack, especially with Sophie about to deliver our pup.

However, I realize that I was right in my assessment of Penny and Jaime. They may not do things exactly the same way that Lucas and Kinsley did them, but they'll be incredible Betas for this pack.

The One He Claimed Chapter 189

Chapter 189: Celebration

Sophie

I wake up in bed, not remembering Hunter moving me, but knowing it must have been him. Even with everything going on, he's keeping close tabs on me. I look at the clock and realize that I need to get up and start getting ready. Lucas and Kinsley will be here soon. I'm so excited about seeing them, but I know I'll probably cry when it's time to say goodbye.

I get up and showered, finding a comfortable dress that is still a bit snug around my big belly. "Huntington, you need to make your entrance soon, so I don't have to buy more clothes," I say, rubbing my stomach as I try to make the dress fit better.

"I'm going to miss seeing your belly swollen with my pup," Hunter says from behind me, his possessive tone sends shivers down my body.

I turn and smile at him. "I'm sure you'll have another one in me very soon. But I won't miss my clothes fitting me again, that's for sure," I say.

Hunter looks down at my stomach, coming forward and running his hands on either side. I feel my back arching, just enough that my mate realizes what I need.

"I'm going to miss that too," he says.

"What's that?" I ask, my eyes closed as the feeling of him touching me moves through my body.

"How very responsive you are to me. I like it that even my voice has you arching these days. I love knowing that your body responds so completely to me."

I chuckle. "My body always responds to you. You are a master at making my body respond to you," I tell him.

"Hmmm, we should test that," he says, spinning me around and putting my hands against the door, easing the ache inside me that feels nearly constant these days. If I'm not sleeping, I want Hunter inside me.

When we've both found our release, Hunter takes my hand and leads me downstairs. I needed some space after the competition for Alaric's pack, so I wasn't part of the party planning and decorations. However, the pack is going all out to say goodbye to their Beta couple and congratulating them on becoming an Alpha and Luna.

It isn't long before we get the notice that Lucas and Kinsley have passed the pack border, and Hunter and I walk outside to greet them while the others position themselves to shout out congratulations when they walk in.

When they step out, I can see that Kinsley is already feeling the strong emotions of saying goodbye that I am. Because our baby bumps are so large, it's impossible to hug, so we clasp hands, both of us fighting tears.

"Tonight is a celebration. Save your tears for tomorrow," I whisper, my throat tight with emotion.

She nods, and both of our mates come to wrap their arms around us.

"Come on, the entire pack has put together a party for you. We have food, music, drinks for those of us who can drink..." Hunter says chuckling, kissing the top of my head.

When we walk in, Hunter and I let Lucas and Kinsley walk in ahead of us. When they do, the entire pack is there, yelling "Congratulations!". A moment later, Kinsley bursts into tears.

It's a beautiful night with lots of food, laughter, and talk of Lucas and Kinsley's plans for the new pack.

"We need a doctor quickly. I've already talked to Dr. Caspian about coming to our pack once Sophie delivers Hunt. I'm only about a week or two behind her if this little guy stays put that long. He's so big!" she says, looking at me.

"Feels like I'm carrying a watermelon in my stomach. A watermelon that moves and kicks," I say, rubbing my stomach.

"Oh, the kicking, I remember those days. How do those babies know right where your bladder and kidneys are?" Leah asks.

"I know!" Kinsley says, rubbing her stomach and smiling. "I can't believe my son is going to be an Alpha. I'm still a bit in shock about that."

After dinner, we move out back, listening to the music as the evening wears on, Kinsley and I are given chairs to sit in while Lucas and Hunter hover nearby.

"Hey Lucas, what are you planning to do about your ranked members," Brutus asks him. As usual when he's not working, he's got Leah cuddled up against him.

"I'm so glad you asked that Brutus. As it happens, I don't know Alaric's pack well enough to make that decision. I'm looking for an interim Beta and I intended to ask you if you were interested in the position," Lucas says. I watch as Hunter zeros in on the conversation.

"Are you stealing my pack members now, Lucas?" he asks.

"Borrowing, unless Brutus and Leah decide that they like my pack better," Lucas says, smiling at Hunter. I know it's more of taunt, but the reality is that this is why I wanted Lucas next to Amelia. I wanted our pack members, all pack members, to have an option of the pack that suits them best.

"A Beta? I'm not Beta," Brutus says.

"Kinsley and I discussed it on the way here today. You're a good warrior, strong but fair. You know how to test a pack member without decimating them, and when the need arises for something a bit more violent, you're ready and able. I know you're old enough that having the position for twenty years probably doesn't sound appealing, but something shorter term, maybe a year to help me get the pack settled and time to assess the others who may be interested in taking the position permanently."

Brutus looks at Leah. "I don't know anything about being a Beta female," she says.

"I can teach you that. I don't anything about being a Luna, so we can figure it out together," Kinsley says.

I watch Brutus' face and when it softens, I know Lucas has him.

"You'd make a fine Beta, Leah," he purrs at her.

"Brutus," she says, blushing.

"I couldn't agree more," Kinsley says.

"Any other pack members you want to steal from me Lucas?" Hunter growls, only partially playing. He hadn't anticipated that some of our pack would follow Lucas.

"I'm not stealing them away, Hunter, and I'm pretty sure the ones I want have already been offered my old Beta position," he says, still smiling smugly at Hunter.

"I haven't announced it to the pack yet because I was letting tonight be about you and Kinsley, but if you'd like to announce your replacements..." Hunter says.

Lucas turns and looks at Penny and Jaime. "So, you two have accepted?" he asks.

Penny looks about ready to burst with excitement. "Yes!"

"May I have your attention please," Lucas says, raising his voice and getting the pack's attention. Someone turns off the music so everyone can hear.

"You all know why we're here tonight, to celebrate Kinsley and I winning our own pack," he says, and everyone cheers.

"I didn't have anything to do with it," Kinsley says.

Lucas winks at her. "I couldn't and wouldn't have done it without you. But tonight isn't just about celebrating us. May I introduce our replacements, your new Betas, formerly your Gammas, Penny and Jaime!" he announces, and the pack begins cheering and howling wildly.

Everyone begins congratulating Penny and Jaime and I can feel their excitement and happiness about the decision. I know they'll both be great Betas.

Hunter finally turns back to Lucas. "So, you didn't answer my question. Who else are you planning to steal from my pack. I know you. I know you have someone in mind," he says.

Lucas smiles at Kinsley, then turns and looks around the pack.

"Beth?"

"Yes, Alpha," she says.

"How would you like to come to my pack and be my Gamma?" he asks her.

“Me? I’m not Gamma,” she says, looking shocked.

“You want my sister to be your Gamma?” Jaime asks.

“I do.” Lucas says.

“You have the heart of a Gamma, Beth,” Kinsley says.

“But the strength of a Lead Warrior. I’ve seen you in training. Your brother isn’t the only one who learned from your father,” Lucas says.

She turns and looks at her brother. “What do you think?”

“I think you’d be fantastic. And, if you hate it, you can always come back here, right?” Jaime asks me and Hunter.

“Always,” Hunter says..

“What about Chloe?” Beth says, her smile fading.

“Chloe can pick which pack she’d like to live in. She’s welcome in my pack and I’m sure Hunter has no problem having her stay here,” Lucas says, looking at Hunter.

“Since I’m not thrilled that you’re stealing my pack members, I would prefer it if she stayed here, but that is up to you, Chloe,” Hunter says, finding her in the group of people near Jaime.

“I’d like to stay with my sister, if that’s okay,” she says softly.

“It’s fine, honey,” I tell her. I know she also bonded with Kinsley when she first arrived, so I’m sure that played into her decision.

“Well, we have a lot to celebrate tonight! Let’s turn the music back on and celebrate everyone’s new positions!” Hunter says, slapping Lucas on the back. “You don’t get William,” he says, so only those of us around him can hear.

“We’ll see,” Lucas says, still teasing Hunter.

The One He Claimed Chapter 190

Chapter 190: Saying Goodbye

Hunter

Last night was bittersweet. I'm truly happy for my friends and what they've accomplished, but **n it hurts to know that I won't have Lucas by my side every day any longer.

I convinced Lucas to join me for one more training session. I get up early, letting Sophie sleep. I know today is going to be a difficult day for her too. She and Kinsley have gotten very close, but hopefully, the bonds we created here will continue. And while we'll see them less, the times we do see them will be that much more special.

When I walk out onto the training field, Jaime is already at the front of the group, Lucas standing beside him.

"Get used to Hunter being late to training," Lucas says good naturedly to Jaime, making the warriors chuckle.

"I have no idea what you're talking about. In the last two days since you've been gone, he's beat me to training," Jaime says, giving it right back.

"Spoken like my new Beta!" I say. "Come on, Lucas. You're with me today." I say as my warriors grumble that they don't get a last chance to spar with him.

It's a great sparring match and I know that Lucas is ready to take his place as an Alpha. When we're done, he rubs his side and smirks at me. "D**n, you really are upset that I'm taking a handful of your pack members, aren't you?"

"You could have given me some warning," I grumble.

"Where's the fun in that?" he says, chuckling as we walk inside. I refocus my attention on Sophie, and I feel her overwhelmed with her emotions.

"I need to go find my mate," I say, all joking gone.

"So do I. Today will be..."

"Tough. Yeah, it will," I say before jogging upstairs to find Sophie in the bathroom, wrapped in a towel, crying.

When I walk in, she looks up at me with tears streaming down her face. "I'm going to miss them so much."

I scoop her up, and gently carry her into the room, sitting on our loveseat and snuggling my mate against me.

"Sorry, I'm sweaty. I was sparring with Lucas this morning," I say, kissing the top of her head.

She nods. "How did he do?"

"He sparred like he was made to be an Alpha," I say, not sure if Sophie's emotions are getting to me, or if I'm struggling on my own with saying goodbye to my friend.

"I know we'll see them again soon. It's just...'

"I know. We won't be having breakfast with them every day, they won't be walking into our offices asking to speak with us, we won't run into them at the pack hospital as we're having our pups checked. It won't be the same, but we will see them and once the community area is together, it'll be even easier for us to schedule play dates or community training sessions. We even talked about having the warrior competitions to give our warriors something to strive for and work hard to achieve.

Sophie tucks her nose under my throat, breathing in my scent as I hold her in my lap, rubbing my hands over her stomach.

Once she's settled, I carry her into the bathroom, and we shower together. I wash her hair and feel her relax as I massage the shampoo into her hair.

When we're done, we head downstairs to have breakfast, seeing Lucas and Kinsley surrounded by pack members all wanting to speak with them before they leave. I can tell that Kinsley is struggling just as much as Sophie is, maybe more since she'll be leaving most of these people behind to start their new pack.

When she sees Sophie, she extends her hand, and Sophie goes to sit beside her. I get my mate some breakfast and hand her the plate while she and Kinsley talk to the pack members. I can feel Sophie struggling not to cry, mingled with laughter as the pack continues to reminisce about funny things that have happened over the years.

I grab some food to go, knowing that Lucas needs help loading their things. It's late morning before their truck is packed with everything they own.

"It doesn't look like much, does it?" he asks.

I look at it and smile. "It looks like the start of a new life," I say to him.

He turns and looks at me, and I see the same emotion in his eyes that I feel in mine.

"I'm going to miss you brother," he says, and I pull him into a hug.

"I'm going to miss you too."

We go back inside and get our mates, Sophie and I standing aside while they say goodbye to everyone. Sophie and Kinsley aren't the only ones crying.

I walk over to Brutus and shake his hand. "I know you'll be a great Beta for Lucas but get your a**back to this pack when you're done," I tell him.

"Yes, Alpha. I didn't...I didn't realize it would be so hard to leave.

It helps that Brooklyn will be there soon for Luna Kinsley's delivery, but...I'll miss everyone here."

"You can always come visit," I tell him. "You too, Leah," I say as she walks up, having said goodbye to her friends.

"Thank you, Alpha. I'm sure I'll want to come back a lot to see my friends."

"You're always welcome."

Next, I move to Beth and Chloe. "This is a whole new opportunity for you Beth. Are you ready for it?"

"I don't know, Alpha, I'm terrified. What if I screw up?" she asks.

"I'll tell you a secret. You will screw up and you'll do it more than once. Just make sure your screw ups don't cost anyone their life or put the pack at risk. Then when you make a mistake, own up to it and learn from it. That's what good leaders do."

"Thank you, Alpha!

The pack walks the others outside, Sophie and Kinsley taking the longest to say their goodbyes, both still crying. Lucas and I walk up to them, wrapping our arms around our mates much like we did when they arrived yesterday.

"I expect to get an invitation to my son's best friend's birth," Kinsley says.

"And our son expects to get an invitation to his best friend's birth, soon thereafter," Sophie says.

They squeeze hands again, unable to hug and then Lucas packs Kinsley into the truck and their convoy of three vehicles, including Brutus, Leah, Beth and Chloe, all make their way down the drive as we wave our goodbyes.

Lucas POV

I watch my old pack waving goodbye as we drive off, Kinsley's tears coming even harder now.

I reach over and wipe the tears from the cheek closest to me. "It's going to be okay baby."

"I know. It was just...it was so much harder than I was expecting. It's like leaving family, you know?"

"I do know. And I know that we have our work cut out for us Kinsley. Alaric's people are nothing like Hunter's. We have a struggle ahead, but I think we're up to the challenge."

"Stealing Brutus was a good idea," she says and I'm glad to see her smiling.

"That was a brilliant idea of yours. And Leah will great as a Beta. We need that kitchen and the packhouse whipped into shape and I know she'll be able to get that going right away."

We're quiet a moment, and I take her hand and pull it to my lips.

"Hunter was right. This is the start of a new life for us, Kinsley. A new life that I never dreamed of, but now that it's here and it's ours, I can't wait to live it."

My mate turns and looks at me. "There's no one in the world that I'd rather start a new life with than you, Lucas."

I smile at my mate and something deep inside me settles. Everything is going to okay. I have my mate at my side and on my side and that's all I ever need