

The One He Claimed Chapter 41

Chapter 41: Kinsley's Stand

Kinsley

The next morning I wake, feeling fantastic. Lucas made me come several times and then I had reached out to stroke him, causing him to o**m after only a few strokes. We both laughed at that, his mostly an embarrassed laugh, and then we had cleaned up and curled up together to sleep.

I roll over, expecting to find Lucas, but instead, I find a note attached to a red rose..

Good morning, sleepyhead. You looked too peaceful to wake. If you have time, I'd love to have lunch with you today.

Your mate and lover, Lucas

I smile, getting out of bed and showering, thinking of last night and how kind and generous Lucas had been, how gentle and caring. As I bathe, I can still feel the tingle of my nipples from his very talented tongue last night.

I get dressed and head downstairs, ready to take on whatever today will bring, and I nearly run into Trent.

"Kinsley," he says, looking me over as if I'm naked.

"That's Beta Kinsley to you."

"I have such a hard time calling you Beta when I've seen you

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f***ed right in front of me. You know, usually girls like that charge by the hour," he says, licking his lips. "So how much?"

I'm not sure what I would have said, but another voice comes from behind me.

"Excuse me!" Luna Sophie exclaims, walking up. "You will apologize, and you will do it now.

"Says who? You? You're not my Luna. You're no one's Luna. You don't get a title unless your mate **ks you in front of us so we can all watch," he says lasciviously.

I see red and a moment later, Trent is on the ground with a broken nose and I'm standing over him seething.

"What is going on here?" Alpha Hunter says, walking up. He looks at Sophie and then at me. "Beta Kinsley?"

"He insulted our Luna," I snarl.

"Is that so?" he asks, looking at Sophie.

"Not before he insulted our Beta. I believe he made a reference to her being a cheap w*e."

I **ear gasps from other pack members, the sounds of a scuffle drawing them to see what's going on.

"I see," Hunter says, walking up behind Trent. Trent starts to get up, but Alpha Hunter pushes him back down. "Stay down," he growls at him.

"Beta Kinsley, what is the penalty for disrespecting one's Beta?" he asks, and I look down. If he had asked me the penalty for disrespecting one's Luna, I could have answered easily, but I day's Stand still struggle to answer if it's about me.

"Lucas?" he asks and my head snaps around to see my mate standing behind me. He came in with the others.

"Death," he says, glaring at Trent.

"Kinsley, what did we discuss the other day?" Alpha Hunter asks to me, his hand still holding Trent on the ground.

I look down, trying to find my courage. Courage that I used to have, that I'm trying to regain.

I square my shoulders and look up, meeting Alpha Hunter's gaze. "That if I wouldn't accept the disrespect toward someone else, then I shouldn't allow it towards myself."

Alpha Hunter nods, as if he's considering his options.

"The penalty for disrespecting one's Luna is also death," he says. Trent snarls and tries to jerk free, but Alpha Hunter extends his claws, slicing them through Trent's shoulder and pushing down, keeping him on his knees.

"Beta Kinsley, I told you that I will not tolerate disrespect in this pack, did I not?"

"Yes, Alpha," I say, feeling that I've once again disappointed him.

“Why didn’t you come to me yesterday?” he asks softly.

“...” I begin, feeling Lucas come up behind me.

“You didn’t think I realized something was going on when I saw Trent talking to you after patrols yesterday? I asked Alpha Hunter this morning if you had approached him after he and our Luna returned.”

I shake my head, feeling like I’ve disappointed both of them.

“He disrespected you, Beta Kinsley. It should be you who exacts his punishment,” Alpha Hunter says.

“Don’t you dare touch me, you f***g b**h,” Trent snarls. A moment later, he’s hanging off the ground, Alpha Hunter’s claws holding him up by the throat.

“I’ll do it. It would be my pleasure,” Lucas growls, moving to step around me.

“No. No, Alpha Hunter is right. He insulted me first. I need to be the one to punish him for his crimes.”

Alpha Hunter opens his hand and lets Trent drop to the floor, stepping back and letting me take the lead.

“Trent, you have disrespected your Beta female, your Luna, and therefore your Alpha and Beta male. You are hereby sentenced to death, effective immediately,” I say, giving him his sentence.

“You f**..” Trent begins, but I extend my claws and in one sweeping motion, his head goes flying across the room. Blood sprays over me as his body falls to the floor. There is something empowering about being able to stand up for myself. Finally. Finally, I feel capable of stopping the leering stares and remarks.

I turn and look at everyone else in the room. “Anyone else feeling disrespectful towards me?” I snarl. When no one responds, I turn back..

“Good. Get this a**hole out of here. Bury the body off of pack lands. Only respectful, true pack members get a funeral and pyre. And spread the word, disrespect is not allowed in this pack, not by anyone, not towards anyone,” I say, looking at Alpha Hunter to see if he’ll back me up.

He nods and I turn, needing to shower and desperately needing to get ahold of my emotions that are all over the place.

I jog up the stairs and peel off my clothes as I head to the shower. I’ve just stepped under the scalding hot water when I hear Lucas come in.

“Kinsley, are you...”

I don't wait, I grab him, pulling him into the shower with me and stripping off his clothes. I'm not sure why killing Trent has made a difference, but it's as if everything inside me has righted after all this time.

“Mine,” I snarl, leaping onto him and sliding down his already hard length. He presses me against the shower wall, kissing me with a passion I've never felt from him. He begins slowly, carefully thrusting inside me, but that's not what I need, not right now.

“I need more. I need more!” I tell him before sliding my tongue into his mouth. He begins thrusting into me, giving me what I need. Our hands are everywhere, our mouths kissing and licking each other, desperate after waiting a year for this moment.

The moment my o**m hits, I throw my head back and scream with the pleasure of it. Lucas' own o**m is only a moment behind mine.

“MINE!” he snarls before he sinks his canines into my neck, marking me again.

My response is only a moment behind his. “MINE!” I growl, sinking my canines into his marking spot, marking him again as both of our bodies shoot off again with the most explosive o**m I've ever had in my life.

Sophie POV

When Hunter had walked in, he had mind linked me to let him handle the situation. I had been surprised, but I watched, seeing that there was something more going on with Kinsley.

After she jogged upstairs, Lucas right behind her, I walked over to Hunter who is overseeing the clean-up of Trent.

“I feel like I missed something,” I say to him quietly.

He looks at where Kinsley and Lucas had gone up the stairs. “I needed her to stand her ground. Lucas found out recently that this,” he says, gesturing toward Trent's decapitated body, “has been going on for a year. I needed her to take a stand, to finally understand her worth, and to fight for it. Thank you for staying quiet. I could tell that wasn't easy for you,” he says, pulling me close and kissing the top of my head.

“It wasn't, but I trust you, so I knew there was more to this than what had happened here today.”

I turn and look at where our Betas had gone. “Talk about a rite of passage. The term 'bathed in blood' has a whole new meaning to me now. Did you feel the difference in her? When she challenged the pack, did you feel it?” I ask him.

He smiles smugly. "Yes, I do believe we finally have our true Beta female."

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Chapter 42: Assumptions and Wagers

Hunter

The next morning, on the way to warrior training, I bump into a ridiculously happy Lucas.

"Beta?" I ask but based on the dark circles under his eyes and the fresh mark on his neck, I'm pretty sure I know why my Beta looks so happy.

"It finally happened, Alpha. Kins finally gave herself to me, and holy f**g s**t. I had no idea it could be that good."

I smile at my Beta. It's good to see him this happy and to know that what I saw in Kinsley yesterday extended to their relationship.

"I'm not exactly an expert, but I can tell you that after just a few days, it gets better and better every day." I say.

"Seriously?"

"Seriously. Where is your mate?"

"Sleeping. I wore her out," he says smugly.

"I'm sure that will continue for a long time, so she better get used to working on little to no sleep." I tell him as we step outside.

I take the time to address our warriors and explain that we have some new faces from Alpha Carter's pack to assist us until we can begin to rebuild our pack's defenses and update our patrol schedule.

After that, I pair Carter's warriors with mine and watch to see how good they actually are. I'm not sure if Beta Matthew sent me his best warriors, or if they are all this good, but it's a

testament to his pack and their training that his warriors are able to easily keep up with mine.

As with all packs, methods of training and techniques vary, so I talk to Lucas about having Carter's warriors rotate in to lead the morning training and teach our warriors some new fighting methods. The more prepared we are for battle, the better.

After training, I head inside, happy to see my mate talking to our pack members and getting to know them. I haven't given her much time to do that other than her Luna ceremony. I walk up behind her, wrapping an arm around her waist.

"Can I join you for breakfast?" I ask her.

"Absolutely not," she says, surprising me and turning to look at me with her hand on her hips.

"Did I do something wrong?"

"Why didn't you wake me for warrior training?"

I smile down at her. "I thought you might be tired after last night," I say, knowing that the entire room is watching our exchange. She might want to think twice about making a scene in the future. Her cheeks redden and she suddenly realizes that we have an audience.

"It's not because I'm a woman?" she asks.

"Did you not tell me that you were able to withstand Alpha Owen's Alpha command?" I ask her. I hear the murmurings of the group. It's good to remind our pack that their Luna is an Alpha wolf.

"Yes, but what does that have to do with fighting?" she asks.

"Why would I keep one of the strongest wolves in our pack from training unless I thought she needed her sleep?"

She presses her lips together and looks down. "I want to start training, no matter how little sleep I've had," she says, a bit sullenly.

"Fine, then no complaints when I keep you up until the wee hours of the morning because you're begging me for more," I say, leaning in so only she can hear the last part.

Now her cheeks turn a deep shade of red and I run my knuckles over her cheek, feeling the heat. "I love your passion, by the way. You should make sure it's directed properly, though. Now, will you have breakfast with me? I'd like to talk to you about our next steps."

"Yes," she says, lifting up on her toes and kissing me softly. "Sorry for jumping to conclusions."

"We both still have a lot to learn about the other. But I promise you, until you are carrying my pup, I would be thrilled for you to attend warrior training. As a matter of fact,

I told Lucas to have your father's warriors start training ours so we can learn the different techniques. Maybe you could stand in as trainer as well."

"I'm a bit out of practice. I think I'd like to go through a couple of training classes first, see how much I remember and how out of practice I am before I begin training others," she says, looking like she expects that she'll be starting over. She won't. She's an Alpha and it will all come back quickly. She's only been out of training for two years and if her father started her at ten, like most Alphas, she had six years before she stopped training.

"Let's see how you do tomorrow. I'll spar with you and see what you remember and how good your reflexes are. Deal?"

"Deal," she says, going through the buffet and piling food on her plate. I'm glad to see she's eating a decent amount of food. I'm hoping she'll put on some weight soon.

"How about we add a little wager to our sparring, to make it fun," I say quietly.

She glances at me from the corner of her eye, but I see the tips of her mouth tip up.

"What kind of wager?" she asks, and I can tell she's excited at the idea of a competition. She's such an Alpha. I love it.

"How about the winner gets to pick our sexual positions that night," I say in her ear. I feel her body shiver with my words, or maybe it's my breath against her ear, I'm not sure but her mouth spreads into a very satisfied smile.

"All of them?" she asks, knowing we'll be having sex more than once each night.

"Absolutely."

"You're on, Alpha," she says.

Pleased, I finish gathering my own food and the two of us head to a table where Kinsley and Lucas are eating. I notice they are talking quietly, and Kinsley is blushing similarly to how Sophie was blushing a few moments ago.

"Mind if we join you?" I ask. Sophie had already put her tray down but stops and looks from them to me.

"Oh, did you want some privacy?" she asks.

"No, no, we were just...talking," Kinsley says, blushing a deeper shade of red.

“Based on the color of your cheeks, I’d say your mate was talking to you about the same things that mine was talking to me about,” Sophie says, smiling at Kinsley before smirking up at me.

I just shake my head and sit down.

I look at Kinsley. “Are we good after yesterday?”

“Yes, Alpha. I won’t disappoint you again.”

I lean forward, holding her gaze. “You didn’t disappoint me, Kinsley. I just wanted to see you rise to the Beta that I know you can be. I think you’ve found yourself and I’m proud of you.”

She smiles, looking down, this blush a lighter shade than the one Lucas elicited. He leans in and kisses the side of her head. “I told you,” he says to her softly.

I give her a minute to collect herself, checking to make sure my mate is eating, then focus. “So, today, I want to invite Alphas Kayce and Robin for dinner. It needs to be soon and if they aren’t willing to make the trip, then I’m going to see if Sophie and I

can travel to see them. If that happens, you two will be in charge. again. I know I’m asking a lot during a time when things are up in the air, but...

“We understand, Alpha. We’re your Betas for a reason, right Kins?” Lucas says.

“Absolutely, Alpha. We will manage the pack and protect them as you would if the need arises.”

“I’m not expecting an attack, but am expecting to get a notice that the two of us have to come before the Committee of Alphas. However, that doesn’t mean that one or more of the Alphas won’t consider our pack weak knowing we lost some pack members recently, and depending on where they ended up...”

“Actually, I found out that Koden ended up with Alpha Owen,” Lucas says.

“Worst possible scenario,” I grumble. “If we do get attacked, that will be who leads it.”

“Agreed. I also heard that Owen has taken a fancy to one of the younger she-wolves who left our pack.”

I frown. “Who?”

“Brooklyn. Leah and Michael’s daughter.”

“The laws haven’t changed. He can’t publicly claim an omega,” I say.

Lucas stares at me. I glance at Sophie. Right. I went against our laws, so what's to keep Owen from going against them as well.

"If they come back, interview them, make sure you feel comfortable letting them back into the pack. At the very least, we'll give Brooklyn a safe place to live," I say.

"Leah didn't want to leave either. It was Michael who chose to leave," Kinsley says.

I nod. If Owen sets the precedent and the others follow in his footsteps, things could escalate even quicker than they will with just Sophie being involved.

"We need to start letting the she-wolves know that we have a safe place for them here," I say.

"We started that yesterday, Alpha" Kinsley says, smiling.

"And that's why you two are my Betas," I say, watching as Sophie pushes her plate away. It's only half empty.

"Sophie?"

"I can't eat anymore. I thought I could, but I can't. If I do, I won't be able to move," she says.

I want her to eat more, she's barely eating enough to support a human, much less a werewolf.

"Your stomach probably shrank while you were gone and if you weren't training, you wouldn't have been burning the calories that you normally would in a pack. I'm sure once you start training again, your appetite will increase," Kinsley says, looking from Sophie to me and back again. I hide my smile. Whether she realizes it or not, Kinsley is protecting her Luna.

"Very true, Kinsley. Let's hope after tomorrow's sparring that your hunger begins to increase. If that doesn't work, we'll have to find other activities to burn calories," I say, winking at Sophie and making her blush again.

After breakfast, I head to my office, leaving Sophie with Kinsley to begin walking through what she does with the pack. Before I call Kayce and Robin, I check my email. One in particular catches my eye and I open it.

'You are hereby ordered to appear in front of the Committee of Alphas one week from today at 9am. Your mate, Sophie Meyers, is required to attend as well to address the issue of you attempting to install your mate as your Luna without going through the proper protocols. If you fail to appear before the Committee, you will be renounced as an Alpha and your title and pack will be removed from you, with force, if necessary.'

One week. I have one week to get the remaining three Alphas on board. I pick up the phone and dial Kayce's number.

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Chapter 43: Refuge

Sophie

"I'm so glad you're here, Sophie. If I'm being honest, I'm excited that our Alpha was deserving of the legend," Kinsley says to me.

"I don't know anything about being a legend. I'm just Sophie," I say to her.

She stops and looks at me. "But you do. You stood up for me yesterday. I watch how you openly love your mate. I can feel how much you care for and want to do right for our pack. And most importantly, I can feel your desire to fight for what is right in this world. That makes you worthy of being a legend. I believe that you and Alpha Hunter will make the changes that our world desperately needs."

"No pressure," I say, only half joking.

"Are you willing to let your daughter go through what happened to me? To your sister?" she asks, and I feel nausea and anger rising inside me.

"Never," I growl, making her smile.

"See. The legend. Unlike others who try to escape, you are doing something about it. It started by running and now, you're taking a stand. Those are the behaviors of a legend."

I shake my head at Her. "We'll see, I guess."

"In truth, seeing you with Alpha Hunter made me see what it's

supposed to be like, or at least what it could be like with Lucas. He's a good man. He followed the law, but the law is wrong. I'm glad you're here, and proud to call you my Luna," she says.

"Thanks, Kinsley. Now, I know something of running a packhouse, but it's been a long time."

It's nearly lunch time when I see Hunter again. He comes looking for me, finding Kinsley and I in the kitchen making sure lunch is ready for the pack. He walks up behind me and wraps his arms around my waist.

“What’s for lunch?”

“Barbeque beef and pulled pork sandwiches.”

“Yum. Are you stopping to eat? I’d like to talk to you,” he says.

“I could take a break and eat something,” I say, knowing he’s worried about how thin I am.

“Good, let’s get some food and sit. Or we could eat in my office.”

“Whatever is more comfortable for you,” I tell him.

“Let’s eat with the pack. They’re all still getting to know you. They’ll appreciate having you among them,” he says.

“And you as well, Alpha,” I say as I grab a sandwich. He frowns when I only grab one, but after breakfast, I don’t want to put more food on my plate than I can eat.

We say hello to several pack members before sitting down.. “Okay, Alphas Kayce and Robin will be here this weekend.”

“This weekend as in two days from now?” I ask.

“Yes. Since they are coming from so far, they will be staying the night. I’d like to plan to have a private dinner with the four of us as well as Lucas and Kinsley. But then I’d like to have something out back, an informal gathering so they can see you interacting with the pack. I think they’ll be watching you very closely Sophie, not just because you’re the legend, but because your interactions with me are so different than anything they’ve ever seen before.”

“So, you want me to make it look good?” I ask, already thinking through what we could do.

“No, I want you to be yourself. Don’t put on any airs, don’t act any differently than you would if it were just us and the pack. Just being you will be different enough for them to notice.”

“I can do that, and I have some ideas of the type of gathering we can put together, something that has a small, intimate feel to it, but still allows all the pack members to participate if they choose.”

He stops eating and smiles at me.

“What?” I ask him. “Do I have something on my face?”

“No, you’re just so perfect and I’m so happy that you’re mine.”

I lean in toward him. “You are such a charmer, Alpha Hunter.”

He smiles, leaning in to the point where I can feel his breath on my lips. In public, he always lets me make the final step of kissing him. I hold his gaze as I lean in, pressing my lips to his. Once I take the step, his response is instant and his hand is in my hair, his head tilting to deepen the kiss.

As always, I get lost in my mate, his scent, his taste, his playful tongue. When he finally pulls away, I leave my eyes closed for a moment, loving the way my lips tingle from his touch.

When I open them, he’s smiling possessively at me.

“Definitely a charmer,” I say to him, making him chuckle.

He sits back in his seat, turning back to his food. “Back to business, I’ve also left a message for Alpha Ezra.”

“Would he come, if you invited him?” I ask.

“Maybe, maybe not. He still struggles with losing my sister, even after all this time.”

“Second chance mates aren’t unheard of,” I say, biting into my sandwich. Pack food is SO much better than the greasy diner food I lived on for two years.

“I don’t know if he’s there yet, but I’ll invite him. Who knows, it might be good for him to get away from his pack. Or it could possibly make him even more sad seeing what he could have had and lost.”

“Hey Luna, I have a favor to ask,” Kinsley says, jogging over.

“What’s that?” I ask, putting my food aside.

I want you to write a note today to the she-wolves on the run. It’s one thing for me to say that you’re here and are happily mated to our Alpha, but if you were to write something...I don’t know, they still wouldn’t have any guarantee that it’s you, but at least it wouldn’t be my handwriting saying it.”

“What should I say?” I ask, taking the pen and paper.

“Tell them the truth. We were mated in secret, we’re fighting the laws that require public claiming for ranked members, and we’re offering sanctuary for any she-wolves on the run, no questions or strings attached. Well, we will ask them to participate in the pack,

so maybe put that,” Hunter says, taking another huge bit of his sandwich. The man seems to have a huge appetite for everything, including me.

‘Most of all, you,’ he says, winking at me and making me blush.

I turn back to the paper and stare at it.

‘Hedda?’ I ask, wondering if she’s in agreement with my idea.

‘I would be happy to confirm everything you say. They may or may not know my wolf form, but can push forward, and their wolves will feel that I’m an Alpha wolf.’

I write the note, saying what Hunter suggested but then also stating that Hedda would confirm the pack’s intentions if they come to the border and ask to see me. I sign it, ‘Our word as Alphas, Sophie (Meyers) Reynolds and Hedda’.

Hunter looks over reading what I wrote. “That’s perfect,” Shaw says, coming forward and purring at his mate. “No one can deny your word as an Alpha.”

“We should go for a run again soon, my mate,” Hedda says.

“Very soon. Perhaps tonight,” Shaw says.

“Actually, I like that idea. Let’s plan on it,” Hunter says, pulling Shaw back. “We could use the time to get you acquainted with our borders and you and I could do a run and assist the patrols.”

“I’d like that. It’s important that I know where our pack borders end, especially if those she-wolves come asking for me,” I say, pushing the note back over to Kinsley.

“Wish me luck. Maybe someone is there waiting for me,” she smiles, then heads out to go deliver the food to the mountain.

While she’s gone, I meet with the kitchen omegas and begin talking through dinner options for our visiting Alphas this weekend. I plan for two nights, just in case they decide to stay. Then I begin planning to put t**g lights up all along the edge of the forest and in the area where we’ll put the food and drinks for the pack, adding some torches to keep the bugs away and give brighter light in some areas.

When Kinsley returns, disappointed that no one was there waiting for her, I tell her everything that I planned while she was gone, getting her ideas for some additional food items that make it easier for the pack and our visiting Alphas to mingle if they choose.

Hunter gets his return call from Alpha Ezra just as I’m ready to sit down for dinner. So, rather than wait for my mate, I decide to sit with some of my new pack members and begin getting to know them better.

I've just finished eating, seeing Hunter enter the dining room. with a look on his face that he wants to talk to me when I get a mind link from the patrols.

'Alpha, Luna, we have three she-wolves at the border asking if Sophie Meyers is here in our pack.'

I look at Hunter. 'Tell them I'm on my way,' I say, racing outside, quickly stripping down and shifting, having Hedda grab my clothes before running to where the patrols are waiting for me. Hunter is right behind me and while I know that Shaw could catch up, or even pass us, he stays behind me, letting Hedda and I take the lead.

When we arrive, I shift. A moment later, Hunter does too and before I can pull my clothes on, his large shirt is pulled over my head.

"Seriously, Hunter?" I ask before turning back to the women. They are standing back from the borders, far enough to give themselves a head start if someone came chasing after them. They're all watching the interaction between me and Hunter with various expressions of surprise on their faces.

As I get closer, I can smell blood.

"Which one of you is injured?" I ask, concerned.

"Are you Sophie Meyers?" one of the girls asks. I lift my nose and smell that she's a Beta.

"I was until a few days ago. I'm mated to Alpha Hunter now," I say, pointing to where he's standing behind me. "My name is Sophie Reynolds."

"Is this true?" she asks, holding up the paper that I wrote earlier today.

"If you're asking if our pack is providing sanctuary to she-wolves on the run, then the answer is yes. I give you my word as an Alpha."

added a post. You weched their videos recently.

"An Alpha's word is wortniess, one of the other giris growls.

Her words offend Hedda who pushes forward. She stomps past the patrols, standing in front of them.

"MY word as an Alpha will always be good," she snarls, and I watch as all their necks go up in deference to my Alpha wolf.

"Shut up, Letti. You're p**g her off," the third girl says.

I pull Hedda back enough to take over but leave her forward enough so they can feel her presence and see her in my eyes.

“Are you here for refuge?” I ask them.

Rather than answering my question, the Beta asks me another question. I’m getting the feeling that she’s the leader of their little group.

“You said your Alpha claimed you in private. Is that true?”

“That is correct. Hunter is a good man, a good Alpha and together, he and I are going to fight against the laws that require that we, as ranked she-wolves, get claimed publicly.

The Betas eyes move past me to Hunter. “Why would you do that?”

“First because I’m a possessive Alpha and I will never share my mate with anyone.”

“That’s why you pulled the shirt over her head when she shifted?” the third girl asks.

“That’s correct. My pack knows they had better be respectful, but that doesn’t mean I want anyone looking at my mate.”

“What’s the second reason?” the Beta female asks.

I turn to look at him and he looks at me. “Because, as an Alpha it is my job to care for and protect my pack. My mate should be loved, respected, and revered above all others. How can I show her that I can protect her, that I love her, if our first night together is a public claiming?” he asks, then looks back at the women.

“I’ve lost a sister to the claiming process, I’ve seen ranked she-wolves struggle with their mate bonds for years, and we, as Alphas and ranked members, are losing our most valuable possessions – you. How can we have strong heirs to carry on our bloodlines if all of our ranked she-wolves are hiding or dead. It makes no sense to me, so yes, I am fighting the laws and I’m working to get other Alphas on my side so that when the Alphas who don’t agree come after me, I won’t be fighting alone.”

I watch as the Beta female looks at the other two. The one girl, Letti, still looks unsure, but the third girl, the one I’m guessing is injured, looks desperate for her to agree.

The Beta turns back to me, squaring her shoulders. “My name is Allison and I’d like to request refuge for myself, and my friends, Letti and Nikki.”

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Chapter 44: Nikki

Hunter

I'm letting Sophie take the lead with these females, not only so they can see that I respect her, but also because I know they are afraid of me, even though I'm obviously mated.

"We're happy to have you, Allison, Letti, and Nikki. Now, which one of you is injured and how badly?" Sophie asks.

Once again, I'm thrilled that my mate is an Alpha. The reasons behind the scent of blood aren't always easy to detect among lower ranked wolves. Sometimes, a warrior might think that a woman on her period has an injury because they can't distinguish between the differences in the blood. Sophie, however, had no problem with it.

"I am," Nikki says. She and Letti had been crouching beside and somewhat behind Allison. She's a Beta while the other two appear to be G**as, so she would outrank them and apparently, even in the wild, hierarchy matters. Or perhaps, Allison just established herself as a leader and they are following her lead.

Letti stands and helps Nikki to her feet. Allison stays on guard, watching to see if anyone will try to attack them now that we know that one of them is injured.

"You're under my pack's protection, Allison. No harm will come to you or your friends. I give you my word as an Alpha, even if you don't believe it," I say, glancing at Letti.

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I take a step forward and all three girls take a step back. "May I carry you to our pack hospital?" I ask Nikki.

"I can walk," she says.

"I'm sure you could. And you could also do more damage to your broken leg causing your healing to be slower. At first glance, I'd say you're malnourished, most likely dehydrated, and injured. The first two will already impede your healing. If you will allow me to carry you, you won't run the risk of injuring yourself further."

I turmand look at Allison as she seems to be their leader. "I'm a marked and mated Alpha. I'm not looking for another mate. My Beta is also mated, and our G**a has been kicked out of my pack."

"Why?" Letti asks.

"He didn't agree with my private claiming of Sophie," I say simply.

“Just let him carry me, Allie. If Sophie Meyers is his mate, and she doesn’t look scared of him, then he has to be halfway decent and let’s be honest, I can’t put any weight on this leg,” Nikki says, looking between Letti and Allison.

“I’m Sophie Reynolds now,” Sophie quietly corrects her.

“There, you see? She wants to be known as his mate,” Nikki says, looking at Sophie. “Do you trust your mate to carry me?”

“Absolutely,” Sophie says without hesitation.

“If she does, I do,” the girl says, looking at me.

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“Thank you for your trust, Nikki,” I say.

“Don’t make me regret it, Alpha,” she grumbles as I bend to lift her up. I feel her body flinch as I pick her up.

“How badly are you injured?” I ask her as I turn and begin walking toward the pack hospital

“It’s broken and it reset improperly,” she says, making me frown.

I lean in, sniffing her. She watches me, waiting.

“You’re an Alpha?”

“Underage, but yeah.”

“Not that underage,” I say, feeling the strength of her wolf even in her current state. “So, Allison isn’t your leader?”

“We’re all equal in the wild,” she says, sarcastically.

“Is that so?”

“We’re all poor, starving, and on the run, so yeah, I’d say we’re all pretty f**g equal,” she says. It should be a growl, but her wolf is too weak, even though I can feel the strength that her wolf will have when she’s healthy again.

“Are you two coming with us or are you going to let my mate find you some food and a place to sleep?” I ask, turning my head to see Letti and Allison following us.

Nikki leans around me to see them following. "Go get some food and some sleep. I'm sure the doctor is going to put me under to reset my leg. You two need to get your strength back as much as I do," she says.

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"Are you sure, Nikki?" Allison asks her.

"Yes. I'll be fine, right Luna?" she asks, looking at Sophie.

"My word as an Alpha," Sophie says again.

When the other two turn to follow Sophie into the packhouse, I look back at the girl in my arms, intrigued.

"So, you're the leader?"

"I just said we're all equal, didn't I?" she scoffs.

"And yet, they listen to you?"

"They're starving and we can all smell the food in your packhouse from here. The food that was left wasn't enough for three. But it's really nice of your pack to do that, by the way."

"It was my Beta's idea. I'll let her know you said so, or you can tell her yourself when you meet her."

When we arrive at the pack hospital, I get her into a room and the nurses come in, immediately putting in an IV as the doctor comes in to examine her. I stay, partly because I'm the only person she knows and partly because I want to see how bad her injury is. She's my responsibility now and I take that seriously.

The doctor begins cutting off the leg of her pants and from the corner of my eye, I see the nurses cutting off her top. I can smell her fear, so I look up at her, making sure my eyes stay on hers.

"They're going to put you in a gown for easier access while they take care of you since you'll most likely need surgery. We'll make sure you have more clothes before you leave the

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hospital, I say and wait for her to nod before I turn back to the doctor

He begins asking her questions about her health, her age, she's 17, and when I see her injury, even I suck in air.

"How the hell did you get that? Is that a bite wound?" I ask her. Her leg looks shattered above the ankle and what was a compound fracture with a bone sticking out has now healed in a hideous position with skin covering the bone. Not only that, but it's also grossly infected.

"Yes. An Alpha caught Allison. I attacked him and one of his pack members grabbed me. I kicked him but got distracted and the Alpha latched onto my leg. When I ripped it out of his mouth, the broken bones tore through my skin. I was lucky to get away with my leg at all."

"How did you get away?" I ask her.

"Allison and Letti didn't run. They stayed to fight, and we were able to get away from the Alpha," she says, smiling. "Allie's tough for a Beta."

"You're the reason they decided to risk coming to our pack?"

She nods. "My leg was getting worse and even though I told them to leave me, they refused."

"I'm going to get some x-rays but you're going to need surgery, young Alpha," the doctor says to her.

"I'm not an Alpha," she says to him.

"You have Alpha blood. That makes you an Alpha. Do you want me to stay with you until they put you under, or I can ask Sophie to come stay with you, if you'd be more comfortable."

"You're fine. You're not as bad as most Alphas."

"I'll take that as a compliment since I know some pretty decent Alphas," I say to her, making her chuckle as the nurses start her drip on an IV drip.

"We're not going to knock you out just yet, Alpha Nikki, but I am going to give you a little sedation to see how effective it is and to help you relax."

"Thank you," she says.

“You want to tell me what pack you’re from? Who your father is?” I ask, pulling up a chair to wait with her until she goes in for

surgery.

“You going to call him, tell him I’m here?” she asks. Her voice is angry, but I can smell the fear again.

“No. This pack is a safe refuge. I’m not bringing she-wolves here to return them to where they ran from. If the other Alphas don’t like it, they can take up with the Alpha committee.”

“Or they can declare war on your pack,” she says.

“Very true. My pack is aware of that and I’m already forming allies to stand with me against the Committee of Alphas. I’m not saying that you have to, or that it’s a contingency of you staying here, but if we are attacked, it would be good to have some ranked she-wolves fighting on our side.”

“I’ll fight with you. I won’t speak for Allie or Letti, but I’ll fight. I

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refuse to go back.”

So, who’s your father?” I ask her again.

She looks down. “It’s not my father, it’s my brother, Alpha Alaric.” Alaric is on the Committee of Alphas, a recent addition, and now I know he’s another one against me.

“Who almost caught you, or Allison, I guess?” I ask.

“Alpha Aiden, the f**khead,” she says, making me smile.

“What’s that look for?” she asks while they do her x-rays. They brought in a portable machine that is covering her lower body to x-ray her leg.

“I know I’m not old enough to be your father, but I hope when I have a daughter, that she’s like you.”

“A b**h?” she asks as the doctor comes in to look at the x-rays.

“Feisty,” I say, smiling at her.

“Okay Nikki, it looks like we’re ready to get you in for surgery,” the doctor says to her, and they begin rolling her out of the room. I follow along, not wanting her to feel alone. When we get to the surgery room, they open the IV line and the fear that I had started to smell again, begins to fade.

“I’ll be here when you’re done,” I tell her.

“Thanks, Alpha Hunter,” she slurs before she falls into unconsciousness.

“I want to know if there are any complications and I want to know the minute her surgery is done,” I tell the doctor before

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The One He Claimed Chapter 45

Chapter 45: Allison and Letti

Sophie

I took Letti and Allison inside the packhouse. I felt their fear the moment we stepped in and the room went quiet. Rather than pretend that nothing was happening, I decided to address the pack straight on.

“Everyone, this is Letti and Allison. These are she-wolves who have been on the run, the first to request our assistance. There is one more in the pack hospital getting medical attention, her name is Nikki. I hope there will be more she-wolves asking for our assistance in the near future. Please make them feel welcome and help them with anything they need,” I say before nodding for the two women to follow me.

“So, what’s most important to the two of you? Food, shower, or bed?” I ask just as Kinsley walks up.

“Hello ladies. I’m Beta Kinsley,” she says, and both girls’ noses go up in the air.

“You’re the one who brings the food,” Allison says.

“That’s correct and you read the note that Sophie wrote and decided to trust us?” she asks.

“Well...” Letti says, looking at Allison.

“They have another girl with them who was injured pretty badly. Hunter took her to the pack hospital,” I tell her.

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Chapter 45 Alison and Latii

“Right. So, how about some food?” Kinsley asks them.

“We’re really hungry,” Letti says.

“Yeah, that wasn’t a lot of food for three hungry females,” Allison says.

“Maybe I need to start leaving more...” Kinsley says, more to herself than to us.

“Kins, will you help them get food and I’ll make sure we have two rooms ready for them?” I ask!

“Absolutely, follow me, let’s get those bellies filled so that after you shower, you can crash.”

“Why are you being so nice to us?” Allison asks.

“Yeah, really.” Letti says.

“Because it’s the right thing to do. Not everyone realizes that, but we do, our Alpha does and obviously, so does our Luna, since she’s the legend,” Kinsley says.

“I’m not a legend,” I say.

“Oh, but you are!” Allison says.

“Yeah, everyone knows you. I came across multiple girls on the run. I asked them all if they were Sophie, or they asked me. Honestly, I feel a little flustered because I’m finally getting to meet you. You’re like a celebrity...only, legend sounds better,” Letti says.

“All I did was survive on my own,” I say.

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“No, what you did was give all of us hope. And for that, we can never repay you,” Allison says.

“Yeah, I’d have been mated off by now, if not for you,” Letti says.

“Well, you don’t owe me anything, except maybe to live your best life,” I say, embarrassed.

Kinsley smiles at me as Allison turns to her. “Is she for real?”

“She is. She doesn’t realize what an influence she’s had, that she’s still having.”

“Anywho, how about I go check on those rooms,” I say, skirting away before I become even more embarrassed.

Without consciously realizing it, I reach out to Hunter, feeling his steadying emotions which help calm me. I can tell he’s focused and concerned about Nikki, so I don’t bother him. Instead, I check to make sure we have two bedrooms beside each other that are ready for guests. Then I make sure they have everything they need to shower, and some clothes to wear to sleep in and for tomorrow. I’m sure Hunter has a plan for making sure these girls have clothes, but if not, Kinsley and I will manage.

I’ve just returned to the dining hall where I can see that Lucas has joined our new she-wolves. They still seem a bit cautious around Lucas, but at least they’re talking to him and even smiling a bit which is good.

When I step up, they’re just finishing eating. “I can show you to your rooms. They’re beside each other. I assumed you’d want to be close to each other.”

“Yes, Luna. Thank you. And thank Betas for helping us. It’s not

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what I expected, but I'm really glad you offered us this place to rest, even if we don't stay for long," Allison says.

"Why wouldn't you stay?" I ask her.

She shrugs. "We're from another pack. Won't you eventually have to tell our families that we're here?"

"No. Not unless you want us to," say confidently. Hunter and I haven't discussed it, but what's the point of offering sanctuary if we're just going to send them home or tell the ones their

running from where to find them.

"Well, we'd like to at least do our part while we're here," Allison

says.

"Why don't you join us for warrior training in the morning? We have some of the warriors from Luna Sophie's pack who are going to help train our pack members on some new techniques. You both are welcome to join in. I'm pretty sure Alpha Hunter is hoping that if we're attacked, that you'd be willing to help fight to maintain the pack's safety."

I watch the two of them look at each other.

"But it's not required. You don't have to fight," I tell them.

"No, of course you don't have to," Lucas says quickly.

"You're really serious, aren't you?" Letti asks.

"About what?"

"Keeping us safe. If you weren't, you wouldn't be expecting a battle."

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tend to keep you safe, even if

man going ** war against are of the packs.”

They look at each other again, then back at Lucas

When time warrior training

Here at them. Five in the morning.

“We’ll be there,” Allison says, and Letti nods.

“I will too,” I say, before directing our new quests to their rooms.

When I finally get back to my room, Hunter is still gone. I shower and fall into bed, only waking when he slides in behind me, wrapping his warm body around mine.

“How is she?” I ask sleepily

“In surgery. How are the other two?”

“Hopefully sleeping. They’re coming to warrior training in the morning.”

“Interesting,” he says. I want to ask why that’s interesting, but I’m too tired and I fall back to sleep before I can.

I’m not sure how much later it is when I feel Hunter getting up.

“Is it time for training?” I ask.

“No. Nikki is out of surgery. I’m going to go sit with her. I told her I’d be there when she woke and I want to keep my word. I’ll hopefully be back for warrior training,” he says, kissing me softly before I hear his feet padding away and the door closing quietly.

The next time I wake, it’s to warm hands sliding over my body. I take a deep breath of his pine scent and let my mate wake me slowly first with his mouth and then with his body buried inside of mine.

By the time I have to get up for warrior training, I’m wide awake. “Please feel free to wake me like that every morning,” I say to

him.

He chuckles as we get dressed.

“How’s Nikki? I’m assuming she woke up?”

“She did. She’s going to need some recovery time, but she’s an Alpha, so once she’s healthy, she’ll begin healing fast.”

“She’s an Alpha?” I ask.

“She is, Alpha Alaric’s sister. Do you know him?”

“No, my father didn’t think much of him, if I remember correctly,” I say.

“His sister doesn’t think much of him either,” he says. “However, he’s now part of our Committee of Alphas.”

“Was he part of your original numbers?” I ask as we walk outside, wondering if this skews the balance out of our favor.

“He was, and I had him against us since I didn’t know where he’d fall. Looks like I was right.”

When we walk outside, I see Allison and Letti. “We need to get them new clothes,” tell Hunter.

“Have them order some online. It’s not safe for them to leave

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the pack lands.”

“I’ll let them know,” I say as we walk up.

“We don’t really have any clothes to spar in. Do you mind if we just watch?” Letti asks.

“That’s fine. Sophie will work with you today to have you order some clothing. I’d rather you didn’t leave my pack lands as I can’t guarantee your safety if you do.

“No problem, Alpha. We were wondering how Nikki is doing? Allison asks.

“She’s awake. I saw her this morning. When I left she was getting some food, but because of the extent of her injury, she’ll be in the pack hospital for another day or two. After training and breakfast, I’d be happy to take you both over there. You’re welcome to sit with her.”

“We’d like that, thank you, Alpha,” Letti says, and they find a place to watch the warrior training while I go to stand with the others and begin warming up. The moment we start I realize how out of shape I am. Unlike most of the she-wolves out there, I wasn’t on the

run. I was waiting tables, barely getting by. So, I can feel my muscles and lungs complaining as we begin. However, I'm a Luna and I have a responsibility to lead this pack, so I don't complain out loud, I just keep pushing myself knowing Hedda will heal me.

Once we're warmed up, Hunter pairs off with me.

"Okay my love, let's see what you've got," he says, taking a defensive stance.

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I shake out my shoulders, knowing there's no way I'm defeating my mate today, but I'm going to give it my best shot. I like some of the positions we've tried, and want to try them again, so I want to win our wager.

In three moves, he has me in a hold against his body. He nips at my ear "You have to be faster than that, my little Luna," he teases before releasing me. This happens three more times, one after the other and I'm getting frustrated.

'So am I,' Hedda growls. If I'm out of shape, it means she is too.

I bounce on my feet, trying to remember my training from back home. I throw a fake punch and when Hunter moves to block, I slide into a crouch, swinging my leg around, trying to knock his Megs out from under him. He realizes my intentions and leaps

over my leg, just in time, but he uses my momentum to take me to the ground, pinning me. Both of us our panting, his grey eyes sparkling with our sparring and the fun he's having, even though this should be serious.

"That was a good one," he says. "You almost brought me down.

Instead of responding, I lean up, my arms still pinned beside my head and I run my nose up his neck to his jaw, nipping at it. I can feel his body responding to me, and as he looks down, I press my lips against his. It has the desired effect, and he loosens his grip on my arms, sliding one under my head and holding me for the kiss.

In an instant, I scissor-kick and flip our positions, straddling him and pinning his arms beside his head.

"Gotcha," I say.

He smiles up at me. "That's cheating."

"I'd say that's knowing your opponent's weakness."

"Are you saying you're my weakness?"

“Mmhmm. So, does this mean I win?” I ask.

He starts laughing. “No way, I pinned you four times to your one.”

“A fifty-fifty split then, for our wager?” I ask, biting my lip.

His eyes travel to my mouth, then back to my eyes.

“You have something in particular in mind?” he asks, his voice deepening.

“I do,” I say.

He slides his arms over his head, pulling my arms along with them until I’m lying on top of him.

“Fifty-fifty split it is,” he says before capturing my mouth in a kiss that promises all sorts of pleasure for me tonight.

When we finally stand, I realize that the entire field has gone quiet, and everyone is staring at us, including Allison and Letti.

“What, you’ve never seen two mates kissing before?” Hunter asks, taking my hand and walking me inside for breakfast.

The One He Claimed Chapter 46

Chapter 46: Guests

Allison

I thought for sure that Alpha Hunter was going to hurt Luna Sophie when he pinned her during their training session. I nearly jumped on him to pull him off of her. It was my wolf, Mizette, who stopped me, and I’m glad she did.

I watched, as stunned as Letti, as Luna Sophie lifted her head up and ran her nose over the throat of her mate. I’ve never, ever seen an Alpha allow that, not even from his mate. But these two seem different.

“They’re the real deal, aren’t they?” Letti asks me quietly.

“It seems so,” I say as we watch Luna Sophie distract her mate until she can reverse their positions. Once again, she doesn’t appear scared of him at all. Rather than avoiding his touch, she seems to crave it. I have no idea what wager they’ve made, but Alpha Hunter willingly gives in to her claim that she defeated him an equal number of times that he defeated her. Again, something unheard of in other packs. At least where I

come from, Alphas insist on proving that they are the strongest, unyielding and unbending to anyone, even their mates.

As I look around, I see that their pack still isn't accustomed to this level of intimacy among their ranked members. Beta Kinsley seemed shy around her mate, not as open to this level of physical contact, at least not in public, so perhaps, this is as new to these pack members as it is to us.

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When training is done, Alpha Hunter and Luna Sophie invite us to join them for breakfast before we go see Nikki. I'm anxious to see how she's doing. Her injury was caused because she helped me when Alpha Aiden nearly claimed me. Letti and I had already joined forces, but it wasn't until then that we met Nikki. She's a strong Alpha, tough as nails, and willing to put herself at risk in order to protect others, namely me. She put herself at risk and she didn't even know me.

We've stayed with her ever since. It wouldn't have been fair to leave her on her own after she injured herself protecting me. And I wouldn't have left her anyway. Out in the wild, if you don't help each other, someone gets claimed. But Nikki is an Alpha, and Letti and I deferred to her decision to come to this pack, to see if Sophie Meyers...Sophie Reynolds, was really here.

As I watch Sophie interact with her mate over breakfast, I'm glad we did. I realize that I want what she has. I want a love like this, a love that I didn't know could exist.

"Okay, ready to head over to the pack hospital and see Nikki?" Alpha Hunter asks.

"Oh, Hunter, did you tell them about our visitors tomorrow?" Sophie asks.

"Not yet. I will on our way over to the hospital. Thank you for reminding me. We have a lot going on these days."

I watch as he leans in, watching her, letting her take the final step to kissing him. She does so with no hesitation. I have to look away as jealousy flares inside me. Yeah, I want that.

I feel Letti's hand squeeze my wrist and when I look, I can see that she feels the same way I do. This is what finding your mate

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is supposed to be like, for everyone.

We say goodbye to Luna Sophie, letting her know we'll say hi to Nikki for her and we follow Alpha Hunter to the pack hospital.

"So, I need to tell you that I'm having some visitors tomorrow night. They'll be here for one night, possibly two. They are Alphas, neither are mated, and they are coming here to talk to me about supporting me and my decision to not mark Sophie publicly."

I stop walking, my heart rate going up. TWO Alphas? I see my fear reflected on Letti's face.

Alpha Hunter stops, turning to look at us. "They will be my guests, but you three are under my protection. I promise you that no harm will come to you, and I forbid public claimings in my pack," he says.

"That doesn't mean that they won't drag us off your pack lands and then claim us," Letti says.

"Over my dead body, over my mate's dead body as well, I assure you, and they would have to get past my entire pack in order to do that. These Alphas are friends, and they will abide by my rules or I will have them removed from my pack lands, without you. If they choose to wage war after that, then so be it. I am prepared for war, as is my pack. You are welcome to remain hidden while they are here. However, I think it would be good for them to hear from you why you've run, why you've chosen a life alone in the wild rather than be publicly claimed," Hunter says.

"They must already know," Letti says.

"They don't. I'm sure of it. My Beta didn't understand. Alpha

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Dutton, another friend that I've already met with didn't understand either. Our wolves don't see the problem with it, and as an Alpha, I can tell you that my wolf, Shaw, wants nothing more than for me to claim his mate for all the world to see so everyone knows that she's ours. It is the human side of us that disagrees with these practices, practices that do not impact us as males the same way that they impact you as females."

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It's absurd to me to think that they don't understand don't want to be claimed publicly. It's true, Mizette wouldn't care about being claimed publicly, but she also cares about me and knows that I'd be mortified if I were to be claimed in such a way, so she refuses to allow it willingly, even by our mate.

We walk into the hospital and follow Alpha Hunter to a door.

“This is Nikki’s room,” Alpha Hunter says, turning to us once again. “I give you my word as an Alpha that I will keep you safe. But the choice about whether or not you will spend time with these Alphas is up to you.”

“If you promise to keep me safe, I’ll do it. If these Alphas and other ranked pack members really don’t understand how it affects us, they need to know.”

I look at Letti. “You’ll have to decide for yourself, but the more of us who confirm the way we feel, the harder it will be for them to deny it. These ranked members need to realize that we aren’t being irrational or acting foolishly. There is a reason why we feel this way and it’s a valid reason, one they need to think about. and consider if they were to find their mate, especially if they want to have the kind of relationship that Alpha Hunter and Luna Sophie have.”

“You swear to keep us safe?” Letti asks Alpha Hunter.

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“My word as an Alpha,” he says. When we nod, he opens the door and I see Nikki sitting up. Her eyes are intent on mine and as I begin to smile, she speaks.

“Why is Alpha Hunter giving his word as an Alpha again?”

“I’ll leave you three to talk. Nikki, do you need anything?”

“No, thank you, Alpha.”

After Hunter leaves, we rush to the bed, hugging Nikki tightly.

“What’s going on?” she asks.

Letti and I proceed to tell her everything, the differences that we’ve seen between Luna Sophie and every other ranked, claimed female we’ve ever met. Then we let her know about the visiting Alphas.

She looks down at her leg. “I don’t know that I’ll be healed in time, but I don’t want you meeting with them alone,” she says.

“Alpha Hunter gave his word that we’d be safe. You heard him, Nikki.”

“Do you trust the word of an Alpha now, Letti?” she asks.

“Not all of them,” Letti says, smiling ruefully. “But I trust the word of three Alphas,” she says, making Nikki smile.

“I’d better be one of the three,” she says.

“Absolutely!”

The One He Claimed Chapter 47

Chapter 47. Sparring

Ap 1 was sparring with my mate yesterday I manded that she WARD GMITTING MÉG Then owns that he kavows how to spar fut whether the end to get us to she needs t frealize one won’t surt me, din moteure, but du The and i wa starting to see her training coming though. Aunties weak andă think aferler Sack, rghe nut ketul Buliding strength, but back- for Swing alue for faith her sows.

I know the gracka sill stummet with Sopher’s acceptance of the and of our touching in aule they we dem round coming for a fan year and ilm qum & heath grane upnutoad that Lacan newes (onuntiare for an gulls up on the rare unsaider that he duar, she jjoita away from tum.

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Killing the the wolves we promised refuge te lart nælpful, reply weys Saghe will get the ‘n sue you had intentatie a frustration like I did.’

‘Yes. I don’t like my mate feeling frustrated,’ he says, contritely.

‘Neither do I,’ I tell him. So today, I’m going to change things up with Sophie. I’m going to go on the attack, and I want to see how she blocks. My mate isn’t a fighter, so perhaps her skill is better seen when she goes on the defensive.

As we walk out to the training field, my mate smelling of me and me of her from our morning love-making, I think about Allison and Letti’s concerns about Alphas Kayce and Robin coming to visit. It’s a valid concern and one I’m debating on how to handle. I

briefly consider cancelling their visit, but I need them on my side when Sophie and I meet with the council next week.

I decide on how to approach them with the knowledge that I'm housing she-wolves who have run from their packs as Lucas and I go through the warm-up. I can already tell that Sophie is better today than she was yesterday. I'm also excited to see Allison and Letti joining the group. They ordered clothing last night when they returned from seeing Nikki, but it hasn't arrived yet. However, Sophie and Kinsley were able to find them some clothing so they could participate today.

After the warm-up, I ask if they want to be paired together, rather than with other warriors in the pack. Both women should have been involved in sparring in their packs because they are ranked she-wolves. However, Letti seems to have less training. When Allison agrees to pair off with other warriors, I put her with Lucas, expecting that her skill set will be similar to his and I pair Letti with a warrior. I intend to continue working with Sophie while the rest of the group learns from one of Alpha Carter's warriors.

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•Chapter 37 Spriting

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When everyone is paired off, I pull Sophie aside. Last night was eye-opening for me to find out what positions my mate is enjoying and it spurred my ideas for new positions as well. Since she chose being on top and riding me, I chose spinning her around and having her ride me in a reverse cowgirl position. I'm not positive, but I'm pretty sure my mate really enjoyed that position too, so if she defeats me today, I expect that she'll choose that one as one of her positions tonight. I love that no matter if I win or lose in our sparring, I still win. My mate is adventurous, and her body is so responsive to mine that no matter what position we're in, we're both able to find pleasure and our release together.

I watch as Sophie takes a stance as if she's ready to attack.

"I want to try something different today. You're not a fighter by nature. You're good at fighting, but your nature isn't that of a fighter, so rather than you attacking, I want you to go on defense and see how you block and counter my attack on you," I say.

She frowns, standing up out of her crouch. "You think it matters?"

"Maybe not, but there's one way to find out," I tell her. "When you're ready," I say.

She gets into a defensive stance and nods. I start off easy, coming at her, but not too hard, letting her adjust to my larger size and body weight. However, very quickly I realize that this is working much better for her. I was right, my mate isn't a fighter, but if she's in a position where she has to fight, she's more than capable of taking down her opponent.

I begin attacking harder, moving faster to get to her, but she's

Bud of the band I put her m Ong on of yesterday

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"There you go come on Sophie foule an kapña wah, you.com punch Marche, you can nowe fangen ↑ i anstaurage ther

She blocks me again, and aim fes punch is decent, but E's not

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"Come on, Sepme magne e apne Owen fire hunting whe dew, cling was to the ground fempty the stian wou i that fo Marek gemuller grong to hit me? bu duae fin girl going to tanp daming for you annis and my names into your neck and Game you as mine," day m***g to get her to stop guiling for punches.

Thue Nomar, after tomat), and 1604 tht can my pit throw a gunohk shouldn't be able to breathe, Sulawesi

You'se welcome for the quis fuging now get wine and mowing Shaw saya. But i can boog The pride in hu wair sé que matas aranghae my with a puntos a book Samsuse Sophie is fighting fòrt. Sie gronie foam defamae lu ofana kuing and juncting inti te dhe qe epping bas-2- and realy using my tieting Fe baking at my strength and framing to Sieck some of fòr dette, an fits aut truunt for half the day.

She's coming at me hard and fast. I can see the anger in her eyes, the ferocity in her, the determination that no one will ever claim her like that. When I finally get an opening, I grab her arm, whipping her around and pinning her back against my chest, her arms

crossed in front of her. Both of us are panting, gasping for air at the battle my little mate just gave me.

I bite down on her ear, gently. "You win, my love. You are f*g fantastic and s**y as hell. I'm so proud to call you my mate," I say to her.

She turns her head to look at me, pulling her ear from my teeth. "That really p**d me off, because it almost happened."

"I know, but you're mine now and Owen better keep his filthy paws off you."

I feel the shift in her emotions, going from anger to desire. It's not uncommon after a battle, and especially when I know she can feel my pride in her through our bond. I lean in and take her mouth in a dirty, possessive kiss, growling my possession over this incredible woman loud enough for all to hear.

Our moment is broken by the clapping of our warriors all around us. Sophie jumps and I release her, but she immediately turns, leaning her body against mine.

"What? You've never seen two mates kissing before?" she says, repeating my words from yesterday and making me bark out a laugh. D**n, I'm a lucky b**d.

I feel even luckier a moment later. "Here, let me give you something to clap about," she says, and jumps into my arms, wrapping her body around me as she initiates the same possessive kiss I just gave her. The pack begins howling and clapping, but this isn't the same feeling that you have at a marking ceremony. This is happiness and pride that I feel running through the entire pack. They are proud that their Alpha and Luna are so much in love.

When she pulls away, she hops out of my arms and takes my hand, leading me back inside. Her eyes are **g with mischief, and I can't f**king wait until tonight, to see what positions my adventurous mates wants to try as part of winning today's wager.

It isn't until we pass them, that I realize that Allison and Letti are standing there with looks of shock, a hint of fear, and incredulity on their faces at Sophie's very public display in front of our warriors and pack members. Good, maybe they can tell Alphas Kayce and Robin exactly what they've seen between me and Sophie while they've been here. I really could use two more Alphas on my side when we face the Committee of Alphas.

The One He Claimed Chapter 48

Chapter 48: Unexpected

Sophie

I'm not sure what got into me, except when Hunter talked about Owen, I started thinking about what my life could have been like if Owen had marked me, if Hunter hadn't gotten there in time. The thought of being that man's mate, of being bound to him, set me off.

Then, to hear my mate tell me how incredible he thinks I am, to feel his pride in being my mate through our bond, well, it just made me throw caution to the wind. What I hadn't expected was the feeling of happiness from the pack. They seem to like seeing the two of us being close, seeing how strong our relationship is and how much trust we have in each other. It once again makes me proud to be Hunter's mate. It also makes me wonder how much stronger our bond will be over time. Our relationship has such a strong foundation, I can't imagine how our love and trust will grow in the future.

And Hunter didn't let me down. I wrapped myself around him, kissed him with utter abandon and he answered my kiss until I was ready to stop. He didn't push for me to continue, pressure me for more, or make our kiss feel unseemly or seedy. It just felt like a woman kissing the man she loves with all her heart, which is exactly what it was. Well, that and Hedda might have been staking her claim in front of our visiting ranked members and the female warriors in the pack.

'He's mine. Everyone needs to know that,' she says.

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289 Vouchers

'Everyone does. We wear Hunter's and Shaw's marks, and they wear ours. No one can claim that we aren't mates.'

The moment I say it, I know that's EXACTLY what the Alphas are going to try and say. Or at least say that our marks aren't valid in their eyes because they didn't watch Hunter mark me.

'Which is why we have to win. Not just because they are wrong, but because we are right. Look at the difference in our relationship with Hunter. Your sister and her mate may never have what we have in less than a week.'

'I know, Hedda. And I know that we have to do this for the others, for Allison, Letti, and Nikki, for Penny and all the others on the run. I just don't understand why it's so hard, why the Alphas in particular are fighting so hard against this.'

'Because this isn't their reason for fighting. It's not about the mate bond,' she says, making me stop.

'What do you mean?'

'I don't know what their real intentions are, but if this was about the mate bond, they wouldn't be fighting so hard to keep things as they are. They'd be fighting to make the change. So, it's not about the mate bond itself. It has to do with something else. around the public claiming process,' she says.

I'll have to think about that. What Hedda is saying makes sense. The Alphas are literally out hunting for a mate instead of running their packs. They want a mate, so it's not about that. Changing the laws would change the she-wolves desire to run and leave the pack, making it easier for the Alphas to claim. them. So then, what is it?

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My thoughts are distracted by the discussion over breakfast. Today, I want to go see Nikki and after hearing Allison say that Nikki wants to be here when our visiting Alphas arrive, I know that I need to make sure that she's well enough to be released from the hospital. I don't want her injuring herself further to protect her friends. Hunter and I will do that, if needed.

When we finish eating, I kiss my mate again, taking an extra moment to deepen the kiss and also holding his hand against my face. I know he'll release me the moment I end the kiss, but I want him to know that trust him. So, when I pull back, I hold his hand against my face, feeling his thumb caressing my skin

while he stares into my eyes.

"I'll see you soon," I say shyly.

"Not soon enough," he says, leaning forward to peck my lips again before I release his hand.

I feel like I'm floating as I lead the girls to our pack hospital.

"What's it like?" Letti asks me.

"What?" I ask.

"Feeling so safe, so comfortable with your mate."

I think about it for a moment. "I'm not sure how to describe it. It's unlike anything I've ever felt before. It's like the best day of my life magnified by a hundred, no, a thousand. There's so much love, so much...care and concern that I feel from Hunter, that it's beyond my words to describe."

"I hope one day that I can have that," Allison says.

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“Me too,” Letti agrees as we walk into the hospital

I see our doctor walking out of a room, and I stop him. “How is our patient?”

“Our patient is impatient to leave, I’ve told her that she can do so, but only if she’s willing to walk on crutches. Her rays show that her wolf is healing her, but her bones aren’t completely set yet.”

“I’ll talk to her, I don’t want her doing anything to aggravate her injury, but being outside may be beneficial to her wolf and her healing,” I say,

When we walk in, I see Nikki sitting on the edge of her bed, looking like she’s ready to get up

“Going somewhere?” I ask her as Allison and Letti rush to her sides.

“I’m sure your mate told you I’m an Alpha. I have no intention of staying in this bed another minute, especially after hearing that there will be two visiting Alphas in this pack today,” she says snarkily.

“Yes, my mate did tell me that. And the doctor told me that you are only allowed to leave if you use your crutches. So, where are they?” I say, looking around the room.

“He’s coming back with them,” she grumbles.

I move to stand in front of her. “Do not risk further injury by doing anything s**d, Nikki.”

“I will not stand by and allow my friends to be marked and

Chapter 48: Unexpected

mated publicly,” she growls.

I put my hands on either side of her body, leaning into her space and letting my Alpha aura push hers back. Because she’s weak, it’s no contest, but I imagine that when she’s healthy, Nikki will have a much stronger aura.

“And do you think that I’ve brought you into my pack, given my word as an Alpha to keep you all safe, and will stand by if one of our visitors attempts to take any one of you as a mate against your will?”

I watch as her face becomes contrite. “My apologies, Luna. I did not mean to offend you. I...It’s in my nature to protect,” she says, as if this changes things. I just raise my eyebrow at her..

“Okay, you’re an Alpha wolf too, I get it. It’s just...the three of us have been through a lot together. That’s makes a difference, you know?”

I think about my short time with Penny, and I do know what she means. I stand up, getting out of her face.

“I understand, but you, Nikki, are also under my protection. I know that doesn’t sit well with an Alpha wolf, but this is my pack, I am the Luna, and I gave my word as an Alpha to keep you safe, even if that means I’m keeping your safe from yourself,” I say, gesturing down to her ankle.

She fights the smile, but in the end, she gives in and smiles widely. “Yes, Luna. I promise that I’ll use the crutches.”

“Perfect. Then, let’s get you back over to the packhouse, settled into a room, and get some clothes ordered for you,” I say as a nurse comes in with the crutches. She adjusts them so that

47 79%

Nikki is comfortable and then we head back to the packhouse.

I stay quiet as I lead them, letting Allison and Letti tell her about what they’ve seen in the pack so far.

“You should have seen Luna Sophie going after Alpha Hunter in training this morning, Nik. It was incredible.”

“Yeah, it made me wonder if all Alphas are that strong.” Letti says.

“Strong and fast,” Allison says.

“I would have thought you’d be out of practice, Luna,” Nikki says.

“Hunter knew what to say to get me out of my head and into the fight,’ I say.

“We heard him mention Alpha Owen,” Letti says, a question in her voice.

“Yes. Owen and his ranked members caught me. He realized I was an Alpha when I didn’t shift after he commanded me. He shifted, intending to mark me in wolf form, then command me to shift into my human form. He had me pinned. He almost had me...” I say, my heart rate s**g as I remember.

“But he didn’t, and he never will,” Hunter’s voice rings out across the courtyard we’ve just entered.

“No, he never will,” I say, walking into Hunter’s arms and letting him bring the peace that only he can give me.

“Is that new?” I hear Nikki ask.

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Nope, and it’s mild. She kisses tem,” Allison says

“A lot,” Letti say

“Not nearly enough,” Hunter says smaling down at me. “Better?

“Yes. What are you doing out here?”

“I felt you becoming distressed. I had already felt your initation, so I tuned into your emotions. I don’t like you feeling distressed. Neither does Shaw,” he says gently, caressing my cheek.

“Thank you,” I say, lifting up on my toes to kiss him. Because! know we have an audience of ranked she-wolves, I slide my hand into his hair and deepen the kiss. He chuckles and wraps his arms around me before pulling back.

“I have work to do, no distracting me,” he says, smiling.

“Fine. Just don’t forget I won the wager this morning,” I say, swinging my hips a bit as I walk up to the packhouse door, turning to look at him over my shoulder.

“I look forward to discovering your choices this evening,” he says, his voice deep, making my body shiver in anticipation.

“I truly never thought I’d say this about anyone, least of all an Alpha, but that man is s**y,” Letti says. “No offense, Luna. I know he’s yours.”

“It’s because of how he treats you,” Nikki says, watching me closely. “Allison and Letti told me that it was different with you and Alpha Hunter, but until you see it...”

“It’s hard to understand, especially since none of us has ever seen a mate bond like yours. At least, not in my pack,” Allison

says.

“Mine either,” Letti says, and Nikki agrees.

I show Nikki to her room, making sure she orders some clothing and introducing her to Beta Kinsley.

When the girls' clothing arrives, they share with Nikki until hers arrives. She begins looking it over the clothing, searching for something to wear tonight.

"It's not a formal gathering, but as an Alpha, I assume you'll want to dress up a bit?" I ask her

"Yes," she says so Kinsley and I find her a dress for her and Allison as well. Letti chose to wear some of her new clothes. Once they are settled, I finish making sure preparations are ready for this evening and our meeting with Alphas Kayce and Robin before going to get ready.

Since one of my favorite positions is in the shower, reminiscent of our first night together, I take advantage of my mate and winning the wager before our guests arrive. We've just finished getting ready when the patrols let us know that Alphas Kayce and Robin, driving together, have arrived.

We walk downstairs hand-in-hand to greet them, stepping outside the packhouse doors as they step out of the car.

"Good evening," Hunter says. I watch as Kayce's nose goes up in the air and I see his wolf flashing in eyes. Unlike Kayce, Robin's eyes are glued to our combined hands. Touch among newly mated ranked members is unheard of.

"Welcome to our pack," I say, and now Alpha Kayce's eyes flash

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to me as well.

"May I introduce you to my mate and the pack's Luna, Sophie."

"Sophie Meyers?" Alpha Robin asks.

"Sophie Reynolds," Hunter and I say together.

"You didn't mention that part when you called us, Hunter," Kayce

says.

“Would it have changed things?” Hunter asks.

Both Alphas turn and look at me appreciatively.

“No,” Kayce says finally. Hunter waits for Robin to also agree that it doesn’t change anything, then we invite them in.

The moment we step inside, Alpha Kayce growls, pushing ahead of us.

“Mate!”

I turn, seeing a wide-eyed and terrified looking Allison staring at Alpha Kayce.

“Mate,” she says softly.

The One He Claimed Chapter 49

Chapter 49: Sophie’s Power

Kayce

“What do you think of Hunter taking a mate privately?” I ask Robin. He and I had decided to drive together. Our packs are close in proximity and while we both could have done work while we were driving, sometimes it’s better to confirm alliances rather than to let them sit idly by until one day you realize that your ally is no longer your ally. My father learned that lesson the hard way and I don’t intend to repeat history.

“Honestly, I don’t like the practice myself. I hate being in the room every time a woman is claimed, but I won’t miss the events in case she’s my mate?”

“But he broke the law,” I say. And this is where I struggle. If we all begin breaking the laws that have been put into place, then it becomes anarchy.

“I agree, but I also think that we have to consider that our she-wolves, our ranked females, our best possibility for creating a strong future and another generation of strong Alphas, are literally killing themselves.”

I sigh. He’s right and I know he is. I don’t like it any more than he does. It’s been almost a year since there’s been a coming-of-age party for a ranked she-wolf. Any other females are gone long before they turn 18. I know many Alphas and other ranked members are out hunting down their mates, but I refuse to do that. I refuse to hunt her down, running her nearly to death or possibly to her death, like she’s nothing more to me than prey.

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Unlike some Alphas, I want a partner, not another pack member.

“Well, we’ve agreed to hear him out at least. Did he tell you anything about his mate?” I ask.

“No, just that he marked her in private, and he refuses and will continue to refuse to mark her in public.”

“Yeah, that’s pretty much what he told me as well.”

“Did he tell you he’s received a summons to the Committee?” Robin asks me.

“Is that why we’re meeting next week?” I ask.

“That’s why.”

“Well f**k me sideways,” I say.

“Sorry, you’re not my type,” he says, smirking at me.

“A**ole,” I grumble. Robin laughs as we approach Hunter’s pack borders. We let the border patrol know we’ve arrived, and we drive onto his pack lands.

“Pretty area,” I say, to make conversation.

“Yeah, there are several packs in the near vicinity and mountains in between them, giving them a natural separation.”

“How do you know so much about this area?” I ask.

“We went to Luna Amelia’s 18th birthday party two years ago, remember? After she was claimed, I spent the next day looking around the area before leaving. Dutton is their neighbor on the eastern border, and I spent a couple of days with him, working on an alliance with him.”

Something else that has caused problems with the public claimings in some instances, such as with Alpha Calvin, is that our alliances have become strained because their Lunas do not wish to see the men that witnessed their claiming. Some Alphas don’t care, but the good ones, like Calvin, do.

“That was smart,” I say, just as my wolf, Rodion, stands up in my head.

'Rod, what's going on?'

He doesn't answer me, but when get out of the car, he lifts our nose in the air and takes a deep breath. Gingerbread, the scent of sweet gingerbread, like cookies that have just come out of the oven, warm, with maybe a hint of icing envelopes my

senses.

'Find that scent,' he growls at me, just as I hear a female voice. welcoming me to the pack.

I jerk Rodion back and look at the woman who is holding hands. with Hunter. Actually, holding hands, not him holding her, but her fingers are intertwined with his and...she's smiling. I thought Hunter said that were just mated

I'm annoyed when Hunter introduces his new mate and she's none other than Sophie Meyers. I'm tempted to get in the car and leave. She's the cause of all of our problems. But I drove with Robin, and he looks intrigued. Besides, Rodion won't let me leave. He's practically ready to pull a shift to find that scent.

I'll admit my mouth is watering, but geez, we'll get some d**n cookies. 'Chill Rod,' I growl at my wolf.

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However, the moment we step inside, the scent surrounds me and Rodion pushes forward, moving toward her.

"Mate," he growls, ready to claim her right here, right now.

I can see the terror on her face as she repeats the word to me. And then, my view of her is blocked by Hunter.

"Stand down, Kayce. I do not allow public claimings in my pack and this woman is under my protection."

"She's my mate. Get the f**k out of my way," Rodion growls.

"No, and if you don't want her to reject you, I suggest you get a hold of your wolf," Hunter growls, and I can feel Shaw pushing forward, ready to shift if Rodion does.

“Get it together, Kayce. We came here to hear what Alpha Hunter and his Luna have to say. Let’s give them time. I’m sure Alpha Hunter can assure us that he won’t send your mate away while we’re busy, right Hunter?” Robin says, nearly stepping between us to keep our wolves from fighting.

“She’s here, under my protection. I won’t send her away, but I won’t allow her to be claimed against her will either.”

“Her will? She’s my mate!” Rodion growls, pushing past Hunter only to have his way blocked by Luna Sophie.

I feel the blast of her Alpha aura as her wolf pushes forward, her eyes flashing with the threat of violence. “Get a hold of yourself Alpha. Now,” she snarls.

The shock of finding my mate finally wears off and I pull Rodion back. He begins pacing in my mind, keeping a close watch on

his mate. Our mate.

I look at the woman, I don’t even know her name, but she looks terrified. I also realize there are two other females blocking my path to her and Hunter’s two Betas on either side of her, ready to protect her.

“My apologies. I didn’t mean to scare you, or your wolf. I wasn’t expecting to find my mate today, so I wasn’t prepared for my wolf’s reaction. Alpha Hunter, it seems, has been keeping quite a few secrets,” I say, growling at him.

“If I had told you, you wouldn’t have come and then where would you be?” he asks me, unabashedly.

sigh, ignoring that remark and focus on my mate.

“I am Alpha Kayce. My wolf is Rodion. May I at least have your names?” I ask her, careful to make sure that Rod’s growling doesn’t exit my mouth.

“Allison, and my wolf is Mizette.”

“Allison,” I say reverently just as Rodion begins purring at his mate’s name. I smile. “Mizette, meaning a mini reflection of you? How appropriate.”

She seems surprised that I know what her wolf’s name means. “She’s very much like me,” she says shyly.

I nod, unwilling to let her out of my sight, but also not wanting to scare her.

“Perhaps, Luna, our dinner for four could become a dinner for seven? Assuming the two young ladies who are also protecting

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288 Moochers

my mate from me are her friends?” I ask Luna Sophie.

“That will be up to Allison, Alpha,” Luna Sophie says.

I look back at my mate. “My word as an Alpha that I won’t try to claim you. I would just like to get to know you and my wolf is going to drive me nuts if he can’t see and smell you,” I say honestly, eliciting a small smile. I realize I want to see that smile, much larger, on her face every day.

The two women in front of her, well one is still a girl, underage, turn and look at her. Rodion sniffs the air, one Alpha, one G**a.

‘And our mate is a Beta, he purrs

“Do you trust his word as an Alpha, Luna Sophie?” she asks. I want to be offended, but I know that not all Alphas can be trusted these days. However, it’s interesting that they are asking Luna Sophie, not Alpha Hunter, since he knows us, and she doesn’t.

Even more intriguing to me is that Sophie turns and looks at Hunter, asking him if I can be trusted. I turn to look him in the eye, raising an eyebrow. He watches me for a moment, then nods.

“Alpha Hunter trusts him and if he does, I do,” Sophie says. My eyes flash back to Allison.

She nods, then looks at the other two. “You don’t have to come.”

“Like hell I’m not,” the Alpha female says.

“What happened to your leg?” Robin asks her.

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“Casualty of the war we’re fighting to not be claimed publicly and not be hunted down like dogs,” she says sharply. She’s got grit, that’s for sure. If she’s an Alpha, she’s someone’s prize, but not mine. My prize is still watching me closely.

“Will

you walk with me?” I ask her holding out my arm.

She looks around at all the others, but it’s Luna Sophie who shrugs, basically saying it’s up to her to decide.

I wait her out, pleased when she slowly walks up to me, barely putting her hand on my arm, as if she’s afraid she’ll have to jump away from me at any moment.

I cover her hand with mine, noticing that her eyes nearly roll into -the back of her head as she takes a deep breath of my scent. I’ll

have to ask her what I smell like to her.

“How about you two, may I escort you ladies?” Robin asks, using his most charming voice.

“Fat chance, Alpha,” the Alpha female says to him, but it only makes him smile.

“Do I at least get a name, little Alpha?” he asks her.

Once again, the girls look at Sophie, not Hunter for confirmation that it’s okay. I have sorely underestimated her power over these young she-wolves. Something I need to make sure I never do again.

When Sophie nods, the Alpha female looks at Robin, her chin up high. “My name is Nicole, but everyone calls me Nikki.”

He nods, then turns to the other young woman.

“And you, little G**a?” he asks the other one.

“Letticia, but everyone calls me Letti.”

“And what’s your name, Alpha,” Nikki asks, her voice still full of snark.

“I am Alpha Robin and my friend, as you heard, is Alpha Kayce.”

“Now that that’s settled, where are we meeting?” I ask.

“Right this way,” Hunter says, and begins guiding us to the room where we will eat and talk in private.

On the way, I rub my thumb over Allison’s hand, pleased when I feel her body shiver in response to my touch.

The One He Claimed Chapter 50

Chapter 50: Reasons

Hunter

I trust Kayce not to do anything rash. He, like me, has always wanted to find his mate. If we had been at Allison’s birthday party, he would have handled it like Calvin did with Amelia, giving her as much time to get to know him as possible. So, I’m not worried about what he will do over dinner or even at the after party. However, I do wonder how he will handle it if she doesn’t want to sleep with him tonight or if he refuses to claim her privately.

I guide Sophie into the room I had set up for us to have dinner, mind linking the kitchen staff to let them know we need dinner for seven, not four.

Luna already let us know, Alpha,’ the kitchen omegas reply.

Of course she did. I smile down at my mate. I can feel her nervousness at having Kayce and Robin around these she- wolves, but she once again made me feel like a fucking king when she looked to me for my opinion. The trust that she has in me, after only such a short amount of time, is incredible and I only want it to grow. A mate bond, created the way it was meant to be created, between two people.

When we get to the room, Sophie watches to see how the women will sit. Kayce pulls a chair out for Allison, and she sits, blushing shyly while he sits beside her. Nikki sits on her other side, as if she’s ready to pull Allison away from Kayce if he does anything wrong. Robin, sits directly across from Nikki, wiggling

288 Vouchers

his eyebrows at her. That means either can’t sit beside Sophie or Letti will have to sit beside either Kayce or Robin. Not surprisingly, Letti leaves an empty seat between her and Robin, sitting across from Kayce.

I look at Sophie. Part of why I wanted the two of them here is so they can see the difference in my mate bond compared to everyone else’s.

‘How would you feel about sitting in my lap?’ I ask her in the mind link.

She looks at me, then at the table.

'Okay,' she says, but I can tell she's not comfortable with the idea.

'Do you trust me?' I ask her.

'Absolutely,' she says with no hesitation.

I smile, sitting at the head of the table in between Letti and

Kayce. I scoot the chair back and tapping my lap. My mate not only sits in my lap, but she wraps her arms around my neck, kissing my cheek.

As expected, both Kayce and Robin frown at the interaction.

"Forgive me, I didn't want to be seated away from my mate," I say. "I think it's important for both of you to see the difference between what I have with Sophie versus every other mate bond you've ever seen with a mated ranked couple."

"You could be commanding her to do this," Kayce says. I notice that his hand is twitching to touch Allison. She looks almost as

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desperate for his touch.

I look at Sophie. "Am I commanding you? Be honest." I say, putting the full force of my command behind it. I see Letti's chin go up in submission, Allison's as well, making Kayce growl.

"No," Sophie says, and I release my aura.

I look at Kayce, waiting for him to acknowledge my mate's response.

"Okay, fine. I want to ask Sophie some questions," he says.

"As do I," Robin says, leaning onto the table, with his hands clasped together.

"Go ahead," she says.

“Why did you run? Two years ago, why did you run?” Kayce asks her.

“You were there that night, at my sister’s party,” she says and Kayce nods. “I’m sure you knew what was going to happen, just as Hunter did, but I didn’t. I was sent to my room, but I didn’t. stay there. I came back out and saw what happened. The warrior who took me to my room that night told me what was going to happen and that was why I had to go to my room. I didn’t believe her. You see, we, as females, aren’t told what was going to happen to us, until our 18th birthday, which has apparently changed since I left.

She takes a deep breath. “I was horrified,” she says, and I can feel her emotions flgoding into her, overwhelming her.

“Shhh. You’re safe,” I say quietly, wrapping my arms around her.

She snuggles into me, accepting the comfort I’m offering.

“I watched my sister beg Alpha Calvin not to do it, but he did and all those men, they cheered as my sister wept. I refused to allow that to happen to me. So, while everyone was busy watching the big event, I wrote a note to my family, packed a small bag and I ran.” Her eyes are lost in the memory, and I can feel her sadness, sharp as if it’s happening again. I lean in, kissing the side of her head. “You’re safe,” I say again, just for her to hear.

She nods, taking another deep breath.

“How did Hunter get you to agree to let him mark you?” Alpha Robin asks her.-

She smiles and looks at me out of the corner of her eye. “Can I tell them the whole story.”

I shrug. “That’s why they’re here.”

She smiles, snuggling into me some more and putting her hands over mine as if she’s afraid her words will make me

angry.

“I didn’t accept him at first. I rejected him, sort of, then I ran.”

“What do you mean, sort of,” Kayce asks her.

“He didn’t know who I was at first. He just knew I was his mate. I was afraid that if I rejected him properly, using my full name, he would chase me down because I am an Alpha female.”

“Did it hurt?” Robin asks me.

“It hurt my pride,” I say, nuzzling Sophie’s hair.

31.29%

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She smiles and continues. “I ran and was almost caught by Alpha Owen. I thought I was doomed. He shifted when he

couldn’t command me to do so, then his wolf had Hedda pinned to the ground.”

She begins breathing heavily, her heart rate increasing. I look and see the other girls in the room clasping their hands tightly in their laps, looking down so we can’t see the emotions on their faces. I’m sure Sophie is telling their worst nightmare.

“Luckily the rejection didn’t work, and I heard Owen’s howl of the hunt,” I continue while my mate collects herself. “Since Sophie is my mate, there was no way I was letting anyone, least of all him, have her. I got there in time and ripped him off of her.”

She turns and looks at me. “Then Hunter found me. I was....”

“Stressed,” I finish for her.

She laughs humorlessly. “That’s one word for it.” She smiles again.

“It was Shaw who won me over, actually,” she says, and my wolf begins purring at her, making her smile even brighter.

“I was in a lake, scrubbing off the feeling of Alpha Owen on my body, and I was freezing. Shaw offered to warm me and did the same purring sound he is now until I settled and fell asleep. When I woke, rather than Shaw, I had a naked Hunter wrapped around me.”

“I can’t imagine that went over well,” Kayce says.

She shrugs. “He could have marked me at any point while I was asleep, but he didn’t. He just asked me to give him time to talk,

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11 50

to get to know him, and to believe him that he had no intention of claiming me publicly. So I did.”

“And you believed him?” Robin asks.

“We had a lot of time alone and the mate bond is hard to resist,” she says, looking at Kayce and Allison.

Allison blushes and looks down, but Kayce scrubs his face with his hands. “Yeah, it really is.”

“How did you do it? How did you hold off for so long in marking her. Rodion is making my head hurt he’s being so loud,” Kayce says, looking at me.

“I had a vested interest in making sure Sophie believed me and trusted me. I knew she was mine and I’d never let anyone else have her, but I needed her to agree to be mine. She did,” I say, smiling at my mate.

My mate, who may never stop surprising me, leans in and kisses me gently, putting her hand against my cheek. She doesn’t deepen the kiss, so I don’t either, knowing she’s already a bit uncomfortable.

When she pulls back, her eyes stay on mine. “It was the best night of my life.”

“Mine too,” I tell her.

I hear a chair scraping and look to see that Robin is standing and is now pacing.

“You’re telling me that this,” he says, waving his hand at me and Sophie, “is for real?”

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“It is for real,” Allison says. “We’ve been watching them for a couple of days. What you’re seeing now is mild.”

“I agree. Allison and I have witnessed the love and trust between Alpha Hunter and Luna Sophie, multiple times,” Letti adds, looking from Allison to us to the two Alphas.

“You saw it earlier, Alpha Robin. You saw how Luna Sophie asked her mate if she could trust the two of you. Have you ever seen a Luna who has that much trust and faith in

their mate. A Luna who has been mated less than a week from what I understand,” Nikki says, watching Robin closely.

He stops and looks at her.

“Have you? Because I know I haven’t,” she asks him again.

“No, I haven’t,” he concedes.

“So, you’re saying that all this trust, all this love, is simply because Hunter didn’t claim you publicly?” Kayce asks Sophie.

It’s Nikki who responds. “Let me ask you something, Alpha Kayce. As an Alpha, I feel a deep desire to protect those around me, my pack, my friends, and maybe, someday, my mate. What part of taking your crying mate, who is begging you not to claim her publicly, would be considered protecting her? How can she ever trust that you would protect her after that? How could she believe that you truly love her after you mistreated her that way?”

He looks at Nikki a moment, then at Allison. “Is the idea of being claimed publicly really that horrible to you? That you would never trust me or believe that I loved you again?”

62.16%

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“Yes, Allison whispers.

Why

It’s not the same for us as it is for you. Alpha. We are raised differently, women and men in packs, particularly ranked she wolves. We’re given the lies of what a beautiful relationship we’ll have with our mates, how loving and caring they will be, and all the while, we are told to keep ourselves pure, not to let other men see what we are to give to you on our claiming night. Even in the packs, even as an Alpha, I was rarely allowed to be naked in front of the pack members. I would never, ever have wanted my first time to be in front of a room full of men whistling and howling I can’t even imagine the embarrassment that I would have felt, the horror I know that sometimes that gap can be overcome, as with my sister and Alpha Calvin, but not always. We only need to remember Alpha Ezra and Hunter’s sister to know that,” Sophie says.

“That is why we’ve run. That is why we choose a life alone rather than risk being claimed,” Allison says to him,

“So, it’s about being mated in public, not being marked in public?” Kayce clarifies. I look at Sophie, wondering if it’s both or just the mating.

She turns and looks at me. “Well,) mean, it would be

uncomfortable to be marked in public because, well, there are a lot of strong emotions that come when you’re marked, but... guess for me, it was about the mating, although the two generally happen together, because of those strong emotions,” she says, and now she’s blushing

“But the law isn’t about the marking, is it?” Nikki says again and we all focus on her. “The she wolf rarely marks her mate during

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the public claiming, does she?”

I look at Kayce and then at Robin, both have the same confused looks on their faces. “Honestly, I’ve excused myself from them for so many years, I wouldn’t know,” I say.

“I have as well, but I don’t remember ever seeing the she-wolf mark her mate. You’re right, little Alpha,” Robin says.

She gives him a look. “I’m not that little, you know.”

Rather than answering, he just smiles and winks at her, making her huff, but I can see her hide her smile and based on Robin’s smile, he sees it too.

Instead, he turns to Letti. “How about you, little G**a. You’ve been very quiet during this conversation which I feel isn’t your norm.”

“I’ve never seen a marking. All I know is what my mother told me,” she says.

“Which is?” Kayce asks.

“Which is that it’s terrible, painful, mortifying, and not worth finding your mate,” she says, watching the two visiting Alphas carefully.

“My mother basically said the same,” Allison says, glancing at Kayce.

“So, I will ask you,” I say, as the food comes in. “Why are we mistreating our Lunas this way? What is the purpose? What could it possible matter if their claiming is public. Can both of you not smell my scent on Sophie and her on me?” I ask, getting to the crux of the issue.

“We’re wolves, after all. What good are our advanced senses if we don’t use them. And what good are we as Alphas if we don’t protect those we are sworn to protect, those

who are most precious to us," I say, leaning forward to nuzzle Sophie and smiling as she leans into my touch.

"What are we even doing if we aren't first protecting our mates," I say and see Kayce glancing at Allison beside him, as Robin looks between Nikki and Letti.