

Mated to the Alpha and His Beta Chapter 391

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Lanie

Xander had been properly shamed about kicking in the door, but once he told me that I'd been in the bathroom for hours and wasn't answering when they called my name in worry, I forgave him. I blamed the wine and tired eyes, but the truth was...some time had gone missing as much as that book had.

I intended to take the children to school, but Xander's mother had offered to do it so I could enjoy

breakfast with my mates. Fat lot of good that had done-the three of them had been huddled around their

platters of eggs and toast talking about doing some kind of training exercises that sounded like a

complicated mess to me.

I could tell that Zane was happy they were including him, though. Whatever had been causing the strain

between the three of them seemed to be better this morning. They were all laughing and punching each other

on the shoulders and knuckling each other's heads. My boys, I thought fondly, watching them behave like

overgrown children.

I hadn't told any of them about the book, or its disappearance. I'd started thinking maybe I'd dreamed it

up. The vision from the Moon Goddess that I'd had in the library might have continued on home with me,

making me think I held that book in my hands when I'd only been holding it in my mind.

Was I still in the vision? Everything around me felt real. I looked at my hands and noticed a faint glow

surrounding them. I turned them over and watched a trail of light follow the motion of my fingertips.

None of my mates seemed to notice, not until I pulsed out some of my Luna energy.

Then they all stopped

horsing around and looked at me.

Three male faces gazed at me with love so strong, so powerful, I knew this had to be real. Because if it

wasn't, I didn't want there to be anything else. Our energies met and mingled, weaving strands of gold and

silver and green and all the colors of the rainbow.

it.

It lasted no more than a second or so. No longer than a blink. I don't think they even saw it, but we all felt

"Go on, all of you," I told them. "It's obvious you need to go let off some steam."

One by one they kissed me and headed out, leaving me alone. I made my way to my grandfather's fake

villa, hoping to find him there. Fortunately, he was.

He and Braden sat at their table, mugs of red fluid in front of them. The fake sun outside the windows

mimicked morning, and no matter how realistic it was, it was no real comparison or substitute for the genuine

article.

I'd never actually pitied my grandfather before, but I did now.

I didn't let him see it, though. "Good morning."

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"To what do I owe this pleasure so early in the day?"

Malachi asked curiously.

I wasn't sure if I should talk in front of Braden, but then decided to go for it. There were so many secrets around here. Too many. Besides, he and my grandfather were lovers. I

doubted there was much Malachi

wouldn't share with him.

"I found a book yesterday. In the small library.

The Moon Goddess showed it to me. It was called Celestial. Have you heard of it?" Malachi frowned. "I have not. I take it the tome is of some importance in regard my great-granddaughter?"

"Yes. It told me a lot of things. Strange and wonderful things, but also terrifying. The book said that Celestials have the power of every single supernatural being that exists." At his shocked expression, I decided to sit down. I told him the rest of what the book had said. "I'm worried about Stella. If she's really able to choose which talents to show or hide...she's just a child, Malachi. How can we teach her what we don't even know?"

"Where is the book now?" he demanded.

I hesitated. "This is going to sound crazy, but...it's gone."

"You lost it?"

I described the night before. The bath, the wine, the sleepiness. "And when Xander burst into the room, the book had vanished. Could someone have come into the bathroom without me knowing about it?"

Locked the door behind themselves?"

"It's unlikely, although I suppose not impossible.

More likely the Moon Goddess took the book back for some reason. So your Alpha didn't see it, perhaps."

Malachi shook his head. "Can you recall anything else about what it said?"

I shook my head. "I've told you everything I can remember. I was really hoping to show it to you so we could go over it together."

My grandfather got up from his seat to pace back and forth. He moved fast, double speed, and a lump grew in my throat. My daughter could do that.

He faced me. "Are you sure you didn't dream this?"

"Actually," I told him, "I'm not."

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Xander

Zane basically kicked my a ss during the workout session. I'd never seen my Beta go so hard. Toward the

end, I really thought he might injure himself. I had my share of aches and pains, for sure. They told me I needed to make more of an effort at getting to the training fields. I was getting too soft. There was something else I needed to make an effort with, too. My Beta hadn't said anything, but we'd been friends too long for me not to notice that he'd been quieter than usual. We were all taking advantage of the locker rooms attached to the training fields rather than going back to our quarters. Our bathroom at home was great, and the shower was huge, but it wasn't big enough for all of us at the same time. It didn't have a steam room, either, and the three of us were headed there.

As we took our spots on the tiled benches, thick steam wreathed all around us. It made it hard to see

Zane's face. Maybe that would make it easier for him to open up to me. I thought about asking my brother if he'd give us some privacy, but then I decided against it.

Zane was Beta to both of us.

"Great workout," I said to Zane. Our shoulders bumped and for a moment, he tensed like he was going to pull away.

Then he settled with his back to the wall. "Yeah. I really needed it."

"I really need this steam room. Maybe even a massage," I said.

Mason sat across from us, silently enjoying the steam. I could sense his interest, though. I knew he'd

jump in if he had to. I appreciated that, and also his willingness to let me talk first.

"Zane," I said and paused, not sure how to bring up the subject. Finally, I just went with blunt honesty.

"What's going on with you lately?"

"What do you mean?"

I should've guessed my Beta wouldn't be as upfront with me. I chuckled in a low voice and nudged him

harder with my shoulder. "Don't play dumb."

"Maybe he's not playing," Mason teased.

Zane grumbled. "Nice one."

"Seriously, dude. I can tell that something's on your mind. I know we've been busy lately-

"Exactly," Zane said.

I took a second to answer, not sure if we were going to fight, or what. "You're pissed off because Mason

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and I have been busy?"

"Busy." Zane snorted. "Doing s hit that has nothing to do with me, right?"

"... That's not..." I stumbled on my words.

Mason spoke up again. "They asked us to go to the leadership council meeting because

we're Alphas it wasn't anything against you."

"If it was a pack meeting, I'd have been there."

It was a good thing the room was hot as an oven, because our Beta's voice was colder than ice.

"But it wasn't a pack meeting," I told him in a firm voice. "Your duty as Beta is to support your Alpha.

Alphas," I emphasized the "s."

"And I'm supposed to do that how, when you two are off in secret meetings that I'm not invited to?" He

shrugged away from me. "It's f u c k e d u p, Xander."

"They didn't invite you because you..." Mason started but then let his voice fade.

"Even if they didn't invite me," Zane cut in, "either one of you should have. Both of you should have insisted

that I be there."

"It was f u c k i n g boring, mostly," I told him.

Zane's face loomed toward mine through the steam.

"B u l l s h i t. I know s h i t's going down, and I know the two of you are all up in that business. You didn't come

home and tell me about it. It's like I don't f u c k i n g matter."

"You matter," Mason said.

"F u c k, dude," I said. "He's right. And you're right."

Silence filled the steam room.

"F u c k," Zane said. "I don't want to be a little b i t c h about it."

A light cough turned our attentions toward the doorway. I couldn't see who was standing in it. I didn't

sense danger, though.

"Yeah?" I called out.

"Umm...sir, Xander, sir, I mean. It's me. Goldie?"

Oh, right. The young wolf who'd volunteered to go to Standard and check things out for us.

"You can come in," I told her.

"Are you leaving soon?" Mason asked.

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"I'll fill you in as soon as she leaves," I promised Zane through the mind link.

A form materialized in the fog. "Oh, I've been there and back again. I took some pictures."

"Of everyone?"

"Only one of the newcomers, I'm afraid," Goldie said almost apologetically. "Something went wrong with

the phone before I could take more. I thought I'd come back, grab a new one."

A light appeared in the shadowy hand. A phone screen. She brought it closer and I leaned over to take it. I

swiped through some of the photos, stopping at one.

"Sh it," I said aloud and reached to take the phone from her. I showed it to Zane.

“Do you know him?” Goldie asked.

I nodded grimly. “Yeah. We do.”

The man in the pictures Goldie had brought back from Standard was Elder Aldon of the wolf Council.

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Lanie

“I’m not sure I’m not dreaming right now,” I said to Malachi and Braden.

“You’re not dreaming. If you are, we all are,” Braden said kindly.

I smiled at him gratefully. “So if I’m dreaming, I should be able to snap my fingers and the book should

reappear. Right?”

is...

I snapped my fingers. No surprise, no book showed up. Malachi rolled his eyes.

“If the two of you could please be a little more serious about this,” he said.

I frowned at him. “Dude, all I’ve been doing is worrying about this. Give me a break.”

“Do not ‘dude’ me, please,” my grandfather said with a curl of his lip. “I find it deplorably distasteful.”

Braden chuckled and reached to squeeze my hand.

“You’re not dreaming. I don’t know where the book went, but Malachi will be able to help you.”

My grandfather whirled, his expression stormy. “No, Malachi cannot. I have no idea where to even begin.

I’ve never heard of the book she mentioned, and the idea that Celestials control every talent imaginable.

Well, it’s unimaginable, to be frank. That kind of power...”

The smile I’d shared with Braden slowly faded.

“Well,” Malachi said finally. “It’s terrifying.”

A sob twisted in my throat like a tornado. I barely held it back. Braden squeezed my hand again, and this time I turned it upward so he could hold it.

“There has to be something you can do, Malachi.”

Braden said the words quietly but with a firm conviction. “You’re an Ancient. And brilliant.”

Malachi spun on his heel to tear across the room again. Then back. Faster and faster, until he was a blur.

I looked at Braden, my eyes wide. “Is he okay?”

“He does this when he’s thinking,” Braden said in a low voice.

After another minute, my grandfather slowed his pace. He hadn’t even broken a sweat. His hair had

gotten mussed from the wind he’d created as he ran, and now he smoothed it with both hands.

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“The book said that Celestials could choose, from birth. So to me that says they’re born understanding what they are and how to present themselves,” he said with an edge of triumph in his voice.

Gently, I released Braden’s hand from mine and got up from the table. I couldn’t move as fast as my grandfather, or at least I didn’t think I could. But sitting still was making my entire body tense up all over

again. I went to the fake windows, turned and came halfway back.

“So, you think Stella has been choosing to act like an infant wolf?” I asked him.

Malachi nodded. “It’s possible. That would make sense, would it not? A brand-new Celestial entering the

earth would still be tied to its parent. Surely, even a Celestial is able to feel love and concern. She would want

to prevent you from harm, especially of her own doing. It’s totally feasible to me that your little Stella could have been choosing her form all along.”

right.”

I shook my head. “That’s hard to swallow. I held her in my arms. I nursed her. I changed her. I.....”

Braden got up and put his arms around me. “None of that is taken away even if what Malachi says is

“And none of that means that she wasn’t aware, from birth, of how to behave. She grew faster than

expected. Perhaps that was also deliberate.”

“But you can’t be sure!” I shouted, breaking free of Braden’s embrace and facing my grandfather with both

myself fists clenched. “This is just a theory. She could simply be my little girl, not sure what she’s able to do! It could scare her as much as it does me! I’m her mother. I have to protect her!”

“And teach her,” Malachi said sharply.

I nodded, forcing my anger to ease. Nothing would be accomplished with a fight. “Yes. Of course.”

“Like I said before, no way to teach what we’re not even certain needs to be taught.”

“So, what do we do?” I asked helplessly.

“Keep an eye on her,” he began, and I cut him off.

“By the Goddess, of course I do that already!”

Malachi pointed a long finger at me. “Your anxiety is understandable. Your tone with me is not.”

“Sorry,” I said, although I really wasn’t.

“Your generation is so enamored of ‘safe’ spaces.

Create one for your daughter so she can share what she’s feeling and learning about herself.

The last thing we want is for Stella to feel ashamed of her talents or because she is different. If she is cognizant of her abilities as a Celestial, we want her to feel comfortable sharing that with you. Perhaps she’s sensed your fear on her behalf. You’ll have to learn to let that go.”

“And if I can’t?”

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“You have to,” he said. “Unless you’re willing to lose her entirely.”

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Mason

“Is that...?” Zane said and quickly shut up.

“Sirs, umm...if you don’t mind, I can just leave the phone here. It’s really hot,” Goldie said hesitantly.

“Unless you need me for something else? I’ll head back to Standard with my new phone and get the rest of the photos.”

“Did anyone in Standard notice you’re not a regular resident?” I asked her. I hadn’t yet seen the pictures on her phone, but by the way Zane and Xander were reacting, it had to be bad news. Goldie waved at the steam but didn’t do much to move it around or clear the way. “I don’t think so.

I pretended to be a janitor. Nobody pays much attention to the cleaning staff.”

“Smart,” Xander said. “What’s wrong with this phone?”

“It just froze up. Won’t take any pictures, won’t connect to the internet. Nothing. I couldn’t get the pictures to send, but they are saved on it. Oh, and it doesn’t have a passcode on it. If you need me for anything else, Alphas, I’m at your service.”

She left the room.

As soon as she did, I crossed to the bench next to my brother. “Who is it?”

Xander turned the phone toward me. At first I had no idea who the picture showed. Then it hit me.

“Aldon. The guy from the prison? Your Elder from the Council?”

“Yep.” Xander swiped back and forth through a few more of the photos on the screen, then handed me the phone. “She’s right. This phone is basically bricked.”

I swiped to a closeup picture. “What’s he doing in Standard?”

“Good question,” Xander said. “I say we get out of here and discuss it back home before we bring it to the leadership council. We need more pictures from Goldie to see if we recognize anyone else.”

We all showered off the sweat from the steam room, dressed, and headed back to our quarters. Lanie

was gone, but a quick test of the mate bond told me she was with her grandfather. That was just as well. I

didn’t want her getting worked up by any of this.

From what I could remember, she and Aldon had interacted, but I wasn’t sure what she’d think about him

being in Standard.

None of us could figure it out, either.

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“The only reason he could possibly be in that town is because he somehow found out that we ended up here in the enclave.” Zane handed me and Xander each a bottle of beer with the caps already cracked off. He went back to the mini fridge in our kitchenette to get himself one.

Xander took a long pull off his beer and smacked his lips. “Brightsky Brewing makes some damned fine. beer. And yes, Zane, I agree with you. No Elder would be randomly traveling around. It’s not like he’s on vacation.”

“Not in Standard, anyway,” Zane added.

I studied the pictures. Goldie had managed to get a few from a distance, and some more up close. He wasn’t really facing the camera in any of them, and a few were blurred. “These pictures aren’t the best.

Could it just look like Aldon?”

“No way. That’s him. You think I’d forget the man who put me in prison?” Xander said with a

scowl.

Zane slid into the chair across from us. "He looks like s hit, but that's how he always looked, as far as I'm concerned."

I got up, my beer in one hand, to pace as I thought aloud. "The whole reason you had Goldie go take those pictures was to be absolutely sure before we let Malachi take action that Brightsky needs to be on the defense. So let's think about all the reasons why an Elder might have recently arrived in the portal town to Brightsky."

"One," Xander said roughly, "he knows we're here."

"Two," I put in, "he might be trying to get to Brightsky for his own reasons. What if he's seeking sanctuary?"

He helped Lanie, didn't he?"

Zane shook his head, then seemed to reconsider. He looked thoughtful. "So he straddles both sides of the fence. That just means we can't trust him."

town.

"It means he could be trying to find safety in Brightsky," I said.

"So why isn't he here, then? If he made it all the way to Standard, that means he knows it's the portal

If he's really got a good reason to show up after all this time, he'd know how to petition for entry. Right?"

Xander tapped his finger at his temple, then pointed it at me.

Zane took a long drink. "I get why you're trying out all the angles, Mason, but Aldon's a fuckwad. If he's in

Standard, that smells like trouble to me."

"What about the other newcomers? We should wait until we see their photos before we go jumping to

conclusions," I replied.

Xander nodded. "I'm with Mason. We have Goldie keep eyes on Aldon and boots on the ground about the

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others. Hopefully, she can get us some more pictures."

I took the phone and tapped the screen. "In the meantime, maybe I can figure out what happened with this

phone. In case someone tampered with it or something."

Something was telling me that not everyone in Brightsky could be trusted.

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Lanie

I hated putting up a permanent shield against my daughter, but Malachi had convinced me it was

necessary. Of course, we both knew that if Stella really was in control of all the powers of the universe, she'd

have no trouble blowing right through any shield little old me was able to put up, no matter whether or not I

had the blessing of the Moon Goddess.

The real key was acting like nothing was wrong. Not just for Stella's sake, but for my other children. My

mates. My mother-in-law, even if she'd been turning colder and colder to me every day.

Once things calmed down, I promised myself I'd have a real heart-to-heart with Gabricla. Get us back on

the same page. I hated that I felt this growing distance between us.

Xander and Mason had included Zane in planning their updated safety protocols for me during the

testing of my own, still fully unknown abilities. I thought they were all being way overprotective, but I didn't

fight them about it. My mates were strong and knew what they were doing. So long as they weren't actively trying to stop me from learning more about myself, I was willing to honor their simple requests for my safety.

Or what they perceived it to be, anyway.

This morning I was in my grandfather's quarters. Not in the breakfast room with its fake windows this

time, but a smaller gym. He had lined it with wrestling mats. room.

"Do you think I'm going to fly off and hit the ceiling or what?" I asked him with a laugh as I came into the

It was only me, Charlotte, Greyson, Braden, and Malachi. We wanted to make sure nobody could walk in on us during activities my grandfather had promised might be "intense." I felt better knowing I didn't have an audience, for one, but also all the people around me would take care of me to the best of their abilities.

"Let's start with the most basic and move up," Malachi said. "The first thing I want you to do is shift,

Lanie."

I hesitated, not sure I understood him right. "You mean let my wolf take over?"

"Yes."

"That's not even a skill," I said, balking. "That's just my nature. Who I am. Me and my wolf are inseparable

He smiled. "So it should be no hardship to allow her some freedom, then."

"It's not a hardship," I agreed. I stripped naked, folding my clothes neatly.

There was no reason to be shy about it. Charlotte and Greyson were shifters, too, and understood the need to not shred my clothes. Malachi was my freaking granddad. But Braden...

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Heat painted my cheeks as I slowly turned away from the four people watching me. Braden and I were never going to be together like that, but there'd been a time when we'd flirted. I didn't think my mates would be thrilled about me being naked in front of him no matter what. On the other hand, as I let Lily rise to the surface, being naked and changing into my wolf felt so free that I really didn't care what Braden was looking at.

"Very nice," Malachi said, clapping his hands together.

Lily was happy to be out. She sniffed at the outstretched hands of my grandfather, wrinkling her nose and growling a bit at his vampire scent. She had her freedom for a few more minutes

before I called her back. I returned to my human form, tasting sweat on my upper lip.

I put my hands on my hips. "Now what?"

Braden tossed me a towel and I wiped my face.

Charlotte handed me my clothes, and I dressed while my grandfather laid out the list of other skills I was

going to run through.

Levitation.

Check.

I didn't make it up very high, but I could get myself a few inches off the floor, anyway. I was glad it wasn't much higher, because even with the soft mats to land on, I still ended up on my ass.

Super speed?

That one was harder. No matter how I tried, the space was too small. Malachi coached me, but I couldn't

quite get it right.

"I run into the wall," I complained, rubbing my nose from the bump I'd given it.

"You're thinking too hard," he said. "You don't need to get up to speed. You simply are the speed. Try it

again."

I did, getting frustrated, especially when Charlotte demonstrated along with him how easy it was.

"For vampires," I muttered.

"For hybrids, too. You can do this," Charlotte encouraged. "Take that first step and imagine the rest already done. It's mind over matter."

"If you can't master this," Malachi said, rolling his eyes, "I doubt you'll be able to take the next steps, so might as well just stop right now."

I took a step...and then I was a blur, darting back and forth in the small room, until I skidded to a stop in front of the Ancient vampire.

"There!" I cried. "I did it!"

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"Very nice. Now let's give you something hard to try."