

## Chapter 144

Hector and I stayed by Vale's side for a while. He held me together as I threatened to fall to pieces. After a long time, I finally spoke. "Oran is dead. Vale incapacitated him and I dusted him. He's ash in the wind."

"He's gone. For good."

"But at what cost, Hector? Was the cost worth it? Jax is dead. Wendy is dead. Vale...my son...my king..."

Absently, I leaned down and moved a hair out of Vale's peaceful face. My jaw clenched as I held back another wave of sobs, trying to keep myself together. My body started to shake and Hector turned me away from my son. I looked at him, his eyes as dark and stormy as the clouds above, raining tears down his cheeks. It broke me. Broke my control and I cried out.

He put both hands on my face and held me, my hands covering his. It was my fucking fault. It was my fault. My Vale was dead. Our Vale, was gone. Joining the list of ones I loved who left me alone. Absently, my mind thought to the pain of living painfully long and outliving your family. I had come to grips that one day I may have to bury my children but not like this. Not before their time. Not before they could reach their full potential. Goddess, it hurt. I felt numb and yet pain. I wished for physical pain. Anything that would take this emotional pain away. Anything that could distract me from the fact that I felt empty.

"Come on, we need to take Vale home."

I took a deeper breath, it caught a couple times before I could take a full one. Hector reached down and picked up Vale for me. We walked eastward through the forest until there was a group of people standing together talking. Uriel, AJ, Danger, Morgan, and Bryan looked up at us. Immediately, Bryan closed his eyes and turned away, tears streaming down his face. Uriel looked pained and AJ sobbed, his hand covering his mouth. Morgan, who must have taken a portal over, broke out in sobs but tried to cover them the best he could. I breathed heavy, holding the tight frown on my face as I tried not to cry. Uriel bowed his head and I gave him a small nod.

"Allow me, Hector." Uriel stepped forward and his power surged.

Vines wrapped around Vale's body, until he was encased in the vines as they sprouted morning glories. Uriel pulled me close into a hug, kissing both my temples before whispering in my ear.

"I'm sorry for your loss, my dear."

A violent shiver ran through me before it settled and I kissed his cheek. We cleared a separate table for the moment and set Vale's body down onto it. I was able to see Zeke in the tent. They had bandaged him but he was still pale and would need more medical attention than we had here.

"What...happened? I know Oran is dead. He sired me, so I can feel it but what...the plan was for you to..."

"I know what the plan was Morgan!" I shouted at my Papa. Nothing could fill this pain, this hole I was drowning in. "I couldn't fucking do it! I couldn't protect him! Protect



them! I was too fucking late!"

My eyes closed and I saw the picture of Vale pinned against the throne. Hector covered my hands that clenched into fists. Quickly, I felt my head start to feel light and I started to sway. Hector's arms wrapped around my head and held me close. I felt unworthy. It was wrong. No one should be comforting me.

I failed. This was my fault. My son died because of me. My Vale took on the world and it took him down. Pushing against him, I stumbled back away from him. He seemed slightly surprised but I just glared at the ground, my hands still tight in fists. I felt like I was twenty again. Searching for the body of the man I loved before he gave his life for me to have a second chance. Except this time, there was a body left. A body, a family, a mate, a race, who would mourn his loss. 2

"The kids are safe. We managed to get every one of our clear of the destruction. Bast, Osiris, Reagan, and Rowan were taken to the Golden Moon's hospital. They were in good spirits though when I found them. The rest of the kids stayed with them when I came back." Uriel tried to give me a balm of good news but it felt tainted.

"Zeke should also be fine as well. He was teleported not too far from here. I was able to locate him and get him medical attention. His mind though..." Bryan had stayed behind to coordinate but he managed to help even back this far.

"We need to head out. We can't stay. There's too much..." Hector looked north.

I couldn't look at the scar I had left on this earth. "Uriel, I need you to redo the runes. I broke them all."

He nodded. "I will. I will get my people back to their realm and then I will come back to your territory. Though, with how much you used, you should be okay for a little while. I would assume."

I didn't reply. He was probably right but I didn't feel like taking the chance. I didn't know how long it would take for my body to regenerate the amount of magic and power I had just used. Wrapping my arms around myself, I stepped back into Hector's chest. He brushed his hands through my hair.

"We need to step up the funeral and the next steps. The Alpha King has passed. Plus, Zeke is now Alpha of the Golden Moon. There are a lot of things we need to do and we will be relying on everyone to help." Hector spoke with authority and the whole group nodded.

"Let's go. Please. I can't..." I looked up at Hector and he nodded.

Morgan narrowed his eyes as he looked at me. "Are you good to open a portal, cub? Or are we doing this the old fashioned way?"

"I can. I have enough power left."

"Then I will take Zeke. AJ and Hector can take Vale. Bring them home. Everyone else will be waiting."

I looked down at the grass. I wanted to run. That was my usual feeling. Run when things were too much. Still, there was so much we needed to do. I had to help Zeke." My eyes slid back to the tent. "I had failed him. At the very least, I needed to be there for him now. He was my son. He left his pack, his family, for Vale. I knew he wouldn't want to go back but I didn't want to feel like he wasn't



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worthy of the Golden Moon. That it wasn't always going to be his pack. It would be a long while before the next Alpha King would be ready to take over anyways."

"Auri?"

I looked up and everyone was looking at me. "I'm sorry, I wasn't listening."

"Did you need a moment?"

Shaking my head, I took a breath. "No. We can go now."

"That's not..." AJ walked around the table and he placed his lips on my forehead. "Mom...you need to take over as Alpha King."

I shook my head. "I will not. I will never!" My chest heaved and tears threatened to fall again. "Zeke will take over as Alpha. The new Alpha King will have been born. They will train him and he will step up when the time is right. Until then..."

"We don't know if Zeke will make it, cub." Morgan looked at me with a sad look on his face.

"He will! He has to...for at least Reagan and Rowan. Zeke is stronger than you think. I'm not stepping up. Our system is broken enough with me. We will continue as the werewolves always have done, Papa. We will get back to the correct flow of time. We will not suffer this fuck up any longer. Suffer me any longer. I will disappear. I won't affect things again. I refuse."

My hands balled up into fists. "What am I but a monster."

"You're not a monster, Auri."

"I AM! I failed! I couldn't even do something as simple

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was protect my own fucking family!" I turned on the person who said it but it was Zeke.

He was holding his ribs and his other hand was holding onto the tent as he hobbled out. Morgan zipped over to him and looped his arm over his shoulder. Shuffling out, I cried as Zeke reached out, cupping my cheek.

"We both failed, Auri. We both failed but that doesn't make us monsters."

'It makes us what is left.' I said through mind link directly to him and he nodded.

"Vale cut our bond before he died. I didn't...I..." Zeke's head fell and I gasped.

My hands came up and I took Zeke from Morgan, holding him to me. Vale had done both the worst and best thing that he could have done for Zeke. Somehow managing to do it moments before his own death. Probably with the shift from alpha of the pack being move to Zeke as well. He just cut himself off all of his ties.

"I'm so sorry, Zeke. I'm so sorry."

His hand came up and brushed the back of my head. "The both of us have to live with this. With the choices and the pain, but we will live." I looked up at him, his face struggling to smile at me. "We have to, don't we? We've got people counting on us. We don't have the luxury."

I shook my head and reached up, swiping the tears from his cheeks. "No, we don't. But we do have each other. Everyone that's left will be here to reset and make sure that not a single person's sacrifice in all of this was in vain."



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Zeke nodded. "I'm sorry I wasn't enough to save your son. I tried. I truly..."

"No, Zeke. You did exactly as I asked. You did your best, but you still survived. That is what I asked and you're here. Now...now we move forward."



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