

The Luna's Choice (theo and ayla) by Kat Silver Chapter 161

Chapter 9: Ayla

The rest of the week went by quickly. It often did when every minute of the day had something to fill it. Holly had come into town with Zeff, and they invited Theo along for our dinner to congratulate us. I also agreed to write the column on a part-time basis, which made both Zeff and Holly happy. Theo was supportive once he knew it was a light schedule that wouldn't be likely to add any more stress to my workload.

He and Zeff also got along surprisingly well and started to seem like old friends. Which made me happy. In the end, it was a wonderful evening.

The following days were filled with much of the same – training in the morning, working on the Harry investigation with Mina, Luna lessons with Grace, and getting my school schedule finalized.

My first two classes started on Monday. I was excited but realized how quickly everything was happening. I began to think I should have waited until the following semester to get started. Theo felt my anxiety, and, being as sweet as he is, he took me around the campus on Sunday to help me get my bearings.

My second class was with Professor Armand. I immediately liked him. His passion for his subject was evident, and he seemed to be a patient and effective teacher. I was excited to see how the class went but was even more eager to get to work with him on my own history project.

Jimmy and I stayed behind when the class was dismissed for my meeting with the professor.

"Luna, thank you for staying back with me," Professor Armand said.

"This first week of school is always hectic for everyone, and this was the best time for me to fit you in."

"It's not a problem at all," I said. "And please, call me Ayla here. I'd rather not draw too much attention."

"I'm afraid your secret won't last too long, my dear," the professor replied. "The rumor that our new Luna will be attending this year has been the talk of the campus."

"Of course it is," I said lightly. "I'm not expecting to keep it a secret. Just as separate as possible. I think it'll be easier on my classmates."

Armand glanced at Jimmy behind me.

"Yeah," I said, following his gaze. "We're working on that too."

Jimmy put a hand to his chest. "You mean you don't like spending the whole day with my sparkling wit and charm? Luna, I'm hurt."

I shook my head at his antics.

"Anyway, I know you're aware of my... rather unique situation," I said as I sat at his desk.

"Yes, I'm afraid I was the one who helped Randy track you down," he admitted. "I'm sorry if that has put you in danger."

"No," I said. "Trust me, there were plenty of others who did that first. In fact, it was you and Randy that helped us find some answers to what was going on."

"It is a relief to hear that," he said. "But you have more questions. I'm not making any promises. It sounds like Alpha Cooper and Randy told you as much as we know."

"Well, I think I have some things that can help us," I told him, reaching into my bag and removing one of my father's books.

"Where did you come by this?" he asked eagerly.

"Let's just say it fell into my lap," I said. "I have a couple more like it. I'm still going through everything, but I brought this one because it has a lot of information on my family history."

He was flipping through the book as I spoke. "Indeed there is."

He stopped on a page I had bookmarked. It spoke about some of the abilities that ran in my bloodline.

“Yeah, I wanted to dig a little deeper into that,” I said tentatively. “I know I can command people, but I don’t know how to yet. It’s something I need to work on.”

“I’m afraid I’m probably not the best instructor on that skill,” the professor pointed out.

“No, that’s okay,” I rushed. “Alpha Torin has offered to help with that. But, um...” — I glanced back at Jimmy, knowing he wouldn’t like the direction I was going to take things — “I wanted to know more about the wolfsbane immunity.”

Jimmy’s gaze fell on me, as I suspected, but I ignored it.

“That is something the Dominis was known for,” Armand confirmed. “From what I could tell, all the members had the capability.”

“But was it something that was completely inherent, or did they have to build it up?”

“Hmm, I’m not sure,” Armand said. “I do recall some kind of tradition or ritual that involved ingesting wolfsbane. I can pull my research for you on that, but I’m sure this would also be a good place to start.”

I smiled. “I hope so,” I stated. “Randy made it sound like you were an expert on Onyxcrown history...”

“I’m not willing to claim that, I’m afraid,” he interrupted. “At least not on their more recent histories, I should say. My studies have always consisted of the distant past. But I can certainly get you looking in the right direction for the information you need.”

“Thank you, Professor,” I said. “Well, I won’t take up any more of your time today. Thank you for meeting with me.”

“Of course,” he said, standing as I did. “And please feel free to review your schedule and let me know of any regular times you would like to meet on this subject.”

"I'll do that." I said.

"Gamma Jimmy," the professor said, "it's always a pleasure to see you."

"Take care, Professor," Jimmy said as he followed me out.

We made it across campus to my car.

"You better not be thinking of doing what I think you are," Jimmy said sternly.

"What?"

"If I find out you've taken wolfsbane in some ritual, Luna, I..."

"Jimmy, calm down," I said. "I'm not doing any rituals, okay? I was just curious. It was just something Harry said."

"Well, we both know how crazy that bastard was," Jimmy mumbled.

"I know, big guy," I said.

I wasn't going to tell him I had every intention of exploring this possible immunity. With my safety always in question, it would at least take that weight off my mind.

The Luna's Choice (theo and ayla) by Kat Silver Chapter 162

Chapter 10: Theo

"And you're sure she's loyal?" I asked Briggs as we stood at the edge of the training field.

"Grady says so, and her and her family's background checks came back clean," Briggs said. "She's a fourth-generation Greytooth warrior, although her family goes back even farther. Top of her class. Gets along with the others. She seemed quite ambitious when I spoke to her. She also looks young enough to fit the part."

I nodded. I removed my watch and handed it to Briggs. Ducking through the fencing, I walked to the middle of the field.

"Maggie Walton," I called.

She turned and shot to attention with a salute. I waved her to me.

"How long have you been at it out here today?" I asked. She was still out of breath from her last match.

"About two hours, Alpha," she replied.

"You're going spar with me," I told her, stepping back to a starting point. "No shifting, no holds barred."

She looked surprised for a moment but quickly took her stance.

I watched her movements as we squared off, waiting to draw her in for the first move. She swung her leg out for a low strike to the knee. I dodged, but she was a step ahead, using her momentum to spin into an elbow strike to my ribs.

Impressive.

She made contact but I grabbed her arm, moving to twist it behind her back. A palm strike to my forearm allowed her to pull from my grip. We stepped away from each other, squaring off again. I pushed harder, testing her limits.

She was fatigued and quickly started to make mistakes, but her recovery was still solid. She fought hard. I didn't feel the need to keep pushing, so I ended the fight with a shoulder flip, pinning her to the ground.

"Well done," I panted. I helped her to her feet. "Get yourself cleaned up and meet me in my office at the packhouse in an hour. In plain clothes."

"Yes, Alpha," she replied, working hard to mask the range of emotions she was feeling.

My lips twitched at her reaction. She was perfect.

I headed out of the field back to Briggs.

"Contact the school and get her paperwork started," I said. "And get her set up with a room in our wing. I want to keep her close."

"Yes, Alpha," Briggs replied. "Are you briefing her today?"

“Yes,” I replied, climbing into my car. “The sooner she’s in place, the better.”

We headed back to the packhouse and Maggie arrived five minutes early. She came into my office and stood at attention before my desk. I looked her over. She wore black jeans and a T-shirt. She still appeared militant. We would have to address that. Otherwise, I was pleased with the selection.

“At ease,” I told her. “Please, have a seat.” She did as she was told. “I have a job for you, Ms. Walton.”

“A job, Alpha?” she asked.

“Yes, but before we go over the details, I need to ensure you understand how important this position is,” I said firmly. “I need to know that you are dedicated to this pack, Ms. Walton.”

“Of course, Alpha,” she rushed. “It’s been my dream to serve under the ranking families my whole life.”

“That’s good to know,” I said. “But wanting a position for the prestige isn’t the same as believing in what you are doing. So, I give you free reign to address any problems you have with me or our ranking members.”

“I’m not sure what you mean, Alpha,” she said slowly and sincerely.

“Do you have any problem with me or my Luna?” I asked. “Are there any rumors that have raised any concern? Are there any politics I have practiced that you don’t agree with?”

“I think there will always be something we don’t agree on, sir,” she said candidly. “However, I don’t know of anything worth noting. I believe your father is a strong, fair Alpha and that you will be the same.”

“And my Luna?” I pressed.

She took a minute to think about her response. “Honestly, I don’t know her, Alpha,” she said plainly. “I believe you are referring to the rumors regarding her being the sister of the woman you were previously partnered with. I am aware of them, but I don’t deal in rumors. I do, however, have one friend who met her briefly during the packhouse attack. She said she was impressive and quite lovely. So, no, I have no inherent issues with our Luna.”

I grinned. "I'm glad you feel that way," I said, leaning forward on the desk. "Because I want you to be her personal bodyguard."

Maggie's jaw dropped slightly, but she regained composure before she spoke again.

"Alpha, with all due respect, there must be more senior warriors who should fill this position."

"Luna Ayla will be attending the university," I told her. "She's not used to having constant security, but recent events have made it a requirement. Truthfully, I don't want a host of males drawing more attention to her any more than she does. But she needs around-the-clock protection. At least for the time being. So, I thought it would be easier on her if her bodyguard appeared to just be another student."

"I see," Maggie said. "Does that mean she isn't going to know I'm there?"

"No, of course not," I insisted. "You'll have some time to spend with her before you begin your assignment. She'll be fully aware of your presence. There will be another team and campus security that will also be keeping an eye on her. They will be less visible, but she knows they will be there."

"Understood," Maggie replied.

"Good," I said. "You will be moving here as well. This is a full-time commitment, Ms. Walton, not just for when she is at school. I want you with her whenever I'm not around. Are we clear?"

"Yes, Alpha," she confirmed.

"Alright. You can go back and start packing up," I said. "I'll call you with more details by the end of the day."

Maggie stood and saluted. Her expression was stoic but with a glint in her eyes that I recognized.

Yes, she and Ayla would get along just fine.

The Luna's Choice (theo and ayla) by Kat Silver Chapter 163

Chapter 11: Theo

“Ayla, I told you not to worry about it,” I said, helping her take a casserole dish out of the oven. “You didn’t need to cook.”

I had told her we were having someone over for dinner, and she kind of started to panic. She insisted on making dinner despite me telling her I’d order something from the packhouse café. But she wouldn’t have it. Now, she was running around the kitchen stressing about everything.

“This is the first time we’ve actually had someone over,” she said. “And since you won’t tell me who it is, I had no idea what was appropriate to make.”

“Baby,” I said, grabbing her shoulders, “relax, sweetheart. It’s really not a big deal. It’s just a casual meal. The casserole will be perfect and delicious. It certainly smells fantastic. So, just breathe.”

Her shoulders relaxed a little. “Okay,” she said, looking completely adorable with a worried pout.

I brushed her bottom lip with my thumb. “You better put that away, or you’ll be the only dinner I’ll be having tonight.”

A laugh burst from her, a broad smile brightening her features.

“There’s my girl,” I said, kissing her nose.

“Alright,” she said, pushing me away. “Let me get this in the fridge, or it will never be ready.”

I grabbed her waist. “I think we both know my favorite dessert is always ready for me,” I teased.

“Theo,” she exclaimed. “You need to behave. We’ll have company here any minute.”

I chuckled as I kissed my mark on her neck just as there was a knock on the door.

“Go,” Ayla insisted. “You get that and I’ll be right there.”

"I got it. I got it," I said, kissing her cheek before heading through the living room.

I opened the door for Maggie, inviting her in. She was still maintaining a formal posture, coming across a little rigid. I couldn't blame her. This was a serious job for her. But I needed her to blend in with Ayla. She would need to relax as well. We'd work on it before I sent her out on her own.

I led her into the dining room, where Ayla was setting the meal on the table.

"Ayla, love," I said, moving to her side, "this is Maggie Walton. Maggie, this is Luna Ayla."

"It's an honor to meet you, Luna," Maggie said with a smile and a bow.

"It's lovely to meet you as well, Maggie," Ayla replied.

"Babe, I've assigned Maggie to be your new bodyguard," I told her. "We want her to blend in on campus with you, so I thought it would be a good idea for you two to get to know each other a little before she starts."

"Oh, well, why didn't you just tell me that," she said, punching my shoulder playfully.

I laughed. "I figured you would fight me less if she was standing in front of you," I teased.

"Maggie, please have a seat," Ayla said, directing her to the seat across from her. "And forgive me for being a little out of the loop. Your

Alpha likes to think he's so smart."

Maggie actually smiled genuinely. "It's okay, Luna. I guess that means we're both a little surprised about me being here."

"Please tell me he told you what this was all about, at least?" Ayla said as she readied a plate for Maggie.

"Yes, he did," Maggie replied. "I was more surprised that he offered me the job in the first place."

“Maggie is a great candidate,” I said, helping Ayla plate the meal. “She was trained in security with the warrior teams, and she is one of their top fighters. I was even thinking about letting her train you some days.”

“That sounds great,” Ayla said, finally sitting down to eat.

I let the two of them lead the conversation. Maggie was a little shy at first, but Ayla did such a good job making everyone feel comfortable that she opened up quickly. I was glad to hear that they had some things in common and didn’t run out of things to discuss.

I knew it was a questionable move, putting them in a situation where they would get close to each other emotionally. It wasn’t what they were trained to do for private security. But Maggie wouldn’t be her sole protector, and I wanted someone who would make Ayla feel more at ease with the situation. Jimmy told me she had been anxious about him following her around campus the last few days. It would be easier for them to look like friends if they actually were.

I also thought it would give Maggie a different perspective on campus.

I needed her to listen for any more rumors or discontent surrounding Ayla. We obviously had members of the Waar Pak within our pack. The male who attacked her couldn’t have been the only one. College campuses are among the top places organizations like theirs like to recruit. With any luck, Maggie will catch a lead.

Now that I knew she and Ayla would get along, I would tell her about the Waar Pak situation.

When we were finished eating, Ayla took Maggie to the living room while I cleared the table.

“Okay, Maggie,” I said when I joined them. I sat beside Ayla on the couch, resting a hand on her leg. “There’s more to the situation you need to know about. I’m aware this kind of security arrangement isn’t standard practice, even for the pack Luna. But Ayla isn’t your typical Luna.”

Maggie smiled. “I’m sure any mate would feel that, Alpha.”

“Yes, well, in this case, I have a bit more to back me up than my own loving devotion,” I said with a smile.

Ayla squeezed my hand. I rubbed the back of hers with my thumb.

‘Are you okay with this?’ I asked her through the mind–link.

‘She should know what she’s getting into,’ Ayla insisted.

“Maggie, have you ever heard of the Waar Pak Society?”

The Luna’s Choice (theo and ayla) by Kat Silver Chapter 164

Chapter 12: Theo

Ayla and I ran through most of the details regarding our situation with the Waar Pak.

Maggie took in all the information intently. She asked questions. She expressed her own concerns. All in all, I was still confident that she was the best choice.

But I also wasn’t taking any chances.

“There’s one more thing I have to ask of you, Maggie,” I said gravely. “I don’t think I need to tell you how important my mate’s safety is to me. I accept that some risks are unavoidable, but I won’t take any that I don’t have to.”

“Of course, Alpha,” Maggie agreed.

“I also want you to know that this isn’t a decision I make lightly,” I insisted. “But there is a way for Ayla to command you that would prevent you from being questioned. By anyone.”

“Theo, no,” Ayla whispered.

I looked back at her, squeezing her leg.

“You can do this, babe,” I told her. “I’ll be right here to help you.” I turned back to Maggie. “It’s stronger than an Alpha’s command. I can’t even break it unless Ayla allows me to.”

“But I’ve never done it before,” Ayla told her adamantly. “I’m not even sure I can do it, and we think there can be... risks if I do it wrong.”

“What kind of risks?” Maggie asked.

“We’re not sure,” I admitted. “But we strongly believe her commanding you directly is much safer than the alternative.”

“There’s an alternative?”

“There is a ritual,” I confirmed. “From what we know, it isn’t pleasant. But that’s why we’re not proposing that. I want Ayla to command you. But it has to be your choice, Maggie. I will not command loyalty from my members. Neither will Ayla. This will act as a safeguard for the loyalty you already have to us.”

“You can think about it, Maggie,” Ayla interjected. “You don’t have to decide now.

Maggie shrugged. “There’s not much to think about. You have my loyalty, so that’s no question. And if this helps you both, then let’s do it.”

I could feel Ayla’s relief and anxiety coming through our connection. I repositioned on the couch to face her.

“We’ve got to try it, babe,” I said gently. “This is something you need to learn to control regardless. And I need assurance that you are safe.”

She chewed on her lip for a second. “Okay,” she conceded.

I cupped her cheek and kissed her. “Thank you. You still have the command Randy gave you, right?”

She nodded, standing up to go and grab the paper he gave her. When she came back, I had her sit in front of me between my legs and had Maggie sit on the coffee table before her. Contact wasn’t usually necessary for a command, only a pack connection, but I believed it would help in this situation.

“Okay, babe,” I said next to her ear, my hands resting on her thighs. “Take Maggie’s hand. Remember to concentrate on the intention you want to achieve. Search for her consciousness. After your Luna ceremony, you’ll be able to feel her tether, tying her to you and me as her pack leaders. Once you find her, say the words. But you have to mean them. You have to have the intention behind them.”

Ayla nodded her understanding. She took a few deep breaths. I could feel the energy build in her. It was the second time since we had marked each other. This time, I was able to appreciate how powerful it was.

“You. Maggie Walton, will not reveal the secrets of the Dominis bloodline to their enemies. You will not give any information that will lead those who wish to harm the Dominis bloodline to me. You will...” Ayla paused, her resolve faltering.

“I

“You have to finish it, Ayla,” I encouraged.

“You will protect the knowledge of the Dominis bloodline with your life.”

I wasn’t expecting those last words, but I supposed I should have. Ayla’s energy dissipated and she released Maggie’s hand. I looked at the woman in front of us. She smiled at Ayla reassuringly.

“That wasn’t so bad,” Maggie teased.

“Did it feel stronger than a regular command?” I asked.

Her brow furrowed. “I’m not sure. But I wasn’t going to fight it, and I -don’t have any intention of betraying you.”

I nodded. “That’s not surprising, I guess. You would need to be asked or commanded a question about Ayla.”

“You can test it out,” Maggie said.

“Won’t work for me,” I said.

“He connected to me,” Ayla said. “I trust him with my life. He’s not an enemy.

“Gotcha.”

“I’ll see what I can do to test it,” I said. “For now, we’ll just have to hope that it worked. But I think that’s enough for tonight. Thank you, Maggie.”

We all stood and walked Maggie to the door.

"I'll let you know what our next move will be soon," I told her. "In the meantime, get situated in your new apartment. And if you have any more questions, you are welcome to reach out to either of us."

We said our goodbyes and I locked the door behind her when she left. I could sense something was off with Ayla. When I turned back, she was sitting on the couch with her hands in her lap. I knelt before her.

"I didn't like that," she said. "I don't want to command someone to die for me. I'm not doing that again, Theo."

I sighed. "I get it, babe," I said. "I do. If I'm being honest, it's suspicious that these commands exist in a ritual. A good Alpha would never command loyalty from his pack like that. So, I know that didn't feel right. But we gave her the choice, Ayla. I promise you didn't command her to do anything she wouldn't already do. You just made it so no one could force her to go against those desires."

"I know," she replied. "But I still don't like it."

I raised up to meet her level, kissing her lips firmly.

"I would be concerned if you did."

The Luna's Choice (theo and ayla) by Kat Silver Chapter 165

Chapter 13: Ayla

Theo and I took the morning off from training. My body needed the break to recover. It was nice to sleep in a little, but I didn't get to for long. Before my first class, I had to go down to the cellar for a little while. I had been studying Harry's notebook whenever I had a little free time, and something had been bugging me. This first week of school would be hectic, and I had scheduled some time down there next week, but I didn't want to wait that long.

I grabbed my toast from the toaster as Theo emerged from our bedroom. He just woke up and was only wearing sweats that hung low on his hips, making it hard to keep my plans.

"I thought you didn't have class for a couple more hours," he asked.

“Yeah, I have to look into something with the Harry investigation,” I said.

He brushed my hair off my shoulder. “Do you want me to come with you? I could use a catch-up on how things are going.”

“Hmm... You sure you can spare the time?” I teased.

His hands went around my waist, pulling me toward him. “I can rearrange some things.”

“Oh,” I replied coyly, “I feel so special.”

Theo growled low, his lips taking mine. He kissed me needily for a few moments before pulling back reluctantly.

“I hate how crazy things have been lately,” he said.

“Lately?” I laughed.

Theo chuckled. “Okay... Since we met,” he corrected. “But at least we got time together before.”

“I know,” I said, running my hands over his chest. “But it’s only for a little while. I’ll get settled into school soon enough. Mina and Briggs’ mating ceremony is in a couple of days. That will clear up some time.”

“And I think we need to make us a priority, too,” Theo stated, grazing his fingers along my cheek. “We both tend to keep ourselves busy. So, while things are so crazy and busy, let’s schedule time together. Just the two of us.”

“I like that idea.” I snaked my arms around his neck. “But going over the contents of a psychopath’s secret lair doesn’t count as a date, right?”

Theo laughed. “No, absolutely not,” he replied. “But we should get go...”

His eyes glazed over and he huffed.

“I guess that means a rain check?”

“Yeah,” he sighed. “I’m sorry, babe.”

I shook my head. “Don’t worry about it.” I kissed him again. “But I should get down there.”

"I better get dressed," he said. "I love you."

"I love you, too."

I grabbed my bag and headed out of the apartment. When I got down to the cellar, no one else was there. It was odd, but I was actually relieved. I pulled the notebook out of my bag and looked for the file I had been reviewing a couple of days earlier. I flipped through the papers until I found the one I wanted. Comparing it to the page in the journal, a wave of excitement washed through me.

I had found the pattern.

Well, part of it, at least. But I was hopeful it would be enough to figure out the rest. I quickly finished deciphering the page I was on. It was exactly what I had thought it was. A formula that Harry had calculated to enhance my wolfsbane immunity.

I sank into a chair. Chewing on my lip as I stared at the page in front of me. It was a stupid idea. And dangerous. But it was less dangerous than most aspects of my life right now. Theo would never be okay with this. I sighed, running my hands through my hair as I leaned over the table.

"Something you want to talk about?"

I jumped in my seat, my head shooting up to see Mina standing in the doorway. I exhaled heavily.

"Mina, you scared the crap out of me.

"Yeah, which is concerning," she said, walking to the table and sitting next to me. "What's up, cuz?"

I took a deep breath. "I figured out part of the cipher."

"And that's a bad thing because...?" Mina asked.

"I found a formula that I think was used to build our wolfsbane immunity," I said.

"Ayla..." Mina said sternly. "You're not..."

“Of course I’m considering it, Mina,” I pushed. “Why aren’t you? You’re a Dominis, too. With no idea of how many people are out there after us, immunity to one thing that could help them take us out sounds like a good thing to me.”

“How do you even know this is a thing, Ayla?” Mina said. “This could all be Harry grasping at straws.”

“Because it was working,” I stated.

Mina looked at me. “What do you mean?”

“Two days,” I told her. “He was feeding wolfsbane into my system for two days, Mina. It’s what kept me unconscious. But then I woke up. Mina, I shifted. I had who knows how much wolfsbane flowing through me and I still shifted. I felt it. I was weak, but I was getting past it. It was getting better.”

Mina’s jaw worked as she thought about what I was telling her. With a huff, she reached over and grabbed the paper I had been working on. After a few moments, she spoke.

“Fine,” she blurted out, shaking her head in defeat. “Theo isn’t going to like this.”

“That’s why we’re not going to tell him,” I said slowly.

“Ayla,” Mina exclaimed. “What the hell are you talking about?”

“You know he wouldn’t let me do this, Min,” I insisted. “But it doesn’t

make sense not to. Besides, even if I could talk him around, I don’t want to add that stress to him.”

“Yeah, like you being sick won’t add to his stress.”

“Just let me worry about that, okay?” I said. “Please, Mina. I’d rather not do this alone.”

“You better fucking not,” she snapped.

With a growl, she stood up and went to the workstation with all the vials. She grabbed a bottle and brought it back, setting it down in front of me.

"You swear you won't take any without me there?" Mina asked severely.

"I swear."

The Luna's Choice (theo and ayla) by Kat Silver Chapter 166

Chapter 14: Theo

"What's going on, Briggs?" I asked as I got to my office.

"We had another attack at the border," he told me.

My stomach fell. "Where?"

"Bonnerville," he said.

"Rogues again?"

He nodded.

"How bad? Were there any casualties?" I asked apprehensively.

"One dead. Five in critical condition."

"Do we have any information about the attack that could tell us why it happened?"

"They have a couple rogues in custody, but they're not talking. They need someone with more authority than they have down there. We have to go down, Theo," he said. "They can't handle this on their own."

"Your mating ceremony is in three days, Briggs. You're not going anywhere." I sighed. "But you're right. I'll go," I greed.

"You'll have to take Jimmy," Briggs said, running a hand through his hair

"Maggie's not ready to take over Ayla's security detail just yet," I said. "So I need him with her at the campus."

I ran my hands over my face. This was the third rogue attack along our border in two weeks. It was unheard of. We hadn't had a rogue attack in decades. I

had sent a few teams of warriors down to bolster the patrols, but it obviously hadn't deterred them. Something was going on and I needed to go down there to get to the bottom of it.

But I didn't want to leave Ayla.

"You can't go down there alone, man," Briggs said.

"I'll take William," I said. "He's been wanting to get out of the city for a while now anyway."

"Didn't they just have their fourth kid?" Briggs asked.

"Fourth and fifth," I corrected. "It was another set of twins."

"Damn," he said, shaking his head with a grin. "You think he's the best option? He's been out of the game for a while."

"He's my only option right now," I said.

"You could bring your dad," he said.

"No, he's still not up for that."

"Alright," he conceded. "Do you want me to reach out to him?"

"No, I will," I told him. "I'll need you to keep an eye on things here."

"You okay, Theo?"

"No," I said honestly. "I lost a pack member, Briggs. I have rogues coming into my territory and no idea why. And now I have to leave Ayla. It's hard enough with us being marked less than two weeks, but with her still in danger..."

"We won't let anything happen to her, bro," Briggs said. "And you need to be at the ceremony as much as I do this weekend. So you'll only be gone a couple days. Just get down there and figure out what happened and get back."

Briggs left my office to go take care of my travel arrangements. I picked up my phone and dialed William's number.

"You better be calling to tell me what the hell has been happening in that packhouse," his voice came over the phone.

"If you came to visit more often, you would already know," I chided.

Willam was my second cousin and a good guy. He was a couple of years older than me, but we spent a lot of time together growing up. For years, I was torn between having him or Briggs as my Beta. But he met his mate two days after his eighteenth birthday, and they quickly started a family. So, when it came time to make an official decision, he had no hard feelings when I chose Briggs.

But he would always be a ranking member. And with his Alpha blood, he could help with any questioning we had to do.

"Just wait until you have five kids to wrangle," he told me.

"I'd have to talk my mate into giving me that many first," I joked. "How are Beth and the kids doing?"

"The kids are great," he said. "Loud and healthy. But speaking of your mate, Beth is pissed she hasn't met her yet."

"I can remedy that," I said. "But, unfortunately, that's not why I called."

"What's up, cuz?"

"I need your help. We've had some attacks along our southern border.

Rogues," I told him. "I need to go down to Bonnerville for a couple of days. Things are a bit crazy here. I can't take Briggs or Jimmy with me."

"When do you want to leave?" Will said.

I breathed an internal sigh of relief.

"I need a few hours," I said. "I need to get everything situated here and figure out a way to break the news to Ayla."

"You don't think she'll take it well?" he asked curiously.

"She'll likely take it better than Beth," I teased.

“She’s got both sets of grandparents, plus her sister, close by,” Will stated confidently. “Honestly, she may thank you for getting me out of her hair for a while.”

I chuckled. “You guys were planning on coming to Briggs’ mating ceremony already. So she could always bring them here. I’m sure my mother would have a field day with them.”

“She may just do that,” he replied. “But let me let you go. I’ll have to get work situated before I can go get packed up. Just let me know when you want me to meet you.”

“Will do,” I said. “And thanks, Will.”

“You got it, Alpha.”

We hung up, and I sent Ayla a message to come home right after she got out of class. I knew she would understand and be supportive, but I still hated it. I had just had a conversation with her that morning about making time for each other. Now I had to go out of town for a few days.

It didn’t help that something in my gut was telling me these attacks had something to do with the Waar Pak.

The Luna’s Choice (theo and ayla) by Kat Silver Chapter 167

Chapter 15: Theo

I had finished making all the necessary arrangements and was waiting in the kitchen for Ayla to get back home. I brought up some lunch since I knew she likely hadn’t had time to eat anything. I had packed a bag already, so I didn’t have to worry about it when she returned. I only had about an hour before I would need to get on the road, and I wanted to spend it with her.

“Theo,” Ayla called as she came in the door.

“I’m here, babe,” I replied, heading to meet her in the living room.

“What’s wrong? Is everything okay?” she said as she rushed to me, throwing her arms around my neck.

I squeezed her tightly, holding her as I savored her scent.

“Babe, what’s going on?” she pressed. “Your text didn’t sound good and you’ve been stressed all day.

The corners of my lips twitched. “I’ll be okay, love,” I told her as I let her go. “But I do have some bad news.” I took her hand and led her around, pulling her into my lap as I sat on the couch. “I have to go out of town for a few days, babe.”

“Oh,” she said. “What’s going on?”

“We’ve had another rogue attack,” I said. “I need to go down and figure out what’s going on. I’ll be gone a couple days, but I’ll be back in time for the ceremony this weekend.”

“Is everyone okay?” she asked worriedly. “Do you want me to come

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Chapter 15 Theo

with you?”

288 Vouchers

“We lost one,” I said solemnly. “There are several still in the hospital.”

“Baby, I’m so sorry,” Ayla said, hugging me again. “Maybe I should come, too.”

I held her tighter. I was so proud of her compassion and wished she could be there with me.

“No, babe,” I said. “It’s too dangerous. Plus, so much is going on. We all need you here.”

“When do you have to leave?” she asked.

“Soon, but I have a little while.”

I pulled her up, looking at her. She looked tired. My brow furrowed with concern.

“Ayla, are you feeling okay?” I pressed a hand to her forehead and cheek. “You’re really pale.”

“Yeah, I’m fine,” she said with a smile. “Just sad, I guess. I hate that our pack is suffering.”

My hand held the side of her neck and I could feel her pulse racing. Her eyes were dilated.

“Baby, you’re not fine,” I said urgently. “What happened today? Did you have contact with anyone you don’t know?”

“Theo, calm down,” she insisted with a smile. “I promise. I’m okay. I’ve just been on edge all day. Your message had me thinking some scary things, and I rushed home. But I’m perfectly fine.”

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Chapter 15. Theo

288 Vouchers

I wasn’t convinced. I was worried.

“I’m taking you to see the pack doctor,” I insisted as I moved to stand. “I’ll find someone else to go down and take care of this.”

Ayla pushed me back. “Theo, no. You need to go.” She repositioned so she was straddling my lap. “I am probably just a little wiped out. But I’m done with class for the day. So once you head out, I’ll take the rest of the day to relax and rest. But until then, can I just enjoy these few minutes with my mate?”

She leaned in and kissed me sweetly, deepening it quickly as she opened for me. My hands slid up her back, pressing her against me as my fingers weaved into her hair. I took what she was giving, tasting as much of her as possible as if I hadn’t already memorized every scent and flavor.

Ayla's hands dipped between us, tucking under my shirt to trace along my skin. She tugged my shirt over my head. Her lips returned to mine as her fingers undid the button of my jeans.

"Ayla," I hesitated, "you need to rest.

She didn't listen, slipping her hand beneath my waistband and gripping my length.

"I told you I'm fine, baby," she breathed. "And I want to show you just how much I'm going to miss you."

Her hand moved along my shaft, making me groan as she kissed me again. Her lips moved to my neck, my head falling back with a groan. Her weight shifted from my lap. I lifted my head and opened my eyes, meeting hers as she knelt before me.

"Babe," I growled.

Chapter 15. Theo

288 Vouchers

She tugged my jeans and boxers lower, releasing my cock for better access. Her fingers wrapped around the base as she leaned in, her tongue darting out to lick along the seam before taking me in her mouth.

"Fuck, Ayla," I rasped out.

She hummed her approval, making me moan at the sensation. I pushed her hair back, gathering it in my hand so I could see her beautiful face as her mouth devoured me eagerly. I cursed at the incredibly erotic sight before me. Her eyes filled with excitement and satisfaction.

I groaned as her tongue swirled around the head just before she took me deep in her throat, swallowing any resistance. My fingers tensed in her hair and she took it as guidance, quickening her pace.

"Holy fuck, baby," I gasped as my lower back tingled and my balls tightened. "I'm going to come, babe," I warned.

She didn't stop. Instead, pushed faster, forcing a growl from my chest as I burst into her delicious mouth. She took it all happily. I worked to steady my breathing. I looked down to see a smug little grin directed at

me.

I grabbed my mate and threw her on the couch. I ripped her leggings down her legs before she could say anything, diving between her thighs. She cried out as I took her in my mouth.

There was no way she believed I would just leave after that.

I gave her everything I knew she liked, pushing her to the brink fast and hard. I lapped her up as she shook. I moved up her body, my lips taking hers roughly as I thrust into her. She cried out, wrapping her legs around my waist. I adopted a frenzied pace, both of us desperate for the other.

Chapter 15. Theo

288 Vouchers

"Theo," she called my name as she came again, wringing my own orgasm from me with her.

I collapsed onto the couch, rolling Ayla to avoid crushing her. Our breathing was labored as we clung to each other.

"That's not what I had planned," I whispered.

"That's a shame," Ayla teased. "I'm glad I took things into my own hands."

I chuckled. "I won't argue your tactics."

She pushed up so she was looking at me. Her hair fell in her face and I pushed it out of the way. She still looked tired but seemed a lot better than before.

"Have I thoroughly convinced you that I'm fine and you don't need to be worrying about me?" she asked.

I sighed with a grin. "I suppose so," I conceded. "But I do expect you to take it easy the rest of the day."

"I promise," she replied, giving me another kiss.

The Luna's Choice (theo and ayla) by Kat Silver Chapter 168

Chapter 16: Ayla

Theo picked me up and carried me to our bedroom. He laid me on the bed and snuggled up beside me.

"I can't stay much longer," he whispered against my hair.

"I know," I said, hugging him closer to me. "Just be careful, please."

"I will. I promise," he told me.

"And you better be back in time for the ceremony," I insisted. "Mina will kill you if Briggs is late."

"That's why he's not coming with me," Theo said. "I'm taking my cousin, William."

"Ah, yes, the mysterious cousin I haven't met yet," I teased. "Can I trust him to keep you safe?"

"Definitely," Theo said confidently. "And you'll get to meet him when we get back. He and his mate, Beth, were attending the mating ceremony this weekend anyway."

"Good."

Theo kissed my forehead. "I have to go, babe."

"Okay," I replied. I looked up at my mate. I held his face as I kissed him firmly.

"Please, please, be careful. I love you. I can't lose you."

"I promise I'll be back before you know it," he assured me. "You just worry about taking care of yourself, love."

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I nodded.

He slipped out of the bed, tucking me under the covers. "I love you, baby."

"I love you, too," I whispered.

"I'll call you when we get there." He kissed my forehead one more time before leaving the bedroom..

I did feel sleep creeping up on me, but guilt kept me awake. Guilt and relief. For a few minutes, I thought I would have to confess to Theo about the wolfsbane. I was still feeling its effects when I got back. Even as I lay there, I could feel the shadow of the poison still in my system.

But I had managed to somehow keep it hidden from everyone else. Jimmy was suspicious after a dizzy spell on the way to class, but I brushed it off as forgetting to eat.

I was upset that Theo had to leave. Even more upset that we have been attacked again. Our pack hadn't experienced these kinds of attacks in my living memory. The fact that rogues were coming at our border was concerning for everyone. I was worried about Theo being down there so close to them. But I also knew he needed to be there. So, at least, I could use this as an opportunity to continue taking the wolfsbane without having to worry about Theo noticing.

I dragged myself out of bed and went back to the living room to find my phone. I texted Mina to let her know I was home and that it had worn off. She messaged back to say she would be up to see me in a few minutes. She wanted to check that everything was okay.

I changed into some comfy sweats and plopped down on the couch to wait for her. I turned the TV on but wasn't really paying attention as I tried to stay awake. Mina knocked on the door not too long later, and I

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linked her to come in.

"So, how are you feeling?" she asked, coming over to sit by me.

"I'm good, actually," I said honestly. "Exhausted, but that's about it. But I think that may be because I was fighting it so hard all morning."

"No more lightheadedness? Heart rate is normal? Any nausea?"

"No, yes, and no," I replied.

"And Theo didn't suspect anything?"

I winced. "There were still some lingering effects when I got back that he noticed and got a little worried about," I told her. "But I convinced him I was fine."

"I'm sure you did," Mina said, shaking her head.

"He had to leave for a couple days," I said.

"Briggs told me," she replied.

"Do you think we could do another dose this evening?" I asked. "Then I could sleep it off."

"I don't know, Ayla," she said. "We discussed once a day."

"I know, but if I can get stronger before he gets back, then he won't get so worried or suspicious," I argued. "Plus, the sooner I get through this, the better, right?"

Mina huffed, rubbing her forehead.

"Please, Mina?"

"Alright," she agreed reluctantly. "But you get some sleep first. Don't

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you have another class today?"

"Professor Armand's class," I said. "I'll let him know I won't be there."

"Okay," she replied. "How are you doing with Theo leaving?"

I sighed. “Obviously, I’m not happy about it. Mostly because of the reason. It’s hard to believe that rogues are attacking now.”

“I know,” Mina concurred. “Briggs said they haven’t been able to figure out a motive yet. This is the first time they managed to get any prisoners.”

“That explains why he wanted to bring his cousin,” I said.

Rogues weren’t bound to a pack, so the commands of lower-ranking members didn’t affect them. A Beta could manage some control, but for getting information, an Alpha was needed. William wouldn’t be as strong as Theo, but he still had Alpha blood. He would be able to help Theo get answers.

“You don’t think they would attack again?” I said. “I can’t but worry they were luring him down there.”

“He knows that’s a possibility,” Mina said. “We all do. He’ll be prepared for that, hon.”

“I know. But I’m still worried.”

“Well, he hasn’t made it there yet,” she replied. “He won’t make it down there until nightfall, at least. So, you just get some rest. I’ll be back later to administer the dose.”

She stood up and leaned over to kiss my head before heading out.

“Love you,” she called over her shoulder.

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“Love you, too.”

The Luna’s Choice (theo and ayla) by Kat Silver Chapter 169

Chapter 17: Ayla

I ended up falling asleep on the couch and woke up several hours later. Theo called that evening to let me know he had made it to Bonnaville safely. I made him promise to keep me updated on what he found out. I started to regret my nap as it got later and my anxiety started to rise. I didn't realize how much our mate bond would affect our separation. I could still feel our connection, but it felt like something was missing.

To help distract me. I ended up pulling out Harry's journal and working on completing the cipher. I was starting to get more of a picture of what was going through his head. I was surprised to find the first pages eluding to Onyxcrown history. There were several names of Dominis family members, but I did know who they were. I had brought three books from my father's box up to the apartment, one of which specifically documented the Dominis family.

I retrieved the book and my own notebook and started the long and tedious task of cross-referencing. I had been at it for a couple hours when Mina returned.

'Come in.' I linked her.

She entered the apartment to find me on the floor in front of the coffee table.

"Woman, please tell me this isn't what you've been doing since I left," she said.

I snorted. "No, but I kind of wish I had. Did you know that our great- great-grandmother could alter her scent? Pretty effectively, too."

"I did not know that," she said, sitting beside me. "However, I'm not

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288 Vouchers

sure how that would serve many practical purposes."

“Apparently, she used the ability to play pranks when she was younger,” I said, pushing the book closer to Mina. “But it came in handy later in life when she was helping rogue refugees.”

“Rogue refugees?”

“Yeah, I’m not sure what that’s about yet,” I said. “Either way, Harry seemed fascinated by the ability. Among others that I’m still exploring.”

“You managed to finish the cipher?” Mina asked, looking over my work.

“For the most part, I think,” I confirmed. “Some sections still don’t follow the pattern, but that could just be legitimate ramblings.”

“We got some of the research from his cabin today,” Mina informed me. “Luckily, my boss called, and he has two lab techs that he said he’s sending my way next week.”

“It’s about time,” I said. “So they’ll start the day you get back?”

Theo and I surprised Mina and Briggs with a trip to the Blue Fang mountain resort for their honeymoon. They weren’t going to take one initially, but we wouldn’t let that happen. They both deserved this break, and it meant a lot that we could do this for them.

“Yeah, I’m not letting anyone come in without me,” Mina said. “So, what else have you discovered about our weird–ass family?”

I chuckled. “The notebook mentions a few members, so I’ve been trying to focus on those. But this book is huge, and I’ve barely made a dent. What I can say is that we, indeed, have a weird–ass family”

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Chapter 17: Ayla

288 Vouchers

“Any ideas why he centered on those members?” Mina asked, flipping through the book.

I shrugged. "My only theory is that it has to do with their abilities. But I have no clue what they have to do with me.

"Probably nothing," she replied. "He may been speculating."

"Yeah, that also crossed my mind," I said. "But we'll just have to see."

"Well, I'm starving. What do you say we take a break, order some food, and have a girls' night. I have two more nights of freedom, and I miss my cousin," she said, elbowing me.

I smiled. "I think I can manage that."

She pulled out her phone and ordered some takeout.

"So, are you getting excited?" I asked as I closed up the books.

A broad smile spread across her face and she flushed. "Yeah," she said shyly. "I'm excited. I'm ready for it to happen."

I pulled her to me, wrapping my arms around her shoulders in a tight hug

"You know I'm so happy for you, right?" I told her. "You deserve the best."

"I know," she said, returning my embrace. "Now stop that or you're going to make me cry."

We let go of each other with a laugh.

"So, what's it like?" she asked, helping me clear the table.

"Which part?" I replied, wagging an eyebrow at her.

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288 Vouchers

"All of it."

I took a deep breath, my own smile breaking out. "It's pretty fucking incredible. It definitely changes everything. And I mean everything."

“Oh, really... I’m not sure it could get any better,” Mina said salaciously. “I mean, my mate definitely knows what the hell he’s doing, if you know what I mean.”

I busted out laughing. “I would have said the same thing two weeks ago.” I said as I got up to get us a drink. “But everything gets more intense.”

“Really?” Mina said incredulously. “You guys already had a crazy strong connection before you marked each other. I’ve never known another fated pair that could feel each other like you two could before mating. I can’t imagine how much more intense it could get.”

“You’ll understand in a couple more days,” I said, handing her a glass of wine as I sat on the couch.

“So, how are you doing then?” she inquired. “With Theo being gone?”

I sighed. “I didn’t realize how hard it would be, but I’m okay,” I said. “I’m not falling apart. I don’t feel despair or pain or anything like that. But he hasn’t even been gone a day, and it just feels like... like I’m not whole.” I rubbed my chest absently. “But that part isn’t that bad. It’s more like a sense of anticipation because I know he’ll be back. It’s the worry that’s hard.”

“He has plenty of people to protect him, Ayla,” Mina assured me with a gentle smile.

“I know,” I replied. “But I’m worried about them, too. I just need to distract myself until he’s back.”

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Chapter 17 Ayla

288 Vouchers

“Well, I can help you with that,” she said. “Once we get some food in you, we’ll deal with this second dose. And I’ll stay here with you tonight. To keep you safe and keep you company.”

“Thank you.”

The Luna’s Choice (theo and ayla) by Kat Silver Chapter 170

Chapter 18: Theo

I pulled up to Will’s house and honked the horn. I would normally have gone in, but we needed to get on the road. He came out the door a few minutes later, Beth and the three younger kids in tow. Beth

managed to wave at me with a baby on each hip as Will hugged their toddler. I waved back, smiling at the images of Ayla flashing through my mind.

My chest tightened.

It was just another reason why this was such shitty timing. Now that we had marked each other, Ayla’s heat could come on anytime. I couldn’t even think about it happening while I wasn’t there. It would be hell for both of us if it did.

Will finally managed to pry himself away from his family and jogged to my car. He threw his bag in the trunk and climbed into the passenger seat.

“Damn, dude,” he said, shooting me a look and hitting the button for the window as I pulled out of the driveway.

“Well, hello to you too,” I said. “What’s wrong with you?”

“I get that you had a better send-off than I did, but did you really have to make me smell that for the next five hours?”

I didn’t stop the smug grin that developed. “Hey, consider it payback for subjecting a bunch of horny teenagers to you and Beth practically dry-humping each other every second of the day.”

We both laughed. Will light-heartedly punched my shoulder before

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Chapter 18: Theo

288 Vouchers

pulling my collar down to get a better look at Ayla's mark.

"So, the rumors really are true," he drawled.

"Yeah," I replied contentedly, "I'm a claimed man."

"How's Kieran taking to that?" he asked.

"He's the biggest pervert I've ever met," I scoffed. "But I can't say I blame him."

"Based on what you smell like, I doubt you're any better," Will chuckled. "But seriously, bro, I'm happy for you. Confused as shit about how all this happened but happy for you."

"Thanks, man," I said. "It's been a crazy few months, but she's amazing. I can't wait for you to meet her."

"Okay, but I have to get some things straight," he said. "You know the rumor mill gets pretty wild by the time it reaches this side of town. Is she really Kylee's sister?"

I took a deep breath and started to fill him in on what had happened with Ayla and me. Feeling bad that he was just finding out about it all

now.

"You could have called, Theo," he said after I told him about Ayla being taken by Dad's Beta.

"I know," I replied. "But I know you wanted to step back from pack duties for a while..."

"That didn't mean I wanted to step back from being your family," he interjected. "And it was never meant to be permanent, Theo. After we lost Lena, I just needed to focus on Beth and the kids and the business for a little while."

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“You don’t think I know that, Will?”

Lena was their oldest child from their first set of twins. She had passed away unexpectedly from an undetected birth defect three years ago. It hit everyone hard, but Will seemed to carry it the most. He stepped down from all his pack responsibilities and moved to the suburbs on the other side of the city. It hurt, but I did everything I could to respect his wishes.

“I was waiting on you, Will,” I said quietly.

Will huffed, rubbing his neck. “Yeah, I know,” he said. “I’m sorry. That wasn’t fair. I just feel bad that you didn’t think to call me for help. But I know that’s on me.”

“It’s not on anyone, man,” I said. “Shit happens. You’re here for me now.”

He nodded. “Tell me more about these attacks?”

“They’ve hit three border towns now,” I said. “This last one was the worst. It’s the first time they killed someone. The first two targeted property looking to do as much damage as possible. There were a few injuries from some fires and accidents and a few, warriors who scared them off. But this one was more violent.”

“So, they’re escalating.”

“Yeah,” I confirmed, “and so far, we have no idea why. That’s why I need you. We have prisoners now.”

“And two Alphas are better than one,” he concurred. “Why do you think they’re coming after us? Why now? We’ve never had problems with rogues like this.”

He was right about that. It wasn’t unusual for rogues to attack the

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Chapter 18: Theo

288 Vouchers

borders of the nearest packs. But my father had set up a buffer zone years ago to help keep them at bay. It was a stretch of land between our border and the human towns. Humans didn't have a problem with rogues as long as they didn't cause trouble, so the rogue would be able to survive well enough to keep animosity toward the pack at bay. Rogues could never thrive outside a pack, but if they could scrape by, they would have enough, to lose to think twice about attacking a large pack.

Apparently, that wasn't enough anymore.

"I don't know, "I told him. "The fact that they are organizing their attacks makes me think they have some kind of leader. Whoever that is may be vying for the chance to take some, or all, of our territory for themselves and establish a new pack."

"Let's hope it's that simple," Will said. "They clearly underestimate our strength."

"They could have heard about our transition in leadership," I said. "Putting off my Alpha ceremony could have them believing we've been weakened."

"Well, it will be my pleasure to show them otherwise, cousin," Will said, clapping my shoulder again.

If that was what was going on, I might be able to sway the situation in my favor. If rogues are questioning my hold over the pack, what will other Alphas think? I had plenty of allies who trusted my capabilities, but others may decide to challenge me.

It would put any rumors to rest if I could swiftly put down a rogue rebellion.