

The Luna's Choice (theo and ayla) by Kat Silver Chapter 171

Chapter 19: Theo

I called Ayla from a gas station in Bonnaville when we arrived. She sounded like she was feeling a lot better than when I left, but I was still in a foul mood. She may have felt better, but I could hear the stress in her voice. It mirrored my own. I couldn't believe how much I missed her.

Like, I physically missed her.

Kieran was so touchy I had to force him back and block him out. He was furious about the attacks as it was. He could feel the damage to our connection with our pack members and became more restless throughout the day. Now that we were so far away from Ayla and Dasha, he was practically a powder keg.

"It'll get easier to deal with," Will said as he got back to the car.

"That's hard to believe," I replied, getting into the driver's seat. "The local sheriff wants us to meet him at the station. He'll debrief us and take us to the captives."

"How many did they nab?"

"Three," I stated. "None of which are talking."

I pulled out of the gas station and headed toward the police station.

Like most in this area, the town was a small border town. It had a couple of grocery stores and gas stations, a small shopping complex, a town hall, a police station, and a factory. One large school building housed all three grade schools. There were a few neighborhoods, but much of the population lived on farmland outside town. The other two towns that were targeted were actually larger. That begged the question of whether the rogues were escalating or if this town was so poorly defended it was easier for them.

I pulled into the parking lot and parked near the front doors. We entered the building to find an older male half-asleep at the front desk. He jumped to attention when he noticed us. He was small and a bit frail-looking.

“Alpha,” he acknowledged respectfully. “We’re glad you have arrived so quickly. Give me just a moment to grab the sheriff.”

He scurried out from behind the desk and down the hall.

“I hope he isn’t a representation of the rest of the force out here,” Will said quietly. “My five-year-old could break him in two.”

“Let’s hope that’s why he’s on desk duty,” I replied.

He returned quickly, a much larger, sturdier male in tow.

“Alpha Theo, Alpha Will, we can’t thank you enough for coming down,” the new man said kindly. “I’m Sheriff Finley McCabe. We spoke over the phone.”

“Yes, I believe we met about six years ago as well,” I said, “when you won the appointment.”

“That’s correct,” he replied. “I wasn’t sure you would remember.”

“I certainly try to,” I stated.

“Well, gentlemen, if you will follow me to my office, we can get started.”

He led us to a simple but nice little office near the back of the building. Will and I took the seats in front of the desk while McCabe picked up two files and handed them to each of us.

“The rogues came from the east. They somehow managed to circle up from the south,” he began. “They started along the outer neighborhood, set a few fires, broke in and trashed a few houses. But they moved straight through. That wasn’t their main target and too many occupants were fighting back.”

“What was their target?” I asked, looking over the paperwork.

“I can’t say for sure, but I think they were heading for the town’s infrastructure — town hall, the water treatment plant, even here,” he stated.

“Same as the other two,” I replied.

“They’re trying to push the population out,” Will said. “Gain ground. for them to move in.”

"That's what it looks like," McCabe agreed. "With the help of the extra warriors you sent, we were able to prevent them from doing that kind of damage. But I lost two of my men in the process."

"We were told there was only one casualty," I said.

McCabe's expression was stormy. "My deputy died a few hours ago. A severe head and neck injury."

I closed my eyes with a deep sigh. "That explains my wolf's distress. I was hoping it wasn't another loss. I'm sorry, Sheriff."

McCabe simply gave a tight nod.

"That was nearly eighteen hours after the attack," Will stated questioningly. "Why wasn't he healing?"

The sheriff's jaw clenched and he opened the top drawer of his desk. He pulled out an evidence bag and dropped it on the wooden surface in front of us.

"Tranquilizer guns?" I asked incredulously.

"Filled with wolfsbane," McCabe told us.

"How the fuck did rogues get their hands on those?" I asked viciously.

"That's what I was hoping you would help me find out," McCabe said.

"Take me to them."

McCabe stood up and led us out of the office. Taking us through the halls, he swiped a key card that brought us to the other side of the building. As soon as he opened the door, I could hear someone yelling.

"We only have two interrogation rooms," McCabe told us. "The third we have in a cell. He's a loud fucker. It's a shame he only shouts bullshit threats."

"For now," I said quietly.

The closer we got, the more my stomach churned at the scent of the rogues. It was a foul, sour stench that left a rancid taste in your mouth. I wouldn't be

surprised if these were life-long rogues, born outside a pack and raised to hate them.

The sheriff banged on the cell bars as we approached. “Hey,” he yelled. “You’ve got a visitor.”

“I hope it’s that delicious little she-wolf from the front desk this morning,” a slimy voice said.

I stepped in front of the cell. Inside, chained to a chair, was a filthy male with tattered clothing. He looked at me from his prison, taking me in. There was no blocking Kieran out anymore. He charged forward, sending my Alpha’s aura bursting through the room.

The man’s eyes went wide and his breathing quickened. He pulled at his shackles. I smirked.

“It seems you like to talk,” I stated, holding my hand out for the key to the cell door. “That’s good. Because I would really like to hear what you have to say.”

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Chapter 20: Ayla

I woke up feeling surprisingly well, and I slept even better. Mina and I had spent the evening together, and before going to bed, she administered the next dose of wolfsbane. I didn’t go to sleep until I started to feel the effects. The dosage was higher, but I didn’t feel it as strongly as before, which was hopeful. I had expected the nausea to keep me up but there wasn’t much. So, once the lightheadedness became too frustrating, I went to bed.

The effects had completely worn off by the morning, and I took it as a good sign. I was able to talk Mina into giving me another dose before she left. But only if I promised to take a break for her mating ceremony over the weekend. I had no problem complying.

“That includes while we’re away on our honeymoon,” Mina insisted.

“I can live with that,” I said. “Besides, if it keeps going this well, we’ll pretty much be done by this weekend.”

"Well, let's hope so," she said. "How is Dasha doing with this whole thing?"

'Getting stronger,' Dasha answered.

I smiled. "She's doing amazing. I haven't even lost her once. After that first dose, she had a rough time yesterday, but she powered through like a champ."

"That's just so crazy," Mina said, obviously impressed.

"You know, this means you could do this, too," I said. "You have this immunity also."

She made a face. "Yeah, I considered it, but I think I'll pass." She grabbed her stuff and gave me a hug. "I've got to head out. But I'll see you at the fitting this afternoon, right?"

"Wouldn't miss it," I said.

Mina left and I grabbed my phone to call Theo. I had messaged him a few times the night before but only got one reply. So, when the call went to voicemail, my heart sank and the anxiety and dread set in again. I left him a quick message and hung up, my brow furrowed with concern.

I was thinking about calling him again when there was a knock on the door. I answered it to find Maggie waiting in the hall.

"Good morning, Maggie," I greeted her. "Is something wrong?"

She smiled. "Not at all," she replied. "Alpha wanted me to make sure you were sticking to your training while he was away. Hopefully, you'll overlook the fact that I'm not here at five in the morning."

"I'm not going to say anything," I chuckled. "Come on it. Give me just a moment to change, and we'll head over to the gym."

Maggie came in and waited in the living room while I threw on some workout clothes. I usually didn't take my phone with me, but then, I was always training with Theo. So, I grabbed it on my way out of the bedroom, checking the screen for any messages. There weren't any, so I tucked it in the waistband of my leggings.

"Ready to go?" I asked Maggie, trying to sound normal.

“Let’s go.

When we arrived, the gym was empty, and Maggie started us out with some weight training. Not long into the workout, I started to feel the wolfsbane kick in. I pushed through. The worst part was the dizziness, but it was easy to manage as long as we stuck with weights instead of combat practice.

The exercise actually helped burn the poison out of my system faster. By the time I returned to the apartment and showered, I didn’t even feel it anymore.

It was kind of incredible.

But the success of my experiment was the only thing that kept me from going crazy. Theo still hadn’t responded, and my concern had grown to panic. I ran my hand through my wet hair and was about to call him again when I heard Jimmy at the door.

“Alright, Luna, let’s get moving,” he called through the wood as he knocked loudly. “There’s pretty little co—ed that’s waiting to see me.”

I went to the door and yanked it open. “I’m not going today.”

His face fell. “What happened? What’s wrong?”

I opened my mouth but hesitated, wondering if I was just overreacting.

Jimmy grabbed my shoulders. “Ayla, what’s wrong?” he coaxed gently

“Theo isn’t answering my calls,” I said.

“Shit,” Jimmy breathed. “Okay, I’m sure everything is fine. Give me a minute and I’ll see what I can find out.”

He stepped back out into the hall and shut the door. He didn’t want me to hear something I shouldn’t. That didn’t help my nerves. I started to pace the living room. My thoughts were going to dark places and I wasn’t paying attention. My foot slammed into a side table,, stubbing my toe and knocking over a lamp. I didn’t catch my balance quick enough and toppled over, my knees hitting the hardwood and my hands going out in front of me, landing right in the broken glass.

A string of curses escaped my mouth as I rolled to my backside, checking my bloody palms. Luckily, only one seemed to have sustained any damage. I

dragged myself off the floor and grabbed a kitchen towel, still cursing when my phone rang.

I lunged for it. "Theo?"

"Ayla, what happened? Where are you? Are you okay?" he rushed in a panic.

"I'm fine," I replied. "Just clumsy today. But now you fucking call me back? I've been worried sick."

"I'm so sorry, baby," he said. "It was a really long night. I didn't want to wake you when we finally made it to the hotel room. I guess I passed out pretty hard. I'm really sorry."

I could hear the sadness and stress in his voice and my heart fell.

"No, it's okay," I assured him. "I'm sorry. I was just anxious."

"I know," he said. "I should have..."

"Just wake me up next time, okay?" I interrupted. "I'm not sleeping all that soundly without you here anyway. So, just call me whenever. Doesn't matter what time."

"Okay," he said softly, relief flooding through the phone. "What did you do to your hand? It stings like hell."

"I tripped over the damn end table," I told him, holding the towel to the cut. "Now we need a new lamp. But I'll be fine in a couple hours. How is it going down there?"

"Slow, at the moment," Theo said with frustration. "We broke one of the rogues but he didn't know anything helpful. We'll continue working on the other two today."

Jimmy came back in the door, hanging up his phone when he saw me on a call. He pointed to my phone and I nodded to confirm it was Theo on the line.

"How are you doing?" I asked Theo as Jimmy noticed the mess and came to check my hand.

"Going crazy without you," he replied, a touch of playfulness in his tone.

“I can always come down and help,” I told him. “I could practice my commands.”

“I don’t want you this close to the border,” Theo said sadly. “However, if we don’t make any leeway by tomorrow morning, I just might consider bringing them to you.”

“I could get on board with that.”

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Chapter 21: Theo

“Everything okay?” Will asked.

I had shot out of bed in a panic when Ayla’s pain woke me up. I ended up knocking the clock off the nightstand as I searched for my phone, so Will was up with me now.

I nodded. “Yeah, she’s fine,” I told him. “Just tripped.”

I ran my hands over my face. I should have tried to get some more sleep, but I was wide awake. So, that wasn’t going to happen. Especially since I could still feel the sting of Ayla’s injury. The pain wasn’t bad, but it was just another reminder that I wasn’t there with her.

I headed to the bathroom to take a cool shower. I might as well get back to the station to get this over with. When I got out, Will was on the phone with Beth and the kids. I had felt guilty about keeping my distance as long as I had, but that guilt lessened every time I heard him on the phone. He may have felt hurt, but when I thought about my complicated life and relationship, I couldn’t feel bad for not dragging him into it all. I just hoped that he would be able to go back to his life after this trip.

I got dressed and grabbed my wallet and keys as Will got off the phone.

“You get cleaned up. I’ll grab us something to eat,” I told him as I headed for the door.

There was a diner a few doors down from the hotel. I pulled up and went in to order something to go. I sat at the counter and grabbed a menu. A waitress

came over with a bright smile and was entirely too perky for me to handle today.

“Hey, there,” she greeted me. “My name is Maddi. What can I get for you today?”

I gave her the food order, letting her know it was to go.

“Aw, that’s too bad,” she said. “You sure you don’t want this for here? I would love the company.”

“No, I would like this to go, please,” I said, trying to remain polite. “But you can bring me a cup of coffee while I wait.”

“Will do.”

She walked off, and I pulled my phone out, texting Ayla. I knew she was probably in class by now, so it was a pleasant surprise when she messaged me back right away. I messaged her back and our conversation continued. She told me about something else she discovered during her research into her family. Even through text, I could feel her excitement.

“So, I don’t think I’ve ever seen you here before,” the waitress said as she leaned on the counter in front of me. “Are you passing through or sticking around?”

“Passing,” I grunted, not really interested in whatever small talk she was trying to make. There were other customers she could annoy

“You know, I’d be happy to show you a good time while you’re here,” she said, her finger trailing along the back of my hand. “Especially if you’re here for pleasure.”

A growl rumbled in my chest. I snapped my hand away, appalled that she would dare touch me.

“Oh, don’t be like that,” Maddi cooed.

“I’m spoken for.” I ground out, pointing to the mark I knew was plenty visible for her to see.

“Is she here?” Her hand rubbed along my forearm.

I stood up abruptly. My fists clenched as my aura began to fill the room.

“Maddi,” a familiar voice called sternly behind me. I turned to see Sheriff McCabe approaching. “Get back to work. Go check the Alpha’s order.”

Maddi’s eyes went wide, looking back at me. She shrank back, scurrying into the kitchen without another word. McCabe dropped into the stool beside me.

“My apologies, Alpha,” he said. “I hope you can forgive our town floozy. She has more libido than she does brains.”

“Sheriff,” I acknowledged. “I’ll let it go this time. If only because this town has been through enough. But she’s lucky my mate isn’t here.”

The sheriff chuckled. “Maybe Maddi would finally learn her lesson if she was. Crossing our Luna may not be the stupidest thing she’s done. but I would guess it would have the worst consequence.”

Maddi had come out carrying my order and a to-go cup of coffee. She shot McCabe a dirty look and aggressively set the paper cup in front of him. She gave me a tight smile as she set the bag on the counter.

“On the house, Alpha,” McCabe said. Maddi started to protest but was cut off. “It’s the least she can do for the disrespect.”

“Of course,” she replied shortly, escaping quickly back to the kitchen.

McCabe picked up his coffee and turned to me. “You heading to the station. Alpha?”

I nodded. “I have to swing by the hotel to pick up Will.”

“I’ll see you there,” he said as he walked out with me. “And again, sorry about Maddi. She likes attention. It’s gotten her in trouble more than once.”

“I don’t care what she does with a willing participant.” I said, “but she needs to learn to respect the mate bond. She may not understand it, but she should know better than to interfere with something that sacred.” I shook my head, reminding myself that hadn’t stopped me. “Hopefully she’ll get it when she finds her mate.”

McCabe’s eyes filled with sadness, and he looked back toward the diner.

“No, unfortunately, that wasn’t even enough for her,” he replied quietly

I sighed heavily. “Maddi’s your mate?”

“Was,” he said strongly, straightening his shoulders. “We severed that bond a long time ago.”

“I’m sorry, man,” I said.

He nodded. “I’ll see you at the station.”

I watched McCabe get into his squad car and pull out. I glanced back into the diner. Maddi was watching McCabe drive off. The same dirty look on her face.

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Chapter 22: Theo

I grabbed Will and we ate quickly on our way to the sheriff’s office. We went straight to the cells where McCabe was waiting for us. The first rogue we had questioned all night was still tied to the chair, slumped over limply. We had kept him thoroughly sedated after I broke him. It was a mercy at this point. But we still had the other two.

The sheriff was waiting outside one of the rooms.

“We put them together for a few hours after you left this morning,” McCabe said as we approached. “This one seemed to be keeping the other in line.”

“Are you thinking he may know more than the other?” Will asked.

“I think it’s worth starting with him,” McCabe replied.

“Alright,” I agreed. “Let’s get started.”

As McCabe opened the door, I braced myself against the sour smell of rogue that wafted out. The male’s head shot up, and he tensed up as we walked in. I could see he hadn’t slept since he had been here. I wasn’t sure how long it had been since he had bathed. Either way, the room was unpleasant. But his eyes held an intelligence that led me to agree with McCabe’s assessment.

I sat in the chair in front of him, and we took each other in for a few moments.

“What’s your name?” I finally asked.

He didn’t respond.

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“You know how this is going to go,” I stated. “The more you fight, the harder this will be.”

Still no response.

“Tell me why you attacked our pack,” I commanded.

His jaw tightened, and his body tensed as he fought the command, but it didn’t seem too difficult for him to handle. He was stronger than the last one. I needed a different approach, or this would end up taking all day. And I really didn’t want that.

“Sheriff, were you able to figure out exactly where the rogues came from?” I asked.

“We believe so,” McCabe replied. “We followed their trail all the way to our border and then a mile past our lands. We’ve also got a human contact who is sending us information on rogue activity in the buffer zone. He mentioned something about tent cities popping up over the past month. It supports the movements we’ve been tracking as well.”

“So they are organizing,” I said.

The rogue scoffed.

“It appears that way,” McCabe said. “For the past twenty years, they’ve rarely seen more than two or three together at a time. And even then, they never stick together long. Now, they are grouping more and more.”

Rogues had a general aversion to each other. The nature of their existence made it nearly impossible to trust one another, so relations were often tense at the best of times. They would occasionally group together in certain areas

or at certain times of the year for safety or extra resources. But would go their separate ways before things got aggressive.

21.97%

10:52

“Well, someone has to be behind their sudden ability to work

together,” I said. I pushed out a command toward the male in front of me. It was subtle, but there was still power to it.

“What makes you think it’s sudden?” he blurted out.

“We would know if rogues were congregating so close to our borders for so long,” McCabe insisted.

The rogue realized he had let my command affect him, but not before a smug look crossed his face.

“Unless they weren’t at our border,” I said. The rogue’s eyes started darting between us. “Something had to have brought so many rogues to this location. I’m guessing most of them came from the same area. Am I correct?”

His face turned red as he fought against the stronger command.

“Where did you come from?” I commanded strongly.

“Ss... Sssablemane... border...” he grunted out with his effort to stop himself.

“And when did you start focusing on Sablemane?” I commanded as I stood, leaning over the table. Kieran was pacing anxiously and angrily.

“Thr... three months ago.”

‘Mate,’ Kieran growled, rushing forward.

It’s what I feared as well. There would be only one way to know for sure. I pushed every ounce of power and authority I had forward. I even felt Will and Sheriff McCabe step away from the intensity.

“Are you looking for the Blessed One?”

47.95%

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10:52

Chapter 22: Theo

288 | Vouchers

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10:52

Chapter 22: Theo

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The rogue's mouth fell open but nothing came

His entire body

tensed so hard that his veins began to bulge under h

his skin as his face

turned red. He started to shake and his nose started to bleed. He wasn't

the one fighting the com.

He couldn't answer.

Someone had put him under the same command Randy had been. If I

didn't relent and pull back the

Command.

this bastard would die a slow

and painful death. The rage that they were attacking my territory –

attacking my people

to get to Ayla made me want to watch every

second of it.

“Theo,” Will called. “What the hell is going on?”

1

“They’re after Ayla,” I said through gritted teeth. “He can’t answer the question, but I don’t need him to.”

“Pull back the command, Theo,” Will insisted.

I hadn’t told him everything about Ayla and who exactly she was. He didn’t understand. He didn’t know how dangerous it

was to let this bastard live. My hands itched to wrap around his throat. Kieran was on the edge, pushing me to finish him off and send him back to the other rogues in pieces.

‘Send a message,’ he snarled in my head.

“Theo,” Will yelled. He grabbed my arm and yanked me back, breaking my eye contact with the rogue. “Pull it back. We need more information.”

Kieran growled aggressively through me, sitting so close to the surface that I thought he would take over the shift.

“Kieran, stand down,” Will said forcefully.

70.79%

10:52

I pushed him back. Working to settle my breathing as I tried to control my anger. But the smell of the rogue was too much. Kieran’s instinct to kill him was still too strong. I pushed past my cousin and McCabe, getting out of the small room to clear my head.

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Chapter 23: Theo

I stormed through the station and outside, needing the fresh air to sober me up. I forced my hands through my hair, keeping Kieran at bay as best I could. I was trying to figure out how the Waar Pak had managed to get rogues to organize against multiple packs when Will came outside.

“What the hell is going on, Theo?” he asked urgently. “Why would they be after Ayla?”

I sighed and walked over to a bench, falling onto it.

“I didn’t tell you everything about Ayla,” I admitted.

“Okay,” Will replied slowly and gently. “Are you going to tell me now?”

I looked around the area. We seemed to be alone. But I also had to consider bringing McCabe in on this information. These attacks were likely to continue, and he may need to understand the motives.

“Yeah, but we need McCabe first,” I said.

Will nodded but looked a little hurt.

“It wasn’t about trust, Will,” I insisted. “It was because there was already so much else to tell you. And I didn’t want to put this mess on you, too.”

“She’s my Luna, too,” Will said sternly. “And whether I’ve met her or not, she’s family. Stop trying to protect me, Theo. If anything, that’s supposed to be my job. Now, how bad is this mess?”

“It’s bad,” I said.

“Okay, then let’s get McCabe and figure out how the hell to clean it up,” he stated, returning to the station.

I stood to follow, pulling my phone out of my pocket. I sent Ayla a message checking on her. The knot in my stomach relaxed some when she quickly sent me a picture of her and Mina at their dress fitting. She said Maggie was with them as well. She didn’t think Jimmy would appreciate being dragged along, and it was a good girl–bonding activity. I smiled a little, feeling less anxious about her safety but still missing her like crazy.

I met Will and McCabe inside and we went to his office. I filled them in on how I knew what was going on and that the Waar Pak were coming after Ayla.

"The first thing I want to do is set up a special task force along the border," I said. "We'll need to reach out to all the border towns to get that organized. Do you think that's something you can handle, Sheriff?"

"If you can send the men, I can make that happen," McCabe replied confidently.

"That covers our southern border," Will stated. "What about the east and west? They may try to travel through our neighbors' territories."

I nodded. "I'll have to reach out to them," I said. "The Wildtail Pack shouldn't be too hard. A few members will be here this weekend for Beta Briggs' mating ceremony. His mate, Mina, grew up and has family there."

"And how are you going to handle Sablemane?" Will asked nervously.

I had told him about my recent history with Kingston. He understood the issues I had with the Sablemane Alpha, but this was pack business. Ensuring he's prepared to defend his territory would protect our borders by default.

"I'll call Kingston," I replied. "But I'll see if Randy can also look into their prior movements. I'm not sure how forthcoming Kingston will be with me regarding any other information he may have."

I thought about contacting Pierce instead. He seemed to be the one actually running that pack lately. However, I knew that was the case because Kingston had been obsessed with tracking down the Waar Pak members. So he would better know what to do with this information.

"What are we going to do with the prisoners?" McCabe asked.

"I'll take care of the one in the cell," I told him. "I'll let you know what I decide to do with the other two. But I've got some phone calls to make. Will, can you help the sheriff get a plan in place for the task force?"

"Can do," he replied.

I left the office and went to sit in my car. I called Briggs first and gave him an update on what was happening. He would get another group of warriors on their way down by the end of the day.

“Did you want me to call Beta Pierce?” Briggs asked when I told him the other packs would need to be informed.

“No,” I said, “I’m going to call Kingston.”

There was a tense silence on the line before he replied. “Okay.”

“And hey,” I stated tentatively, “don’t say anything to Ayla yet. I’d rather this come from me. If I can get out of here today, I’ll tell her when I get home. If not, I’ll call her tonight.”

“I can handle that,” Briggs agreed.

“Thanks,” I said. “I’ll keep you updated.”

I hung up and dialed the next number.

“Alpha Theo,” Randy answered.

“Can you talk?” I asked, making sure he was in a safe location.

I heard movement before he replied. “I can now. What’s up?”

“The Waar Pak is organizing rogue attacks on my pack,” I told him. “They started out at the Sablemand border. I have to contact Kingston to let him know they may be coming back to his lands once we get our border fortified. I have a feeling he will know more about the situation than he’s going to tell me. I wanted to see if this was something you could look into.”

Randy chuckled. “I’m already here,” he replied. “Should I get him?”

I sighed. “Yeah, might as well.”

It took a few minutes until I heard Randy giving Kingston the information I gave him. There was a muffled back and forth before he came back to the call.

“You’re on speaker,” he said.

“Were you able to get a name from the rogue?” Kingston asked.

“No, we can’t get anything from him regarding their plan without Ayla.”

“Is it possible to make that happen?” Randy asked.

“Yeah, it might take a day or two to get them transferred, but it’s doable,” I replied.

“Give me a week to get my border situated and I’ll come to you,” Kingston said.

“That won’t be necessary,” I retorted. “Randy...”

“If you want to be able to do anything with the information I have, it is,” Kingston insisted. “Just keep the rogues alive until I get there, Theo.”

“Okay,” Randy rushed in as my temper began to rise, “and you’re off speaker. I’ll play the mediator, Alpha. Keep me in the loop and I’ll do the same.”

“Thanks, Randy,” I said sincerely. “Now, just figure out how to keep him the hell away from my mate.”

The Luna’s Choice (theo and ayla) by Kat Silver Chapter 176

Chapter 24: Ayla

The dress fitting went wonderfully. Mina looked stunning and was going to be breathtaking at her ceremony. We all teared up more than once. We went out to dinner after, where I toasted my amazing cousin Mina, Annabelle, Maggie, and I went back to my apartment after dinner for a few drinks. We invited Luna Grace to join us, but she regretfully declined so she could get back to Alpha Torin.

We were sharing stories when Theo called. I grabbed my phone and rushed to the bedroom.

“Hey, babe. How is everything going?” I answered eagerly.

“Hey yourself,” he replied. I could hear the smile in his voice. “Things are... complicated. We’ve hit a bit of a roadblock.”

“Oh no,” I said worriedly.

“It’s okay,” Theo assured me. “It actually means I’m coming home tonight.”

“Really?” I asked excitedly.

“Yeah, but we have to transfer two of the rogues up there,” he said seriously. “It’s a long story and I’ll tell you when I get back. But I’m just getting the prisoner transfer secured, and then we’re going to head out.”

I glanced at the clock.

“It’s already getting pretty late, Theo,” I replied. “Are you sure you’re going to be okay to make the drive? I’d rather you got some sleep and left in the morning.”

“I wouldn’t,” I teased. “I’m not sleeping any better than you are, baby. Besides, Will and I are trading off. I’ll be fine. I promise.”

“You better be,” I warned. “I’m ready for you to be home, but I need it to be in one piece.”

“I know, babe,” he chuckled. “I know. But let me get this finished up so we can be done. I’ll let you know when we’re on the road. I love you.”

“Love you, too,” I said.

I hung up the phone and was instantly in a better mood. I rejoined the group, falling onto the couch.

“And here’s the luckiest female in the pack,” Annabelle said. “How is our super sexy Alpha?”

“Annabelle,” I exclaimed. “What would Matthew think?” I teased.

“Exactly what he already knows,” she said. “That I have fantasized about our Alpha whenever I’m mad at him.”

“Annabelle,” I said again as the others laughed.

“Don’t worry,” she continued. “I don’t do it anymore. It lost its appeal when I saw how crazy he was about my best friend.”

My face turned red as I sipped my wine.

“Hey, that doesn’t mean we’re not all still wondering,” Mina said, shifting on the couch to face me. “How is he?”

“Oh, my goddess,” I groaned as I covered my face.

“Ayla, sweetie,” Mina said, “I love you, and I realize you aren’t used to this kind of girl talk, but... it’s time to spill.”

“Luna, don’t let them pressure you,” Maggie said sweetly. “But if you want to share... I don’t think anyone here is going to stop you.”

We all laughed.

“Fine,” I said, setting my wine glass on the coffee table. “He’s fantastic.”

I didn’t know a person could make the sounds that came out of their mouths. They giggled and teased and continued to make inappropriate comments about our sex lives.

“What about you, Maggie?” Annabelle asked. “Anyone you’ve been passing the time with?”

Maggie hesitated.

“You don’t have to tell us.” I insisted. “Unlike these two. I don’t mind if you want to keep your private life private.”

“It’s not that,” she said casually. “It’s just kind of... well... I’ve been seeing one of my squad members. We’re not supposed to date within the group.”

“Girl, no one here is going to rat you out,” Mina said. “We promise.”

Maggie looked content. I really enjoyed her company. I was grateful to Theo for assigning her to protect me. It was nice growing my circle of friends.

A twinge tugged at my chest as I thought about Emma. I missed her. We still talked once or twice a week, but it wasn’t the same. We kept saying we would plan a trip to see each other. However, we both knew how difficult that would be with the way things were between Kingston and Theo. I knew she would always be welcome here. That wasn’t a concern at all. But whether Kingston would give her a hard time or try to put her in a position she didn’t want to be

in was a concern for both of us. So, for now, I just had to be content with our phone calls.

“So, when is our dashing Alpha going to return?” Mina asked, pulling me out of my thoughts.

“He actually should be on his way home any minute,” I said with a smile.

“I will give you this,” Annabelle said, “you’ve been handling his absence better than I did the first time Matthew and I were separated after marking each other.”

“Oh. don’t be fooled,” I interjected, “I’ve been falling apart. It feels like I’m going crazy sometimes with how much I miss him. I never thought I’d need someone this much.”

“It’s the bond.” Annabelle said with a shrug. “It will level out over time. But the first year or two is pretty intense. Especially when you get far enough apart. You know that feeling of emptiness when you can’t feel them or sense them anymore?”

My brow furrowed. “No,” I said. “I guess Theo wasn’t so far away for that. We’ve still been able to sense each other.”

“You said he went to Bonnerville, right?” Annabelle asked, sitting up straighter.

“Yeah.” I nodded.

“That’s almost four hundred miles, Ayla,” she said. “I lose my connection to Matty if he goes farther than a few hours.”

“That’s what I’ve heard is normal, too,” Maggie said curiously.

“Maybe you just thought you felt him because you missed him so much,” Annabelle tried to explain.

“Maybe, but he was able to feel when I cut my hand,” I told them.

“Damn, girl,” Annabelle breathed.

“They’ve always had a strong connection,” Mina pointed out. “Their bond has never exactly been normal. Theo could feel Ayla even when Harry had taken her.”

“He did?” I asked.

“Yeah.” Mina confirmed. “He knew you were alive and he could tell you were tied up.”

“Wait a minute,” Annabelle interjected, “wasn’t that before they marked each other?”

“Yep,” Mina said.

“Shit,” she replied. “I guess you two really were meant to be together.”

“Were you doubting it?” I teased

“Absolutely not,” Annabelle replied with a bright smile.

The Luna’s Choice (theo and ayla) by Kat Silver Chapter 177

Chapter 25: Ayla

My friends left a little while later, but I held Mina back. A part of our conversation about Theo’s and my bond was bothering me.

“Mina, why do you think Theo never felt the wolfsbane in my system?” I asked. “Not even when I was with Harry, and it was still affecting me so strongly.”

Mina thought for a few moments. Her brow furrowed as she considered the possibilities.

“Maybe because you’re immune, the bond doesn’t recognize it as a real danger,” she said. “No one really knows how to explain the mate bond and how we are connected the way we are. But the communication is inherent between two wolves. Maybe it just knew that wasn’t the bad part.”

“Yeah, I suppose that would make sense.”

“Look, try not to think about it too much, okay?” she said, grabbing my hands. “What you and Theo have is remarkable. That’s all that matters.”

“I know.” I smiled at her. “The same goes for you and Briggs, you know. Even without the weirdness Theo and I experienced.”

“Oh, I know,” she agreed with a bright smile. “I wouldn’t want anything else.”

I pulled her into a strong hug. “Good,” I said as I held her. “Because you deserve every bit of happiness.” I let her go. “Now, go and get some rest. We only have one more day before the big day.”

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“I love you, Ayla,” she told me.

“I love you, too.”

When everyone left, I changed into my pajamas and attempted to sleep. I had taken the next dose of wolfsbane and hoped it would distract me from anticipation. However, I barely felt the effects. So, an hour later, I was still wide awake, staring at the ceiling. I grabbed my phone but hesitated to text Theo. If he was driving, I didn’t want him distracted. If he wasn’t, he needed to be sleeping.

As if he sensed my thoughts, his name flashed across my phone screen.

“Hey, everything okay?” I answered.

Theo chuckled. “I was about to ask you that,” he replied. “Can’t sleep?”

“No, I miss you,” I told him. “I’m too excited for you to be home.”

“Me, too.”

“Are you driving? If not, you should be sleeping,” I pointed out.

“I’m driving,” he said. “Will is passed out. He’ll take over in a couple hours. Want to keep me company?”

“Yeah,” I replied with a wide smile.

I wasn't sure how long we talked or when I fell asleep. But I woke up with my phone on the pillow next to me. I grabbed it, wincing as the bright light blinded me, and my eyes adjusted. The first thing I saw was a message from Theo letting me know Will was taking over and he would be home in three to four hours. I checked the time.

The message was sent just over four hours ago.

Concern spiked in my chest, and I was calling Theo's phone when I

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heard the apartment door open. I shot out of bed and out of the room. I paused as I watched Theo enter, dropping his bag to the floor. Then, I practically launched myself at him. Crossing the apartment in a fraction of a second and throwing myself against him. Arms around his neck. Legs around his waist. Lips slamming into his.

Theo didn't skip a beat. His arms wrapped around me, holding me tightly against him. His fingers dug into my hair as he kissed me passionately. My back hit the wall and Theo's hands moved down my body. My core burned with desire. I groaned as he slipped under my nightgown to cup my ass, his fingers trailing through my slick folds.

"Goddess, I fucking missed you, baby," he rasped.

He ground his hips against me. Bracing myself against the wall, my hands slipped between us, undoing his jeans and pulling out his hard length. Lifting myself by his shoulders, I positioned him at my

entrance.

"I need you, Theo," I whined, sliding down on him smoothly. Moaning as he filled me.

"Fuck, Ayla.

He gripped my hips, his fingers digging into my flesh, sending intense sparks of electricity through me. He began to move. Savoring the feeling of having me wrapped around him again. But urgency soon took over and his pace

became frantic. Matching the excitement and pleasure bubbling through my abdomen.

“Yes,” I cried. “Fuck, Theo, yes.”

He pulled my arms above my head. Pinning them there with one hand while the other arm wrapped around my hips. Switching the angle to pound deeper into me. He was unrelenting. Our cries grew louder and more intense and we both approached our climax.

4

“I love you,” he forced out.

“Theo,” I cried.

We exploded together. Coming apart as we accepted everything the other was giving. I hung limply from his shoulders, my face tucked into his neck as I worked to steady my breathing. Theo repositioned his arms, holding me more securely as he carried me toward our bedroom.

He pulled away long enough to strip out of his clothes before climbing in next to me. He tugged me to him, kissing me gently before looking down into my eyes.

“Hi.” he said with a broad smile.

“Hi.” I giggled.

He rested his forehead against mine. “I can’t tell you how good it feels to be home with you.”

“Probably as good as it feels to have you home,” I replied. “What did you find out while you were gone?”

Theo sighed. “Enough,” he said. “I’ll tell you everything, but right now, I think we both need some sleep.”

I could tell he was exhausted. And my rather vigorous greeting didn’t help the matter. Truthfully, I was feeling the lack of sleep sink in as well. My own body was sated but tired. So, I snuggled closer to my mate, draping my arm over his waist as I closed my eyes and breathed him in.

“I think that sounds fantastic.”

The Luna’s Choice (theo and ayla) by Kat Silver Chapter 178

Chapter 26: Theo

Ayla and I spent the morning together, and I filled her in on what happened in Bonnaville. As I expected, she wasn’t happy about the situation. She wanted to question the rogues as soon as they arrived. later that evening, but I convinced her to wait. They were locked securely away in the cellar. For now, I wanted her to focus on Mina and the ceremony. This was supposed to be a happy, exciting time for all of us. I didn’t want the Waar Pak issue getting in the way of that any more than it already had.

Besides, we all needed a break from it for a few days.

Ayla and I hadn’t had many normal experiences in our relationship, and I was determined to make that happen that weekend. So, when we finally dragged ourselves out of bed, I sent her off with Mina, Annabelle, and my mother for an afternoon at the spa. I got Mom’s list of to–do items left to tackle before the big day and dragged Briggs and Jimmy to help knock them out.

My dad joined us for dinner, and we ended up in the packhouse rec room shooting a few games of pool with a few beers. I had invited Will, but he needed time at home to be there early the next day. It was after nightfall when my phone rang. It was McCabe letting me know they had arrived with the rogues. I told him where to go and that I’d meet them there.

“The transfer here?” Briggs asked after finishing a combo pocket shot, putting him ahead of me.

I nodded. “Jimmy, you take over for me,” I said, tossing him my pool queue. “Dad, you want to come give me a hand?”

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“Do you have to ask?” he said with a wry smile.

“We can all come and help out,” Briggs said.

“Nah, this should be quick and easy,” I said. “Won’t take long and I’ll be right back to kick your ass in the next round.”

“That’s a bet,” Briggs said after us.

Dad and I headed down to one of the back exits. I had kept him informed of everything that was going on. He was still the Alpha, after all. It was important for everyone that he be involved in certain things. And meeting one of our pack sheriffs for a rogue prisoner transfer was one of those things. Besides, I still needed his advice from time to time.

“Are they going to the garage?” Dad asked as we left the building.

“Yeah, it’s the closest spot to the utility shed without having them out in the open,” I told him. “Harmon will be here this weekend, and we’ll get started on the plans for better access to the cellar.”

“Good,” Dad said. “This in and out is getting suspicious.

We entered the large garage from a side door. This garage, in particular, was designated for pack–assigned vehicles. It was mostly SUVs and trucks, a few town cars for important visitors. So, the large black van with black–out windows stood out.

Sheriff McCabe was already outside the vehicle, his arms crossed over his chest. Three warriors I had arranged to travel down to get them stood at the back doors patiently.

“Sheriff McCabe,” I said, shaking his hand. “I believe you know my father.”

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“Alpha Torin. Alpha Theo,” he greeted both of us.

“I hope there weren’t any problems getting here,” I said.

“Nothing out of the usual,” he said. “But we did have to sedate them a couple hours ago. They started making a lot of noise at a gas station.”

“Can they walk?” I asked.

He nodded. “They’re not completely out, but it should make getting them wherever you need easy enough.”

“Good,” I replied, moving to the back doors and opening them up.

Their scent hit me, now mixed with days–old sweat and filth. The one we hadn’t questioned yet was lying across the floor while the other was hunched over.

“Let’s get them inside,” my father said next to me. “We don’t want this stench attracting attention.”

The warriors climbed in and dragged the two forms from the van. I signaled for them to follow me, and we led them the short distance to the utility shed. We filed into the tight space, and I entered the code to open the hatch. I had made sure the door to the investigation room was closed so that nothing could be seen. I led them down the corridor to the cells, directing them where they needed to be put.

“You three stand guard,” I told the men. “I’ll send your relief down shortly.”

“We’re not going to question them more now that we’re here?” McCabe asked as we started to make our way back out.

I shook my head. “We need Ayla for that,” I explained. “And I’m working really hard to give her a day or two without having to deal

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with this Waar Pak mess. We could all use time celebrating something good. Speaking of, we would be happy if you could stay, McCabe.”

We headed back up the stairs out of the cellar.

“I know I would enjoy a more thorough briefing of how things have been in your area,” Dad told him. “Before the attack, that is.”

“I would have to check in to see,” McCabe said. “But we have Panser’s sheriff in town with the new task force. If he says he can handle things another day, I’d be honored.”

“Good.” I said, clapping him on the back. “Now, let’s get back to the party. I have a pool game to win.”

The Luna’s Choice (theo and ayla) by Kat Silver Chapter 179

Chapter 27: Theo

Ayla and I weren’t ready to spend another night apart yet, so while the others remained in their groups the rest of the night(except for my father), I slept in my own bed with my mate. We woke up with some extra time, and I eagerly spent it making love to Ayla before she was called away. While any intimate moment we managed to share these days was enough for me, I was eager to get to a point when I could take my time with her.

The rest of the day was hectic but went by smoothly. Once we were all dressed and ready to go, I went to the ladies’ suit to pick up Ayla. We would go to the banquet hall before everyone to start greeting the attendants. There were a few standard ways to hold a mating ceremony. The more traditional practice entailed the ceremony taking place at the beginning of the evening, followed by a reception of the couple’s choosing. In those cases, the mating couple would have chosen to mark each other in front of their friends and family.

Mina and Briggs opted for the more private option. We would be starting with a reception gathering in the banquet hall first. The night will close out with the promise ritual. They will leave directly after, where they will mark each other in private.

After my experience marking Ayla, I encouraged their choice. Ayla and my public mating ceremony will be a little different from either option since we are doing it on the solstice. However, we will be marking each other again in front of most of the pack. While I was -greatly looking forward to sharing that with my pack, I still wouldn’t

change our original mating for anything.

As I thought about that night, Ayla opened the door to meet me. My breath caught as my eyes fell on her.

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She looked stunning in a flowy, pale green dress. Her hair had been pulled up with wispy curls framing her face. Suddenly, it was going to be a lot harder to make it through this evening.

She smiled as she looked me up and down. "I always knew you'd clean up nicely," she teased, taking my arm as she kissed my cheek.

I swung her around and pulled her against me, leaning in to graze my lips along her jawline.

"And here I was, wondering how the hell I was going to make it through the evening without tearing this dress off of you," I said lowly.

"Okay, you two, knock it off," my mother's voice pulled us out of our bubble. "Get moving. People have already started to arrive."

Ayla laughed as she dragged me down the corridor to the elevator, where I may or may not have let my hands roam the whole way down. We were smiling and laughing playfully as we approached the banquet hall. Suddenly, Ayla stiffened and her smile faltered slightly, replaced by one that no longer reached her eyes. I looked to see what had caused the change and my own mood dropped.

Our first guests to arrive were none other than Malcolm and Julia Neale.

I sighed. Looping Ayla's arm in mine, I proceeded toward the entrance to greet our guests.

"Malcolm, Julia," I acknowledged. "We were expecting to see you two here this evening."

"We couldn't miss the mating ceremony of our favorite Beta, now

could we?" Julia cooed annoyingly, looking as cheap as ever in a tacky gold dress.

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“We were passing through on business anyway,” Malcolm said. “What better way to spend the evening than such a joyous occasion? And I must say, Luna Ayla, you are looking absolutely magnificent this evening.”

“Thank you, Mr. Neale,” Ayla replied tightly.

Luckily, the next group of attendees was approaching us.

“Well, I hope you two enjoy yourselves,” I said diplomatically, gesturing them towards the hall. “Please, help yourselves.”

The two continued past us and we gave each other a look.

‘I didn’t know they had been invited. Ayla commented through the mind-link.

‘I honestly don’t think they were,’ I replied. ‘I’ll have Jimmy and some of the others babysit them to keep them away for the evening.’

We continued to greet everyone as they came in, eventually moving in to announce Briggs and Mina’s entrance. We made our way to the platform at the head of the room as my mother linked me to say they were waiting outside. I quieted the room.

“I want to welcome everyone and say how excited and happy I am to be up here tonight,” I spoke to the crowd. “I couldn’t ask for a better Beta. Knowing that mine has ended up with his perfect mate brings me joy and comfort. No two people deserve it more. And I’m happy to be gaining a new friend and family member.” I squeezed Ayla’s waist. “So, I’m proud to introduce Beta Briggs and his mate, Mina.”

The opposite doors opened and Briggs and Mina entered. I tugged Ayla closer as I watched how happy they looked. Mina looked beautiful and Briggs was mesmerized. I kissed Ayla on the temple and helped her off the platform. The band went to the stage and the party

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got underway.

Ayla and I were making our way toward the spot where some of our group of friends were congregating. I was stopped in my tracks as a gray head of hair jumped in front of me.

"I'm sorry I'm late, Alpha," Harmon said as he shook my hand. "My flight was delayed."

"Harmon, no worries," I said, jovially returning his handshake. "I'm just glad you could make it."

I saw a flash of gold coming my way, and I suddenly realized why Malcolm and Julia showed up tonight.

The Luna's Choice (theo and ayla) by Kat Silver Chapter 180

Chapter 28: Theo

"Oh, dear goddess," Harmon muttered under his breath. I followed his gaze and realized he noticed the same thing I had. "What are the Neales doing here?"

"I have a feeling it's to ambush you," I replied.

"Ayla, my lovely," my mother said as she pushed through the crowd. "Please forgive me, but I need to steal you away from Theo for a moment. Some friends are dying to meet you."

'Julia is coming this way,' I linked Ayla. 'Don't you dare leave me alone with that woman.'

Before either of us could protest, Mom had Ayla's arm, pulling her across the room. I stifled a frustrated huff.

"Harmon, my good man," Malcolm's voice approached. "It's good to finally see you again."

“Mr. Neale, Ms. Neale,” Harmon greeted through gritted teeth. “I wasn’t expecting to see you here this evening. I didn’t think you were particularly close with Beta Briggs.”

“What better time to remedy that?” Malcolm said coolly. “But since you’re here, I have some questions about the Arrowclaw contract.”

“With all due respect, Malcolm,” I interrupted, “this is a celebration. None of our guests are here to do business tonight. Neither should you be.”

“Oh, come now, Alpha,” Julia said, stepping in close to me. “This will only take a few minutes. But if all this work talk isn’t to your liking, why don’t you take me to the bar and get me a drink? Malcolm and Harmon can handle this.”

“I don’t thi...”

“It would be easier to get the clarifications now,” Malcolm said with a warning tone, “then wait for our uncle to contact you about them.”

I felt my temper rise at his dimly veiled threat. Part of the reason our orders had been decreasing was because we were trying to get out of our contract with the company. His uncle was well- established in the industry and could make business difficult if we broke the agreement on bad terms. Our green practices gave us a legitimate reason to decrease our business with them. Eventually making us not worth his time. But if Malcolm started making waves, we would be stuck in the deal for another five years, and his uncle could put extra pressure on my company.

“Alpha, I can handle this,” Harmon jumped in, trying to keep me calm as he began guiding Malcolm away from me. “Why don’t you go rejoin our beautiful Luna?”

“Oh, that can wait,” Julia said, looping her arm in mine and pushing me toward the bar. “First, you can get me that drink we mentioned.”

“You mentioned,” I clarified, removing her arm from mine.

“Alpha, you really aren’t any fun now that you have a mate,” she pouted, grabbing a glass of champagne from a tray.

“How is that?” I asked. “Seeing as I’ve never shown any interest in having ‘fun’ with you before? And I can guarantee you, I would always have infinitely more fun with my mate than with you.”

Anger flashed across her face. “You know, I did a little digging recently.” She stepped closer. “You may think your mate is someone special, but she’s nothing more than a low-bred country bumpkin with nothing to show for her life.”

“Ms. Neale” – Ayla suddenly appeared, forcing her way between us – “as lovely as it has been having you, I think it’s time you and your brother left. You do have a long trip home, after all.”

Ayla’s energy had pushed Julia back a few steps, but she was pressed against my chest. Holding me in place so I didn’t rip Julia’s tongue out.

“Everything okay, Alpha?” Jimmy asked as he approached with the rest of our friends.

“Gamma Jimmy, please have security escort Mr. and Ms. Neale out of the party,” I told him.

Julia looked appalled. “If you think my uncle will let you get away with insulting me over this tramp...”

She threw her drink at Ayla. Growls and snarls echoed loudly as everyone in earshot turned on her. The room got quiet as hands gripped my shoulders to keep me from flying at Julia. Ayla jumped into action.

“Please, everyone,” she addressed the crowd with a smile, “don’t mind us. It was an accident. Just the result of a spirited conversation. Please, go back to celebrating.”

She waved to the band, and they immediately started playing, switching to an upbeat song. When most of the room’s attention was off us, Ayla stepped close to Julia.

“You obviously didn’t learn your lesson about respecting me the first time we met,” she hissed. She had a fake smile and was using her body to hide the hand gripping Julia’s arm firmly. “But if you think I would let you ruin my cousin’s mating ceremony, you’re even dumber than I thought. Now, I suggest

you dig really deep for whatever sense you have buried in that bleached-out brain of yours and leave quietly.”

“You’ll be hearing from my uncle about this,” Julia taunted.

“Believe me, sweetheart, I can handle your uncle,” Ayla said with every ounce of confidence she deserved, adding a command at the end. “Get out.”

Malcolm finally rushed up to her side as the security guards came up behind Julia.

“What the hell did you just do?” he hissed under his breath, but Julia was already obeying the command and rushing from the room.

Ayla grabbed a towel from the bar to wipe herself down. I brushed the hands still holding me off, taking her by the arm, pulling her into my arms, and kissing her firmly. After a second, she protested, pushing me away.

“Stop, you’re going to get your tux wet, too,” she insisted.

“Ayla,” Mina called as she stepped out of the crowd. “What was that all about?”

“Nothing,” Ayla assured her. “I’m sorry. We didn’t mean to cause a scene. The last thing I want is to ruin your night.”

“Are you kidding?” Mina said with a smile. “That was prime entertainment.”

Ayla chuckled. “I’m afraid my dress didn’t make it through. I’m not sure I should be in the pictures.”

Mina waved her off. “That’s what editing is for. Besides, I’ll have a good story to tell about my awesome cousin saving the day.”