

Chapter 31 - Once Rejected, Twice Desired

Alexi POV

Somehow, I had been getting small windows where I could see and hear what Max was planning.

He had really lost his mind and became “The King of the Rogues.”

How he did it so fast, I don’t know, but his pack consisted of almost 150 wolves.

He had been sending them into the Blue Moon territory to spy on Alaia and Xander to bring back information he could use to get her back.

We knew that her Luna ceremony was being held on Saturday and that there would be a lot of new faces on the pack territory getting things together.

Hiding amongst the catering staff was going to be his way in.

I was in the middle of thinking of a way out of all this when Max chimed in.

I see you’re awake. So, what do you think of the plan?

From what I’ve seen, it’s a suicide mission, and you’re just asking to get us and your whole disgusting pack killed.

How dare you? After everything I’ve done to fix your fuck up, this is how you behave?

Cut the shit Max; you’re not doing me any favors. You’ve ruined my life and taken me away from my pack. I’m probably classified as a rogue by now when I was supposed to be the fucking Beta. So, be real with me, why are you so obsessed with her? Why do you really want her?

I told you, she’s my mate and I love her.

So, it has nothing to do with her glowing purple eyes?

How do you know about that?

I know about a few things, you dick.

It doesn't matter. By this time tomorrow, Alaia will be in my bed, screaming my name.

It won't work. Whatever you're planning won't work.

Well, luckily for us we've got a little bit of extra help from one of your old whores. She'll do anything we say if she thinks it will get us into her bed again. She's my secret weapon, and once she's served her purpose, she'll be as dead as that fucking Alpha Xander.

I felt myself slipping back into the darkness, and it seems that Max did as well.

I held on as long as I could and saw a blonde shewolf walk into my line of view.

"Have you got the vile?" he asked her.

"Yes, I've got it here."

"Fuck this up, and you won't live long enough to regret it, Francesca..."

"Who the hell is Francesca?" I thought before I was sucked back into the black.

Alaia POV

Amethyst and Alastair spent almost three hours in the woods running, chasing small woodland creatures, and "other activities."

At times I had to shield my sensitive eyes from the things the two of them were doing. Oh, to be young and in love.

When Xander and I were finally given control again, we quickly shifted and headed back to our room. It was time for a long hot shower and some sleep.

My Luna ceremony took place the next day, and I knew that Katherine would blow a gasket if I looked like I'd been out chasing rabbits all night.

I turned on the shower and sat on the marble counter while the steam filled the room, rolling my aching back and shoulders.

Xander came and stood between my legs and began to massage some of the soreness away with his strong hands.

"So, what did you think of the run? Was it strange to let your wolf completely take control?"

"Oh, it absolutely was. I felt like a spectator in my own body. But I also felt how happy Amethyst was. She felt the way I do when I'm with you, so it was all worth it."

“I guess Alastair deserved a little fun as well. When we found you, he was beyond happy, but tonight it went to a different level. He bonded with his mate, and there’s no better feeling than that.”

Xander gently lifted me from the counter and carried me into the shower. I stood there for a few minutes and just let the hot water cascade down on me before Xander began to wash my long curly hair.

He had never done this before, and it made me think about what Amethyst had said to me a few hours earlier.

Letting her and Alastair take control and have that time would strengthen the bond between all four of us. It seemed that she was right.

Feeling his fingertips rub and scrape against my scalp was pure heaven and caused me to release a deep moan.

I heard Xander chuckle behind me as he rinsed the shampoo and applied the conditioner. He carefully ran his fingers through every curl from root to tip, and I secretly wondered if he had become a beautician overnight.

After rinsing again, he pulled my hair up off my back and neck then wrapped it in a bun before he took the sponge and began to wash my body.

He swirled and rubbed a thick layer of fragrant suds along my neck, over my shoulders, and down my back, all the way to my toes.

This shower felt different from all of the ones before it. Xander was worshipping my body, and I wanted to do the same to his.

I turned around and took the sponge from his hand before reaching up and beginning to wash him the same way he had done for me.

“I feel a bit slighted Little One; I want my hair washed too.”

I giggled a bit then pushed him down onto the built-in bench. I grabbed his shampoo, then stepped between his legs and began to massage my fingers through his beautiful silky curls.

While I focused on his hair, Xander’s hands gently ran the length of my body. He needed that physical connection; he just had to touch me.

I leaned his head back and brought the shower head over to rinse the suds from his hair.

As I carefully made sure the soap and water ran back off of his head and not onto his face, I noticed that Xander’s eyes were locked on my face.

“You, My Queen, are my greatest blessing. I’m honored to be called yours.”

Tears sprang to my eyes. We were now fully bonded and connected. I didn’t even know anything was missing before tonight but standing here now looking into Xander’s eyes, I knew that he wasn’t 100% mine until this very moment.

“And you, My King, are mine.”

Xander POV

When Alaia and I woke up the next morning, everything felt different. I could feel her emotions, almost like a sixth sense.

I watched her sleeping beside me, and her tiny little body radiated contentment, happiness, and love.

I told you, you asshole. You should have let me out with our mate a long time ago.

Good morning to you too, Alastair. How are you? Did you sleep well? That’s how you should start a conversation, you know.

Whatever. You called me a cock block last night and now look. Look what I did. I believe a “thank you” is in order.

Nah.

What? Why not?

You had a damn good time last night because I allowed you control. So no, I won’t say “thank you,” but I will say “you’re welcome.”

I cut Alastair off before he could reply. I was in too good of a mood to argue with him so early in the morning.

I felt a pair of eyes on me and looked down to see Alaia wide awake and smiling at me.

“The sun is barely up, and you two are already arguing?”

“Nope, I cut him off before he could get going.”

“Ha! That’s why he’s always in a foul mood; you don’t let him express himself.”

I raised an eyebrow at her. Who had been filling that perfect little head of hers with such vicious lies?

It was like she knew what I was thinking because before I could open my mouth to ask, she shrugged a shoulder and said, “Amethyst told me.”

“Well, Amethyst can’t really be considered an impartial source. Let’s go down for some breakfast, I’m sure it’s already a bit crazy downstairs, but I want to spend a few more quiet moments with you.”

Alaia when into her closet and pulled on a pair of yoga pants and a loose-fitting shirt. Even in the most basic of clothes, she was breathtaking. She was radiant, and tonight she'd officially be mine, forever.

“Let’s go, ‘Sweet Cheeks,’ I’m starving.”

I laughed out loud at her. “‘Sweet Cheeks’? Really?”

“Have you seen your ass? If you could see it the way I do, you’d understand.”

“Trust me; I understand all too well. After you...”

Alaia walked out of the room with me right behind, enjoying the view the whole way.

“Xander Emanuel Black! Where have you been? You should have been done with your breakfast an hour ago.”

“Good Morning, Mom,” I replied before I sat at the table and pulled Alaia into my lap.

She didn’t protest like she used to, she just settled in and relaxed against my chest.

Almost immediately, a massive plate of food was placed before us. I picked up a giant strawberry and brought it up to Alaia’s plump and pouty lips.

I was in a trance as I watched her wrap those lips around that strawberry and bite down.

Can you be jealous of a piece of fruit? At that moment, I was pretty sure you could be.

“Mom, I’ve been in my house, in my bedroom, with my mate. I understand that you’ve put a lot of work into tonight, which is appreciated, but I’m going to take all the time I feel necessary to make my Little One feel like the queen she is.”

I then picked up a piece of bacon and fed that to Alaia as well.

“We had a long night and needed to sleep in a bit.”

Alaia punctuated my statement by letting out a huge yawn and stretch.

“And now I’m going to sit here and feed her until she’s full, however long that takes. Once she’s done, you’re free to do whatever it was you needed us for an hour ago.”

I never took my eyes off Alaia’s face. She was the most crucial thing in my world, today and every day. Everything else was just background noise.

“That’s the best answer you’ve ever given me; I see I raised you right.”

Mom then left the kitchen to chase down some poor omega who was carrying a slightly off-center centerpiece.

I raised a piece of an omelet to Alaia’s mouth, and once she finished chewing, she asked, “Aren’t you going to eat anything?”

“I will once you’re done. All this chaos is for you, and I’m sure Mom and Kimmy are waiting to pounce on you as soon as you’re finished here. So, eat up, you’ll need all the energy you can get.”

I felt nervousness beginning to slowly emanate from her, so I put the fork I was holding down and placed my hands on her cheeks, bringing her forehead to rest on mine.

“Everything will be fine, beautiful. And no matter what, when it’s all over, you’ll be mine and I’ll be yours. Forever.”

THIRTY-THREE | HE CAN’T WITHOUT YOU

Chapter 32 - Once Rejected, Twice Desired

Alaia POV

Xander was right. As soon as I finished my breakfast, Kimmy and Katherine swooped in and dragged me back upstairs and to my dressing room.

The vanity was covered in makeup and hair care products, and I cringed a bit at what the next few hours would hold for me.

“Okay, Alaia. Have a seat.”

“Wait, why? It’s only 10:00 AM, we have seven hours until everything is scheduled to start!”

“We would have had eight hours if you and my brother weren’t playing kissy face at the breakfast table all morning.”

“Alaia, I’d like to have a full body treatment done for you today. A brown sugar scrub, mud mask, and seaweed wrap. I want that flawless skin of yours to sparkle. Then we’ll move on to hair and makeup. We’re a bit short on time but if we hurry, we can get everything done.” Katherine calmly told me.

“Well, no girl will turn down being pampered, so let’s do this. Where do you need me?”

A woman who introduced herself as Ingrid came in and set up a large table in the middle of the room. She then unceremoniously stripped me down to my underwear and literally picked me up and placed me on the table.

I saw Kimmy snicker out of the corner of my eye but I chose to ignore her and let Ingrid do what she needed to do.

“Okay Luna...it’s time to make you glow!”

Five hours later I had been scrubbed, wrapped, plucked, and waxed to within an inch of my life. I had had both a manicure and a pedicure and now it was time for hair and makeup.

I sat in front of the vanity and closed my eyes as the makeup artist and hair stylist went to work.

I finally opened my eyes when I heard someone sobbing. Looking into the mirror I saw my mom bawling her eyes out behind me.

“Mom, what’s wrong? And what are you doing here?”

“Nothing is wrong, you’re just so beautiful baby! And why wouldn’t I be here? Katherine and I have been planning this all week.”

“Really?”

“Of course sweetie. The only thing better than having one former Luna planning the ceremony is having two! Your dad, Aaron, and Jordyn are here as well. We’re all so proud of you honey.”

She broke down again and I had to stand up and wrap her in a tight hug.

“Thanks mom, now stop crying or you’ll make me start and my makeup is almost done.”

Just then, Jordyn came into the room and immediately started crying as well.

“Really J? What happened to being a kick-ass Luna, huh? Kick ass Luna’s don’t cry.”

“You’re right, babe. No more crying, I’m just really happy for you. And I love seeing you so happy.”

I kissed her on the cheek and gave her a quick hug before I spun around and sat back in my chair to finish getting ready.

Finally when it was time to get into my dress I started to get butterflies in my stomach. This was a big fucking deal!

I was about to vow my life to an entire pack of wolves, I’d have to lead by example and take care of them always.

I started to feel hot, like really really hot. My heart was racing and the room was beginning to spin.

Is this a panic attack?

“Alaia, babe? I need you to breath okay? We’re all here and you can do this.” Jordyn said while rubbing circles on my back.

I took a few deep breaths but it wasn’t helping. I started to feel nauseous and really began to panic, I didn’t want to let all these people down.

Then through the haze, Amethyst began to purr our healing melody.

After a few moments I began to calm and when I could breath again I hummed along until everything was back to normal.

Everyone stood looking at me cautiously, like they were waiting for me to explode or something.

“Okay, I’m alright now guys. I’m so sorry if I scared you, I don’t really know what happened but I feel much better.”

“Is that one of your ‘Amethyst Powers’?” Jordyn excitedly asked.

“Yea, it is. We’re healers and the song I was humming is a part of it. It’s pretty cool actually.”

“Hell yea it is! So you ready to finish getting dressed?”

“I’m ready.”

After what seemed like FOREVER, I was finally done and it was time for me to head down.

I took one final look in the mirror.

My hair was straightened of all it's curls and hung down by my waist. I had on Katherine's beautiful white satin dress that had been tailored perfectly to fit me.

I never needed foundation or concealer so I just wore a dark smokey eyeshadow and a simple black eyeliner and mascara to make my eyes pop.

My lips were painted rose and a small sprinkling of bronzer finished off my look.

I looked like myself but older and more sophisticated. I looked like a Luna.

I walked out the room then headed down.

Xander was already dressed and waiting for me in the common room.

When I saw him my knees went weak. He had on an impeccable navy blue suit, a crisp white shirt, and chocolate brown dress shoes. He decided against a tie and left his top two buttons undone.

His thick black curls were combed in his signature tousled messy look that always made me want to reach out and run my fingers through them.

There were no words to describe how incredible he looked. So I just said the first thing that came to mind.

“Damn, Daddy...”

Xander's eyes flashed black before he licked his lips and began to quickly walk over to me.

Unfortunately he was intercepted half way by Katherine who swiftly pulled him towards the back door.

“Do not touch her, she is absolutely perfect and we can't have you wrinkling or smudging all of our hard work. Save it for afterwards.”

With that, she pushed him out and closed the door behind him.

“We'll just give my son a few moments to cool off before we get started. But you look absolutely stunning, Alaia. I completely understand his reaction.”

“Thank you, Katherine.”

She smiled warmly at me before she turned to the room.

“Okay, Ladies. Let's go usher in a new Luna!”

I stood in the middle of the stage and looked out onto all of the faces in the crowd.

I don't remember any of what Xander had said so far in the ceremony, nor how or when I came to be standing here.

All I know is that I will soon be responsible for all of them. And for some strange reason, I wasn't nervous anymore. I was ready.

Xander took my hand in his and smiled down at me, waiting for me to give the silent signal that he could continue. I nodded then smiled back at him. It was time.

“Alaia Miller, do you vow here tonight to always protect and honor the members of the Blue Moon pack to the best of your abilities until your final breath?”

“I vow to do so.”

“And do you vow to always support you Alpha, and to stand by his side? To guide him when he goes astray and help him stand when he is weak to the best of your abilities until your final breath?”

“I vow to do so.”

“Lastly, do you vow to use your powers only for good, and for the betterment of your pack? To never use them for selfish gains or for the manipulation of others? Do you vow that the Amethyst wolf will remain a positive source of light, until your final breath?”

“I vow to do so.”

Xander took a large golden dagger and sliced his right palm, then did the same to mine.

We interlocked our fingers and when our palms rested against one another my mind was bombarded with voices of my pack.

It was our mindlink. I could hear each and every one of the Blue Moon pack members welcome and congratulate me. This was one of the proudest moments of my life.

In the crowd, the pack began to all take a knee and bow their heads in reverence.

A strong gust of wind began to circle Xander and I as the bond from the pack continued to flow to me from him.

When it was over, we turned to the crowd and Xander proudly announced “Blue Moon pack, please rise and honor your new Luna, Alaia Miller.”

Cheers and howls filled the air and my mind. Although it was just the pack sending their well wishes, it was all of them at the same time and it became a bit overwhelming.

Quiet down please. I'm honored to be your Luna, but I'm new to our mindlink and cannot process so many voices at once.

All at once, the entire pack said "Yes, Luna."

"What was that?" Xander asked.

"What do you mean? I just mindlinked them."

"The entire pack, baby. No one has ever linked more than ten members at once, you just linked over five hundred."

"Whoa..."

"You just keep surprising me, Little One. Come on, let's go eat."

I walked around the party speaking to various members of the pack before I found my family seated at one of the tables.

I went over and quickly wrapped my dad and Aaron in a hug, I had missed them so much.

"How are you guys? Do you miss me yet?"

"Are you kidding? It's so peaceful at home now, I'm loving every minute of it!" Aaron joked while petting my head.

"Aaron, stop petting me. As an Alpha, I don't think you want anyone to see you get your ass kicked by the neighboring packs Luna."

Dad took the opportunity to turn me towards him and stop the bickering before it really had a chance to get started.

"Alaia, I'm so proud of the woman you have become. Of course I would have preferred for your mate to have been from Opal Moon so I could always have you close, but Alpha Xander is a good man and leader. I couldn't think of a better match for you if I tried."

"Thanks, Dad. I think he's pretty perfect too."

I turned to Aaron to ask him about Jordyn when I hear a terrible scream behind me.

I turned around and saw Xander down on one knee, with black veins popping out of his neck and face. His usually tanned skin was red and inflamed, almost like someone had poured acid on it.

His eyes had gone completely black and looked ready to pop out. My heart clenched when I saw him reach for his throat, he couldn't breathe. I had to do something, I had to get to him.

I rushed over as quick as I could, reaching him right as he collapsed onto the ground.

As soon as I touched him, my hands began to tingle.

Dark magic. Xander had been poisoned.

Amethyst, we have to heal him! Now!

I tuned out the screams and chaos behind me and closed my eyes. I ran my fingers through Xander's hair and rubbed his face while I hummed to him.

The poison that was working through his system was strong, it was refusing to subside but I continued on, desperate to save my mate.

I placed my forehead against his and as fat tears ran from my eyes I hummed with everything I had. I poured myself into the melody, my lungs began to burn, I was barely breathing but still I continued.

I felt a harsh pair of arms wrap around my waist and pull me up and away. I wanted to fight them but I had no energy. I had given my all trying to save Xander. I didn't know how spent I was, until he was no longer in my arms. My body was limp in the stranger's arms.

When I finally opened my eyes I saw that we were being attacked. There were rogues everywhere, pouring in from every direction. Leaping down from trees and swarming in from the woods in both their wolf and human forms.

Many of the warriors from my pack along with Aaron, Jordyn, and my father shifted and began to slash at every rogue in sight.

Others opted to fight in their human forms, and soon the entire area was a blood bath.

All of the beautiful decorations my mom and Katherine had worked so hard to put together were strewn on the ground, splattered with black and red blood stains.

Helpless shewolves and pups huddled together or ran for cover trying to find the smallest hint of safety.

I could see the faces as they screamed and howled, but I still couldn't hear anything. It seemed that all but one of my senses were turned off. I could only see. See the destruction before me.

My mind was in turmoil, my pack was under attack and I didn't know if my mate was still alive.

I glanced over and saw Matt and Kade in their wolf forms standing over Xander's still body, fighting off the rogues.

I prayed that he would be alright, that I had done enough to save him, and that the pack could stand long enough to get him to safety.

Hold on, Doll. We will get through this, but only if you can be strong.

I can't, not without him...

Alaia! He can't without you! If you give up, our mate dies. Trust in our abilities, we will make it out of this.

A large sack was pulled over my head and the last bit of the battle was lost to me. I let myself be carried away to the unknown, trusting that this would not be the end for me, or the end for us.

THIRTY-FOUR | THE BLOOD ROGUES

Chapter 33 - Once Rejected, Twice Desired

Xander POV

Alaia had just mindlinked the entire pack. That was insane. I could maybe reach six wolves before I got a massive headache and had to stop.

This woman was incredible and I was truly enjoying her grow and learn her powers.

We made our way off the stage and into the crowd below.

"Babe, you can head over to our table if you'd like or go talk to your family for a bit. I just need to have a quick work with Kade and Matt then I'll be right over."

She nodded her head, "Okay, I'll see you in a few", then walked over to her dad and brother.

I strolled over to find Kade and Matthew arguing over who could link the most pack at once.

Apparently what Alaia had done had made an impact on more than just me.

"Really? That is what's important right now? What's the situation with the rogues? Have we heard anything from the border patrols?"

As I was finishing my sentence a member of the catering staff walked by with a tray of foods and tripped into me.

He apologized profusely before standing and quickly running away.

“Xander, you alright man? Your hand is bleeding.”

I looked down and saw a small trickle of blood run down the side of hand. The cut was small so it should have already began to close and heal. But it burned.

“What the fuck is going on?”

The burn ran up my arm and spread to my chest. It was getting hard to breath and I was becoming dizzy.

Black veins began to emerge from my skin, radiating pain through my entire body

I felt myself collapse with Kade and Matt right beside me, yelling for help.

Soon, chaos began to break out, and I smelled them before I saw them.

The rogues. We were under attack, rogues were attacking my home and I couldn't even stand and defend us.

The pack began to shift into their wolf forms and fight the rogues back. My warriors were well trained but these rogues just would not go down.

Where one slash to the throat would usually kill a rogue, they were still standing after four or five.

Then, out of nowhere, the smell of rot and decay was replaced with sweet caramel. My angel was here with me.

The pain that was taking over my cells was replaced by small sparks, tingles, and warmth where her skin made contact with mine.

She began to run her fingers through my hair and rub her small hand across my cheek.

A sense of calm came over me, she was okay and even if I didn't make it I would die knowing that I loved her with my whole heart.

She began to hum her melody and the burning in my chest began to subside and I could breath a little better.

My veins were still on fire and it felt that I was being electrocuted over and over, but she had given me back my breath.

I felt her place her forehead against my own as her tears spilled onto my face. I wanted nothing more than to reach up and wipe her sadness away. To kiss away the tears.

My heart broke at the thought of her hurting. I never wanted her to feel any pain, only happiness and love.

As she continued to hum, the raging inferno started to die down and my erratic heartbeat slowed.

I opened my eyes and stared at her perfect face, mere inches away from mine. Even in her frantic state, she was absolute perfection. I tried with all my might to reach out and touch her. I just wanted to feel her skin under my fingertips one more time, but my arm refused to budge. So I settled for just looking at her.

Then she was gone. A filthy rogue with wild red eyes and greasy black hair had slipped in in the mist of the fray and snatched her small body from me.

I felt cold where she had been providing warmth just seconds ago.

As soon as she was lifted off her feet, I saw her immediately collapse. She had given every drop of herself to save me, and now she couldn't even fight to save herself.

I tried to get up to get to her but every time I tried to move, nothing happened.

My body was paralyzed.

I then tried to call out to Kade, Matthew, or anyone to come save her but I had no voice.

I couldn't get their attention, they were all completely engulfed in the battle and didn't even see her being taken.

The pain caused by the poison had stopped, but the pain of seeing my mate being taken away and not being able to help, hurt far more.

Our mate is strong Xander, she will get through this.

Alastair, I need to get to her. We need to shift now.

We can't Xander, the poison in our system is keeping us from shifting. I can't even heal you.

I need to do something, I can't just lay here while she's being taken.

There is nothing we can do. Just hold on, we will get her back.

She is my everything, if anyone harms her I'll burn down the world.

Alaia POV

The farther away I got from my family, my pack, and my mate the weaker I felt.

I just wanted to sleep forever, I wasn't sure I could survive whatever this was.

It was then that I realized that my senses were returning to me.

I was being carried through the woods, I could hear the crunching of dried leaves and snapping of twigs as my kidnapper ran through the night.

They leapt over logs and dodged tree branches with incredible speed and agility.

Eventually he stopped and I could feel myself being placed on the back of a wolf. The sack was still over my eyes but I knew it too was a rogue. The smell of death permeated my skin and made my stomach roll.

I dug my hands into its disgusting matted fur before the wolf took off and ran for what felt like hours. When we finally stopped, I was lifted off its back and carried into a moldy smelling structure.

After a few minutes crossing creaky floors, we entered a room and I was placed into a chair where my hands and feet were bound before my captor left me alone.

I strained my ear to listen for anything that could help me figure out where I had been taken but besides the sounds of nature outside, there was complete silence.

I tried to mindlink Xander but I got no reply, it was like he didn't exist at all.

My heart began to race and my breathing became frantic. What if I hadn't saved him? What if he had died and I wasn't there with him?

I heaved for breath but my lungs refused to take in the much needed oxygen.

I was dying, this had to be what dying felt like. My stomach began to spasm causing me to painfully dry heave over and over again.

Alaia, you have to calm down. We will not make it out of this if you don't.

Amethyst began to softly purr but I couldn't hum with her. I didn't have the strength and I could feel her weakening.

It was all becoming too much to bear.

In a brief moment of clarity I tried to mindlink Kade, then Matthew, then Aaron but got nothing in response each and every time.

They can't all be dead, I told myself. They are all so strong and capable. they would have fought the rogues off and easily survived. This thought finally began to calm me.

Maybe my mindlink was being blocked. Maybe Xander was still alive, along with the rest of my family.

My family.

We may not have been connected by blood, but we were connected by bond and Blue Moon was my family.

I had to be strong for them. I had just vowed to fight for and protect them until my final breath and I was going to do just that. Or die trying.

Amethyst, save your strength. I am going to need you if we are going to get out of here. I'll work to keep myself as calm as possible, you work to see if you can reach Alastair. Can you do that?

I can and I'll try Alaia, but I need to rest. You need to rest. We cannot fight back in this state.

She was right. I was having to fight to keep my eyes open and my head up. I needed to sleep, just for a little while so that I could figure out my next move.

So I slept, and dreamed of how once I was free I would destroy all those who dared to harm my family.

I woke up to the sounds of footsteps approaching me.

I don't know how long I had been asleep but I feel like it hadn't been very long.

I was still exhausted and being restricted in the chair had began to make my hands and feet go painfully numb.

Whoever had entered the room suddenly stopped behind me and pulled the sack from my face, allowing me to study my surroundings for the first time.

What was this place? I was in a bedroom but it wasn't in any house that could be considered habitable.

The red and black decor just screamed "trying too hard" and made me wonder who would have ever thought this was appealing.

"It's nice to see you're awake, Kitten. Do you like your new room? Our new room?"

My body tensed up and I froze. I knew this voice, but it had changed. It was more animalistic now but I could never forget it.

This voice used to make me weak in the knees, this voice used to be everything to me. Used to be...

“A-Alexi? What is this?”

“Do not call me by that name. I am not Alexi! That idiot no longer controls this body. I am Maximus, I am your one true mate.”

His wolf? How was this possible?

He walked around into my line of sight and I was shocked at what I saw.

Alexi’s body looked beaten and broken.

His skin that used to look so perfectly sun kissed now housed horrendous yellow bruises, scabs, and scars. His once sandy blonde hair was now almost brown with all of the filth caked into it.

His muscular build had worn away to where he was almost skin and bones.

And his eyes. They were once the most beautiful gray, but now they were blood red.

He was a shell of his former self and I hurt to see someone I once cared so much about look this way.

“Maximus? Could I speak to Alexi? Would that be alright?”

“NO! You are mine and will deal with only me!”

I shrunk back. I had never seen him like this. Even when Xander presented himself as my mate, Alexi never behaved this way.

“O-okay Maximus. I will only deal with you.”

“You didn’t answer my question, Kitten. Do you like our new room? I designed is especially for you. For my Luna.”

My stomach lurched. I didn’t know what Maximus had planned for me but I knew I wanted nothing to do with him. I would never be his Luna.

But I had to tread carefully here.

“I haven’t really seen it. Could I maybe be untied so that I can look around?”

Maximus looked me over for a few moments trying to decipher my true intentions. Almost reluctantly, he stepped forward and untied my bindings.

My wrists and ankles were raw from the rubbing of the ropes against my skin.

I tried to stand but my legs were too weak. Instead I just rotated my body in the chair, looking for anything that could tell me where I was or how I could escape.

“Once I know that I can trust you, I’ll allow you to move around our home freely. Until then you will remain here.”

"You call this our home, but Maximus, I have a home already. And my family needs me to come back to them. Please let me go back."

"I am your family now! You will have whatever your heart desires here, I will make sure of it."

"Maximus, please..."

I reached out my hand and lightly brushed my fingers over his arm. I felt the telltale tingles that told me dark magic was at play here.

And for the briefest of moments, I saw a thin ring of grey surround the iris of Maximus's eye before he quickly jerked away from me.

Alexi was in there, I just had to bide my time to find a way to free him and thus free myself.

“Maximus, where is here? Where are we?”

“This is our home Kitten, welcome to the Blood Rogue pack.”

THIRTY-FIVE | HIDDEN TRUTHS

Chapter 34 - Once Rejected, Twice Desired

Alexi POV

Somehow Max had pulled off his idiotic plan and taken Alaia. He had taken her away from her home and her family, and that hurt. He had also, in a way, taken me away from mine, so I knew what it felt like to miss home.

I wanted to help get her back to her pack as soon as possible.

When she touched our arm last night, somehow, she pulled me from the darkness, but only for the briefest of moments before I was forced back in. But it was enough. I was able to see her. I could see how hurt and scared and exhausted she looked.

She was still dressed for her Luna ceremony, and her dress, which I'm sure was once beautiful, was now dirty, ripped, and covered with bloodstains. What I also saw were her eyes. I saw those purple eyes when I looked at her and then realized she was the key to pulling me back for good.

I just had to figure out how to speak with her and let her know what needed to be done without Max finding out. That seemed almost impossible at this point, but I had to try if I had any chance of getting us out of here.

Francesca POV

“You fucking bitch! What have you done?” I screamed at my sister while throwing her across the room.

“I did what we planned to do all along. I got that bitch Alaia out of the picture. The rogues have her now. Isn't that what you wanted?”

“I fucking wanted Xander! I wanted her away from him so that we could be together. That was the only reason I agreed to help you. What was in the vial you gave me?”

Victoria shrugged a nonchalant shoulder at me and said, “Poison, of course.”

“What. Kind. Of. Poison?” I gritted through my teeth.

“I don't know the name, but it kills the wolf slowly and painfully. There is no cure. Once it makes its way through the blood, it's just a matter of time before it does its job. Your Xander is a strong wolf, so he can hang on for maybe a week or so, but not for much longer.”

I collapsed onto the ground. My own sister had betrayed me, and I had trusted her without question. I had done all this for Xander, and now he was gone.

“Why would you do this to me? You knew he was mine. He was always supposed to be mine.”

“He had a mate, Francesca, and it wasn't you. It was never going to be you. Get that through your head.” She looked me right in the eye before she continued. “Xander was just a pawn in my plan. Because of Alaia, Alexi was banished from the pack and denied his beta position. He was taken away from me, and it was all her fault. So, I took the one thing that mattered most to her. Imagine how she will feel knowing that her mate died slowly, in agonizing pain, all because she

was a dirty slut who couldn't leave my man alone. Now she's broken and out of the way, and I can get Alexi back."

"He was never yours! You were some whore that he banged to pass the time, Victoria! Alaia was his mate." As the words came out of my mouth, it all clicked for me. Victoria and I hated Alaia just because she had been paired with men we wanted for ourselves. They weren't our mates and were never going to be. Now all our lives were ruined.

But I had one last card to play here. Victoria wanted someone to be broken? I'd show her broken.

"You say that 'The Rogues' have Alaia, but do you know which rogue in particular?"

"I don't fucking care, Francesca. None of them are my problem anymore."

"You sure about that? Because I'm pretty sure you just handed Alaia over to Alexi."

"Bullshit. You said we were giving her to their Alpha, Maximus. I'm not that stupid."

"But you are, Victoria. Maximus is Alexi's wolf. He's been in control of their body for weeks now, and all he's wanted is Alaia. And you gave her right to him. He's probably fucking her right now, and it's all thanks to you."

"You're lying! Alexi doesn't want her; he's mine!" Victoria's eyes bulged from her head as she tore through the room, throwing furniture, punching holes in the walls, and breaking everything in sight.

I just sat back and watched with a smile on my face. That bitch deserved all of this and more. She cared about no one but herself, and now it was time for payback.

"I'll kill her! I'll fucking kill her and take back what's mine."

Bingo! Maximus wouldn't let Victoria anywhere near Alaia. Now that he had her, he would use his entire disgusting pack to keep her. And he'd kill Victoria without a second thought if he felt she meant Alaia harm.

She was planning her own funeral, and I couldn't care less. We were done, and I no longer had a sister.

I stood from my chair and dusted myself off. "Yeah, you do that." I then walked away, never to see her face again.

Kade POV

It had been three weeks since those fucking rogues had come in and attacked our pack. There were no casualties on our part, but at least seventy-five rogues had died at our hand. It wasn't until it was all over that we saw they had taken Alaia. I couldn't believe it. We had failed our Luna, and ultimately, our Alpha.

The only bright spot in all this was that Xander wasn't there to see what had happened. Once Xander collapsed, Matt and I refused to leave his side. But after all the fighting had stopped, we saw the state he was in. His entire body was covered in bulging black veins that now matched his eyes. He wore a constant grimace on his face like he was in continuous pain, but he couldn't tell us what was wrong. Xander couldn't speak or mindlink—he couldn't even move. His body was shutting down, and there was nothing we could do to help him. We placed him in the pack hospital under a twenty-four-hour watch, then began the task of trying to find Alaia.

We couldn't lose our Alpha and our Luna; we wouldn't survive a blow of that magnitude.

I sat in Xander's office, going over reports from the attack and looking over our territory map for anything I could find that might help.

Matt came in a few minutes later and slumped down onto the couch. "Have you been to check on him?"

"I sat with him for a bit this morning, but I've been here ever since. I have to find something; we have to bring Alaia home. Maybe she can heal him."

"She can't, Kade. I spoke to the elders. The kind of poison they used is irreversible. I've been looking for anything that could help us figure out how to get him back, but it's not looking good. He's getting worse and worse by the hour."

I couldn't believe this was happening. Xander had been my best friend my entire life, and I wasn't ready to do this shit without him. I couldn't.

The phone rang, pulling me out of my thoughts.

I answered and placed it on speakerphone. "Beta Kade speaking."

"Kade, it's Aaron. I did it; I linked Alaia about ten minutes ago. She's alive, man."

I jumped to my feet, completely shocked. We had been trying to reach Alaia nonstop for the past three weeks, but we were blocked every time. "What did she say? Does she know where she is? I can have our warriors ready to go in ten minutes, just tell me where."

"She doesn't know, Kade. She tried, but she's weak and only getting weaker. I don't know how much longer she can survive."

I sat back down and blew out a breath. We needed to catch a break, anything so that we could get Alaia back.

“Alpha Aaron, what can—”

“It’s just Aaron, Kade. We’re family now. Our packs are forever linked to one another. Please, we don’t need the formalities.”

“Aaron, it is. What exactly can you tell me about what she said? Maybe something will pop out and give us a clue we need.”

Aaron’s Flashback

I couldn’t believe we hadn’t found her yet. It’s been three long weeks, and both the Opal Moon and Blue Moon packs have been running nonstop.

I was closed off in my office, running throughout the events of the last few weeks. We were searching for anything that could help. Then I remembered the night of my Alpha ceremony when Alaia and I had our first shift. The elders said we were a powerful pair. Even though Alaia was the Amethyst Wolf, I still had powers. Being part of the amethyst pair made me a stronger-than-average wolf, and maybe I could use that to my advantage.

I shut all the blinds and sat in the dark for a few minutes. I had to try and reach her. I closed my eyes and concentrated on Alaia. My sister. My twin. I focused on the bond we’ve always had, even before we had shifted. I focused on my love for her, and my need to get her back. I started to feel a buzzing in the back of my mind, like someone was trying to link me but couldn’t get through. But I didn’t have any blocks up and had told my entire pack not to link me under any circumstances. Not until we had found Alaia. I wanted to remain available for her at all times.

This had to be her.

I concentrated harder, and the buzzing turned into a heavy pounding. It was like someone was banging on my skull with a hammer.

Something told me to push through, so I did.

The pain got so bad I was sure I was going to blackout, but then there was a bright flash of white light, then peaceful quiet.

Alaia, are you there?

Silence.

Alaia, please. Please tell me you can hear me.

I still got no response. I feared the worst; that Alaia didn’t respond because she couldn’t.

A-Aaron, is that you?

Alaia! Yes, where are you, sis? We've been looking for you for days.

I-I don't know where I am. He won't tell me, and I can't get out of this room; he locks me in.

Who Alaia? Who took you?

Alpha Maximus . . .

Alpha Maximus? There was no alpha around by that name. Had she been taken farther from our territory than we initially thought? Maybe this Alpha was after her powers.

Alaia, what can you tell me that will help us find you?

I'm so weak, Aaron. I haven't heard from Amethyst in six days. I feel us slipping away.

Alaia! No, don't do that! We need you to fight and come back to us.

But he's gone, I can't do this without him.

Of course, Alaia didn't know. She was taken in the middle of the ambush and only knew what she saw shortly before.

Alaia, Xander is still alive! Whatever you did before you were taken slowed the poison. It didn't kill him, but he's still sick. He needs you back. He can't heal without you, without his mate.

I saved him?

Yes, you did. Now you've got to save yourself and get back to Xander. Tell me something, Alaia, anything. Please!

He calls himself the King of the Rogues, and he won't let Alexi out. And I think my pup is dying.

Wait; what? What does Alexi have to do with this? And what pup?

Alaia? Alaia!

She was gone. The link was gone, and I couldn't get it back.

Was this alpha holding Alexi as well? Is that why we hadn't heard from him all this time? And . . . Alaia was pregnant? We had to get her out of there. We had to save her and her pup.

Kade POV

“She’s pregnant?”

“That’s what she said, but she doesn’t sound like herself. She’s slipping away, man. We’ve got to save them.”

“Shit. And Xander probably doesn’t even know,” Matt said.

“We’ll get them back. That pup is our future Alpha. We will not lose them.”

Just then, I heard Aaron speaking with his beta Lucas in the background.

When he came back to the line, he said, “It’s Alexi! Maximus is Alexi’s wolf. That is who has her. Alaia said that he wouldn’t let Alexi out. Max has taken over Alexi’s body!”

“Does Lucas know how to find him?”

“There’s this old abandoned house we used to use as a fort when we were kids. Lucas thinks they may be there.”

“Send me the coordinates, Aaron, and we’ll meet you there.”

As we hung up, I saw Matt mindlinking someone. When he was done, he looked over and said, “Henry and the rest of the warriors are on their way. We’ll be ready to go as soon as we get the location.”

“Let’s go get Alaia and our future Alpha. Then we’ll find a way to bring Xander back to them.”

THIRTY-SIX | A&A’S HIDEOUT

Chapter 35 - Once Rejected, Twice Desired

Alaia POV

Every day I felt my body grow weaker and weaker.

Amethyst had stopped responding to me almost six days ago, and I feared she was gone for good.

Maximus was becoming more and more erratic, and I was afraid that soon he would snap. He would come into the room every day to bring me scraps of food and water, but he didn't allow himself to get too close to me. I believe when I touched him the first night, I somehow reached Alexi, and Max didn't want that. All of his talk about me being his Luna was put on hold until he could find a way around my powers. And that frustrated him.

And to make matters worse, I was pretty sure I was pregnant with Xander's pup: My breasts were sore and sensitive. My stomach was a constant sea of turmoil, I couldn't keep anything down, and my sense of smell was on overdrive. I wanted to give up so badly, but I kept going for this baby. I had already lost Xander; I wouldn't lose his heir as well. Not if I could help it.

I kept my suspicions to myself. I didn't want Max to try and hurt my baby because it was Xander's.

A wolf pregnancy is only five months long, and I was guessing I was probably close to being a month and a half along already.

I would start to show soon and needed to get us out of here before that happened.

I was curled up on the bed, staring at the wall when Aaron's mindlink came through. I had given up trying to reach the outside world, so when I first heard his voice, I was sure I was hallucinating. The second time I heard him, I figured it couldn't hurt to try and respond. If I'm crazy, then fine, but I'd rather be crazy and have the voice of my brother in my head than nothing at all.

I was so happy to hear his voice, but at the same time, the conversation was draining. This wasn't a normal mindlink; it was channeled through our Amethyst pairing, which drew on my powers.

Amethyst had been quiet for so long; I knew she was fading as well.

But Aaron had given me the boost I had needed. He had told me that Xander was still alive and fighting for his life. So, I would fight right along with him.

It was time for me to go home.

"Hello, Kitten. I've got a surprise for you." Max had entered the room with a loud bang and woke me from my restless slumber. When I didn't move or respond, he stepped closer and leaned down in front of me. Max carefully picked up a few locks of my hair and moved it away from my face, mindful not to make contact with my skin. When my face was cleared enough for his liking, he leaned into my line of sight. "Don't ignore me, Kitten. You'll like this surprise, I promise."

I wouldn't give him the satisfaction of a response, so I just looked him in the eye.

“I guess that will have to do. I’ve decided to allow you out of the room for a shower. I’ve also got some fresh clothes for you to put on. Would you like that?”

I would love it, and he knew I would. I hadn’t been allowed to shower since I got here three weeks ago. My hair was a tangled mess, and I smelled just as terrible at the rogues who roamed the halls. I nodded my head in response.

“Good. Come with me, and I’ll bring you to the bathroom.”

I swung my legs over the side of the bed and tried to stand, but my knees gave out from under me.

Max grabbed a thin blanket from the bed and wrapped it around my body before scooping me up and carrying me bridal style from the room.

This was the most contact we had had since my arrival, and I knew this was my chance.

Amethyst, if you’re there, please help me now. I really need you.

I closed my eyes and began to hum my melody. I didn’t hear Amethyst, but I knew the tune by heart and pressed on without her.

I felt Max slightly stumble, but he shook it off and continued to carry me through the dingy hallway.

As the melody was coming to an end, Amethyst finally woke from her slumber and began to purr lightly.

Max’s body froze, and he slowly placed me on my feet. I kept one hand on his arm and held on until the melody was over. When I looked up, his eyes were back to their stormy gray, and I knew that I had finally reached Alexi. He just stared down at me for a moment before he stumbled backward and onto the ground. He heaved a few deep breaths and clutched his chest, trying to steady his heart.

As I watched him struggle to calm himself, I slowly slid down onto the floor. My already weakened body was depleted. My only chance now was that Alexi could find a way to get us out.

Alexi’s eyes focused on my face before he said my name. “Alaia? How did you do that?”

“I think Max thought that as long as we didn’t have any skin to skin contact, my powers wouldn’t work, but that’s not the case. Any physical contact will work, really.”

“Are you okay? I’m so, so sorry I couldn’t save you. Has he hurt you?”

“No, he hasn’t hurt me, but I’m also not okay. I’m pretty sure I’m pregnant, Alexi, and I’ve given everything I have to keep this pup alive. I don’t have anything left.” For the first time in weeks, tears ran down my face as I realized just how shattered I was.

Alexi stood to his feet and looked around. “I know where we are. Can you link your pack? I can give them your location so they can come to get you.”

“I think Max has blockers up. I’ve only been able to link Aaron, and that was through our Amethyst bond.”

“Is he coming for you?” Alexi looked panicked when he asked me that, and I understood why.

As soon as Aaron saw that it was Alexi who’d kidnapped me, he would kill him on the spot. Without question. And that was only if he got to him before someone from my pack did. Blue Moon would torture him for what’s been done.

But I didn’t want that. This wasn’t Alexi’s fault, and I didn’t think he should be killed for it.

“Alexi, I know this wasn’t your fault. And I’ll make sure they know. Okay?”

“Alaia, you don’t have to worry about me. Just focus on hanging on a little bit longer. Stay here, okay? I’ll go see if anyone else is around, then I can get you out of here.”

Alexi walked away, and I took the time to see what was up with Amethyst.

Amethyst? Where have you been? I’ve really needed you.

I’m sorry, doll, I’ve been trying to save my strength to communicate with Alastair. He and Xander have been getting sicker and sicker. I needed to reach out to him to make him keep fighting.

Are they getting worse?

Yes, and I think that’s why we’ve been so depleted as well. We are connected in more ways than one. One can’t survive without the other. We have to get back to them soon, or none of us will be around for too much longer.

Just then, I heard a chorus of loud howls in the distance.

I knew instinctively that Aaron had found me.

Alexi ran back up the stairs and stopped in front of me.

“Alaia, stay with me, okay? The rogues are going to try and fight off anyone who comes onto the territory, and I don’t want you hurt.”

“What about Aaron? Will they attack him?”

“You know better than that, Alaia. Aaron is an Alpha and a warrior. He’s going to be fine.”
Alexi scooped me up and sprinted down the stairs and out of the house.

Seeing it from the outside made me wonder how the ‘house’ was even still standing. It was more a shack than anything else, and I didn’t understand why anyone would make this their base of operations.

“Aaron and I used to play here when we were younger. I was our very own fort. We could do any and everything. I guess I just wanted to go back to when things were simple.”

Hearing Alexi explain this made me so sad for him. He had been hurt by the rejection just as much as I was, but he didn’t have anyone to pick up the pieces.

While I was given Xander, Alexi had to go on alone, and bear the disappointment of those he looked up to most.

I made a silent vow to myself that I would do all that I could to make sure Alexi found happiness after all this was over. He deserved it.

“Try and link someone now, Alaia. If there were blockers, they wouldn’t work this far from the house.”

I nodded and tried to link Aaron and Kade. Maybe I could get them both at the same time, like a conference call.

Guys? Can you hear me?

Bean? Where are you? We’re coming up on the location Aaron gave us now. We’ll be there in two minutes.

Hearing that stupid nickname made me smile. I thought for a time that I’d never hear it again.

Bean? Really? Anyway . . . we’re here, sis. The rogues are pouring out from everywhere, but there is way more of us than there are of them. Where are you? Are you alright?

I’m with Alexi. He’s taken me out of the house to keep me away from the fight.

Alexi? Tell us where you are, Alaia. I’m coming right now.

“Alexi? Where can I tell the guys to come to get me?”

“Tell Aaron that he can find you at our old treehouse.”

Aaron, he says come to the old treehouse. Do you know where that is?

Yeah, I know. Kade, I see your guys arriving now. Follow me, and I'll lead you to your Luna.

Alexi and I finally stopped in front of an old rotten treehouse in the middle of the woods. 'A&A's Hideout' was painted above what used to be the door.

"I remember when you and Aaron used to come here. I was never invited because I was a girl."

"We had to protect the integrity of our secrets; girls gossip too much," he said with a shrug.

This was the Alexi I remembered. Cool and cocky. I had missed this version of him.

I heard twigs breaking in the woods in front of us, and soon we were surrounded by warriors from the Opal Moon and Blue Moon packs. They were in both their wolf and human forms and looked to be more than a little pissed off.

I wanted to ease the tension, so I took a shaky step forward before my legs gave out.

Seeing this must have ignited a rage in them because growls erupted from the group as Aaron, Kade, and Matt rushed toward us. As Matt reached me, he took off his jacket and wrapped it around my shoulders before lifting me up into his arm. "Hey Bean, how you and the little bean holding up?"

"We've been better, that's for sure. But I'm so happy to see you, and it's not just because you're so damn pretty."

"Of course you're happy to see me. I'm your best friend."

He smiled down at me and walked into the woods. When I asked him to stop, he immediately protested. "We need to get you home, Alaia. The pack doctor is waiting to look you over, and we need to make sure the pup is okay."

"Just two minutes Matt, please?"

He let out a long sigh before he stopped walking and turned back to the treehouse.

Aaron and Kade were beating Alexi, who was lying on the ground, not fighting back, and completely unmoving.

"Guys, stop it! This is not his fault, and he shouldn't be punished for it."

"Bullshit, Alaia! He started all of this, and now I'm going to finish it. I can't believe I once thought he was my best friend."

I could see that hurt Aaron and Alexi both. They were once brothers, and now they were worse than strangers.

Kade was standing close by, clearly wanting to attack again, but out of respect for me and my previous statement, he didn't.

"Aaron, listen to me. It was his wolf, not him. Alexi was trapped here just like I was. As soon as he could, he tried to help me. And now I'm going to help him." I then turned to Kade. "Beta, please take Alexi into custody until we can figure out what can be done for him. He is not to be harmed any further. He will receive food, a shower, clean clothes, and medical attention."

Kade offered no argument, even though I knew he wanted to. "Yes, Luna."

Two Blue Moon warriors stepped forward and lifted Alexi onto his feet before leading him back through the woods.

"Aaron, please trust me on this. I wouldn't even ask if I wasn't 100% sure this was the right thing to do. Give him a chance."

He nodded once before he, too, turned and made his way through the woods and back to the house, followed closely by his warriors.

I looked up at Matt, who looked confused and angry at my decision. "Do you trust me, Matt?"

"Of course I do, Alaia."

"Good. I know this looks strange, but I promised to use my powers for good, and that what I'm going to do."

"Yes, Luna."

I relaxed into his arms before saying, "Please take me to Xander now. We need him."

I placed a hand over my belly before being led to the car and my other half.

THIRTY-SEVEN | OUR LAST HOPE

Chapter 36 - Once Rejected, Twice Desired

Alaia POV

I woke in a warm, bright room, dazed, and a bit confused before I realized that I was in the pack hospital. I didn't even remember the trip back home or how I got here.

I looked down at my arm to see I was hooked to a few machines and noticed an IV pumping fluids into my body. I knew I was extremely dehydrated. Max only gave me small amounts of food and water, and everything I did get always came back up. I rubbed a hand over my slightly rounded stomach and prayed to the Goddess that the last few weeks didn't harm my baby. I couldn't lose this last link I had to Xander.

Xander!

I shot up from the bed so fast I made myself dizzy and had to take a second to wait for the room to stop spinning.

Matt sat in the corner of the room and rushed over as soon as I sat up, afraid that something was wrong. "Bean? Are you alright? What happened?"

"Matt, I need to see Xander. Please take me to him."

He smiled, then nodded his head. "Cool, but don't jump up like that, you scared the shit out of me. Can you stand up?"

I placed my feet on the floor and pushed up. My legs were still weak, but I could hold my own weight with just a little bit of effort. Proud of my little bit of progress, I smiled up at Matt.

"Okay, take my arm, and we'll go slowly. He's right next door, but you let me know if you need to stop, alright?"

"It's a deal."

We started taking baby steps toward the door to my room, with Matt pulling my IV pole behind us.

"So, how did you get stuck with babysitting duty? Shouldn't you be out there with Kade kicking someone's ass?"

"We did plenty of ass-kickings while you were gone. You getting better is the priority now. So, it's you and me, kid."

I just shook my head at him. I would never have thought that he would be so silly, but Matt had quickly become one of my favorite people.

When we arrived in front of Xander's door, I felt Amethyst beginning to stir in my mind. She was excited to see her mate, and so was I. I stepped in and was heartbroken at what I saw. My strong and powerful mountain of a man laid on his side with sweat running down his face. His beautiful hair was stuck to his forehead in clumps, and there were dark, sunken circles under his eyes.

Matt pulled up a chair for me and placed it right next to Xander's head.

I sat down and began stroking his hair, trying to offer him any comfort I could.

“Matt, would you bring me his toiletry bag? I want to clean him up a bit.”

Matt went to the closet and returned with a small, black leather bag and passed it to me.

I looked inside, found a small brush and comb, and immediately went to work on taming Xander’s beautiful ebony curls. Once that was done, Matt brought me a basin of warm water that I used to carefully give Xander a much-needed shave. “That’s more like it. That’s the man I love,” I said while looking down at him.

“He looks much better, that’s for sure. He was starting to look like Grizzly Adams, but he would have killed Kade and I if he knew we had decided to shave him.”

“Matt, I can’t heal him, can I?”

“No, I don’t think you can. All my readings and talks with the elders have ended with this poison being irreversible. In the two days you’ve been home, though, he hasn’t gotten any worse, so there is that. Maybe if your powers won’t heal him, the bond between the two of you can help to at least bring some part of him back.”

That wasn’t what I wanted to hear. I didn’t want to lose him so soon.

You have to mark him, doll.

What? What good will that do?

The combination of the mate bond and your powers will help bring him back.

Are you sure? Matt said that our powers couldn’t heal him. The poison is too strong.

Usually that would be true, but this isn’t a normal situation. For an ordinary wolf, a Blue Moon is no different from a full one. In our case, it amplifies our powers tenfold. The Blue Moon is in two days. You have to mark him when the moon is at its brightest in the sky. That is our last hope of getting them back.

“The Blue Moon . . .”

“What about it, Bean?”

“I need to mark Xander on the night of the Blue Moon.” I filled Matt in on what Amethyst had told me.

“I’ve never heard of that, and I’ve been researching like crazy. I’ll go to the elders now and see what they can add to this. If it’s our last shot, then I want us to have all the information we can.”

I felt a spark of hope for the first time in weeks. I would do anything to save him, and this seemed like a perfect solution.

“Do you want me to take you back to your room?”

“No. Actually, could you see if I could be moved in here with Xander? I just need to be close to him.”

“Sure, Bean. I’ll make it happen. Be right back.”

When Matt left, I leaned down and placed a kiss to Xander’s lips. I smiled when I felt that familiar spark from the contact. I had missed it almost as much as I’d missed Xander. But he was still here, and I wasn’t going to give up on him.

About twenty minutes later, another bed and new equipment were rolled into the room and set up next to Xander. I settled in and prepared to watch my peacefully sleeping mate for a while before the doctor came in.

“Hello, Luna. How are you feeling today?”

“So much better. So . . . how am I?”

“Well, besides some mild dehydration and exhaustion, you’re doing great. Also, the Beta and Gamma told us that you suspected that you might be pregnant, and a blood test had confirmed that. You are about seven weeks along, Luna.”

Xander had done it. He was determined to put a pup in me, and he did. But I couldn’t really enjoy this moment because he wasn’t here to celebrate with me.

“Luna, are you alright?”

“Yes, I’m good, Dr. Roberts. I just wish Xander could hear the news as well. How is he doing?”

I looked over to Xander’s beautiful face and hoped to receive news that I knew wouldn’t come.

“He’s . . . complicated, Luna. He was getting progressively worse day by day before you were found, but now he has stabilized. Although he’s not getting any better, we’re still holding out hope. Maybe all he needed was you.”

“How much longer can he survive like . . . this?”

“I can’t say for sure, but maybe a few weeks? His wolf hasn’t been able to heal him, so right now, his body is the same as a human’s. His organs are all still functioning, but if they start to shut down, we won’t be able to stop them.”

The blue moon was my only hope. So long as Xander could hold out a couple more days.

I nodded my thanks to the doctor before he turned to leave the room.

“Just rest for the next couple of days, Luna. We need you and our future Alpha strong and healthy.”

He left the room, leaving me alone with my thoughts.

Kade POV

It took all of my restraint not to kill Alexi as soon as we found him in the woods. It was his rogues who attacked our pack, poisoned my best friend, and stole my Luna. He deserved nothing less than death. But Alaia wanted him alive, and I would respect that.

When we arrived back to the territory, I personally escorted him down to the cells in the packhouse basement. Once he was locked in, I took a moment to satisfy my curiosity. “Alexi, why would you do something like this? Why would you betray your best friend and your pack?”

He scowled at me, seemingly to say that it was none of my business, but then he spoke. “I always got the girl. Maybe that was my problem. I ran through them, and when I was bored, I moved on to the next. My wolf hated it, he wanted us to save ourselves for our mate, but I didn’t care. When I found out that Alaia was my mate, I was ashamed by the way I had behaved all those years. I never wanted her to have to deal with it. So, I rejected her, and as soon as I regretted it and decided to get her back, she already had Xander. He had already moved in and stole her heart without her even knowing. Max was livid, and he absolutely hated me for taking his mate from him. When the challenge didn’t end the way we expected, he snapped and decided that drastic actions were needed.

“My sleeping around caused us to lose our mate. I couldn’t deny that, so I understood. But then I was somehow pushed aside, Max had full control, and his rage fueled his decisions. I couldn’t stop him. I hate that a part of me caused Alaia more pain.”

It was then that I realized why Alaia was so adamant about not hurting him. Alexi did make a few poor choices, but he didn’t want all of this. He was a victim as well. “I’ll do everything I can to help you, Alexi. This, I promise you.”

“You’re a pretty good Beta, Kade. Almost as good as I would have been,” he smirked at me as he went to go lay down on his cot.

“Someone will be down soon to take you for a shower. Dinner should be ready when you get back.” I left Alexi and headed up to Xander’s office to figure out a way to keep my promise.

Alaia POV

For the last two days, I'd sat by Xander's side, only leaving him for short bathroom breaks and naps. Lots and lots of naps.

Being close to him again had revitalized me, and I was finally feeling back to normal. It was true that mated wolves needed to be close to one another to survive. Xander was regaining some of his color, and the dark circles under his eyes were getting better, too. But he still hadn't woken up, and he still couldn't communicate with us. He was no longer in constant excruciating pain, but that wasn't enough.

But I held on to hope, and I'd even felt the baby move a few times. Our baby.

I was sitting in my usual spot at the head of Xander's bed—Matt had gotten a super comfy recliner brought in for me with a ton of extra pillows. It was a little slice of heaven in my otherwise less-than-heavenly world.

I placed one of his hands on my belly and rubbed his hair while I read out loud from one of my favorite books. This had become our daily ritual, and it seemed to bring both me and Xander comfort.

The baby gave a sharp kick, right where Xander's hand was resting, making me gasp. So far, I had only felt small movements, more like flutters, but this was a full-blown kick.

“That's your daddy, little bean. I'm going to do everything in my power to make sure he's here to teach you everything there is to know about being Alpha. We'll watch you grow and learn and shower you with all the love you can handle. He's going to be so happy to meet you.”

Another pair of kicks made me smile. This pup was a fighter, just like me, and it's dad.

We'd be a family soon enough; I hoped.

THIRTY-EIGHT | THE OPERATOR

Chapter 37 - Once Rejected, Twice Desired

Alaia POV

My nerves were going wild as the day went on. Tonight was the blue moon, and our last chance to get Xander back.

Matt had been sitting with me all day; I'm sure trying to distract me and keep me calm.

We were playing a game of Monopoly when Kade came into the room. “How are you feeling, Bean? You ready for tonight?”

“Why? I thought you of all people would be against ‘Bean,’ but you’re just as bad as Matt.”

“What can I say; it suits you. Perfectly.”

I rolled my eyes and smiled inwardly. These two reminded me so much of Aaron that it made me miss home just a little bit less. “Well, to answer your question, I’m feeling a bit restless, but overall I’m alright. I am trying to keep my mind occupied, but it’s a lot easier said than done. Hey! You can help with the distraction. How is Alexi doing?” I knew that Kade had taken it upon himself to look after Alexi until we had time to figure out where to go with him. It made it easier for me to focus on Xander, knowing that there was someone I trusted implicitly to keep Alexi safe.

I hadn’t seen him since that day in the woods, but I knew that Kade would have made sure he was taken care of, per my instructions.

“He’s alright, I guess. He’s been seen by the doctor, and none of his injuries were serious. After he cleaned up and ate a few decent meals, he seemed to get a little bit better. That is actually why I’m here. He’s asked if he could talk to you for a bit. I would bring him up here to you, but I don’t want to upset the pack if they saw him moving through the packhouse. As it stands, they all think that he is behind Xander’s condition and your kidnapping.”

That was a good point, and the last thing I wanted to do was cause any more stress on my pack. “So, you think I should go down to the cells to speak to him?”

“I do. I’ve been talking to Alexi the past few days and, oddly, we’ve bonded. But he needs a friend. I really think he needs Aaron, and you, too.”

“But what about Xander? I can’t leave him all alone. He needs me here. And the blue moon is tonight.”

“I’ll stay with him, Alaia. If anything happens, I’ll link you right away. And you’ve got a few hours until the moon is at its brightest. It’ll be okay,” Matt said.

I thought about it for a minute, then stood up. I had vowed to help Alexi, but so far, I had only been focused on myself and Xander. There was no way I could keep that vow if I didn’t actively work with him and help find our solution. “Okay, let’s get down there. I don’t want to keep him waiting when I don’t have to.”

Kade and I left the room and walked in a comfortable silence down to the basement cells. This was my first time down here, and I was surprised at what I saw.

“Wow, it’s not a dungeon down here, after all.”

“Nah, we keep the dungeons in a secret location far, far away. That way, no one can hear our prisoners’ screams.”

My mouth dropped open in shock. I would have to do something about that. I couldn’t have my pack torturing people!

Kade saw my expression and burst with laughter. “I’m just kidding, Bean. There are no secret dungeons. This is it. We rarely require torture, and it’s only under the most extreme circumstances.”

I guessed I could live with that. For now.

We stopped in front of the last door in the corridor before Kade unlocked and opened it for me. I was happy to see that it was large, clean, and had a window to the outside.

I didn’t want him to feel like a prisoner, even though he technically was.

And Alexi was looking much better, too. He was no longer covered with filth, blood, and bruises. His hair looked like it had been recently cut, and his skin was regaining its natural bronze color. The haunting red of his eyes was totally gone as well—something that I would absolutely not miss. He still had some weight to gain before he was back to normal, but he was well on his way, and that made me so excited to see.

“Hi, Alexi. How are they treating you down here?” I joked.

“Far better than I deserved or would have expected. Kade has been great, too. I’m really thankful for the both of you.”

“We’re just treating you with the decency you deserve, nothing more. So, what’s up?”

He took a long deep breath before he looked me in the eye. “I wanted to ask you a couple of things. First, I wanted to see if you could help me talk to Aaron. Since I’m no longer a member of the pack, I can’t link him. I know that you have powers of communication and just thought that maybe you could like, connect me with him, or something?”

I had never thought of something like that. It would be like one of those old-time switchboard calls with me as the operator. “Uhm, I could try, but I’m still learning, so I don’t know if it will work or not.”

“Cool, whatever you can do will be appreciated.”

I closed my eyes and linked Aaron.

Aaron, are you busy?

Alaia? No, I’ve just left a meeting. What’s up? Is everything alright?

Yeah, everything is cool, I guess. I have a favor to ask you.

You know I'd do anything for you, little sis. What do you need?

I need you to talk to Alexi.

There was silence from Aaron's end, and after a while, I became afraid that he may have disconnected.

Aaron?

Why, Alaia? I'm done with him, and you should be, too.

Because you're lying, you're not done with him. He's your brother in every way imaginable. I know how annoying having a brother can be, but I also know that no matter how angry mine ever made me, I could never be done with him. He needs you, and you need him. Please.

I don't have time for this, Alaia. I have a date with Jordyn tonight, and she will kill me if I am late.

Bullshit, she's always late everywhere. Tonight will be no different. Please, Aaron.

I heard him sigh, and I knew that I had him.

Fine. Ten minutes, Alaia, and I'm not promising anything.

Okay, hold on. I'm going to see if I can somehow link the two of you together. Give me a minute, okay?

Fine.

I opened my eyes and smiled at Alexi. "He's willing to give you ten minutes!" I was so excited. I just wanted both of them to be happy, and they needed each other for that to happen.

Alexi was beaming at me when he asked, "So, how does this work?"

I had no idea.

Take his hand, doll. Take his hand and concentrate on him, and have him do the same. Then once you've established the link, you can do the same with Aaron.

Will I have to stay connected to them both the whole time?

No, just connect them, but don't let go of Alexi's hands, or he'll lose the link.

Got it, thanks, Amethyst.

I filled Alexi in, then placed my hands in his as we both closed our eyes and focused on one another.

After about a minute, I heard him in my head. Alaia, can you hear me?

Yep! Now let me get Aaron over.

I then switched over and focused on Aaron.

Aaron, have you ditched me yet?

I was getting close. Are you ready now?

Yes. I'll connect the two of you; then I'll fall off. Whatever you guys discuss will just be between the two of you. Okay?

Okay. And thank you, Alaia. Really.

No problem.

I concentrated on the guys, and soon I had a solid mindlink flowing between the three of us.

I closed off my mind to them and opened my eyes to see Alexi's clouded over. The link between him and Aaron was active. I had done it!

I sat on the bed, holding Alexi's hands for what seemed like forever before I felt him give me a small squeeze.

Looking up, I saw that his eyes were back to their stormy gray.

"How did it go?"

"So good, Alaia. I've missed him so much, and it was great to talk to him without all the anger. It was almost like it was before all this started."

"That's awesome. I can't believe I was able to do that, but it was very cool. I'm happy I could help you two out. Maybe you guys can talk face-to-face soon?"

"Maybe. But to do that, I would need your help with one more thing."

"Okay, and what's that?"

"I need you to help me kill my wolf."

After my talk with Alexi, Kade came back to escort me back to my and Xander's room.

I told him about what had happened and asked for his advice.

“Sorry, but I don't have any advice to offer here. It's clear that Max is unstable and dangerous, but I don't know if it's even possible to kill him without harming Alexi.”

“He thinks it's the only way that he can ever move past all that has happened. But he'll never be able to shift again or find another mate. He'd be losing so much; too much.”

“It's really up to him to decide how much is too much, Bean. If this is what he feels is the right move, you just need to support him in it. So, he won't be able to shift, but he'll live his life without worrying if Max will somehow come out and hurt someone. And, regarding the mate thing, there is no guarantee he has a second-chance mate out there, anyway. They are actually very rare, and what happened in your case was unheard of. But that doesn't mean he can't find love the human way. He still has a chance to be happy without his wolf.”

Everything Kade had said was right. This was Alexi's choice, and as his friend, I'd support him. We just had to figure out if it was even possible. “Kade, who knew you were the old wise one of the group?”

“I'm just full of surprises. You don't know the half of it.”

Reaching the room, I found Matt sitting in the corner reading.

“Hey Matt, did the doctor come by while I was gone?”

“Yeah, still no changes. No better, no worse.”

“Okay, so how exactly should we do this?”

“I'm guessing we should move his bed a bit so that it's in front of the window. That will allow the moonlight to shine down on the two of you. I don't know what happens after that; I guess your wolf would have to guide you.”

“Alright. Well, let's get everything set, and we'll take it from there.”

The guys carefully rearranged the room a bit to get Xander in the best spot possible.

I wished we could take him outside to enjoy the night fully, but that was out of the question. The wide-open window would have to suffice.

No one but Kade, Matt, and the elders knew about our plan. I didn't want to get the pack's hopes up in case it didn't work, and I also didn't think I could handle the pressure of having all of their

expectations riding on me. Attempting to save the life of the father of my unborn child was stressful enough on its own.

I was pacing the floor and furiously chewing on my lip.

“Bean, chill out. All your pacing is making me nervous!” Matt joked.

“I can’t. I have to keep moving, or I’ll drive myself crazy worrying about the ‘what-ifs.’”

“Well, lucky you, the time for waiting is over. The moon is just about at its brightest.”

My stomach dipped, then flipped, and I felt like fainting. I’d never been this nervous in my life; so much was riding on the next few minutes. I walked over to the bed and sat next to Xander’s resting figure. He looked so peaceful, utterly different from the picture I had of him the night of my Luna ceremony.

And I was thankful for that small gift. If I did lose Xander, my last memories would be of him comfortable and safe, not lying on the ground in the middle of a battle fighting for breath.

Amethyst, are you ready for this?

I am. Don’t worry, all you have to do is mark him. Let the moon and your powers take it from there.

Okay. I can do this.

I looked out of the large window and up at the moon. It didn’t look any different from any other full moon, but sitting in its glow did feel more powerful.

Kade and Matt backed away a bit to not crowd me and make me any more nervous. And I was thankful for that.

I said a silent prayer to the Goddess above that she would spare my mate and send him back to his family. I steadied my breathing and rubbed my hand idly across Xander’s cheek, waiting for my queue. Instinct told me that I would know the exact moment and that I would feel it. And so, I waited. I felt my body start to tingle all over, starting at my chest and radiating down to my fingers and toes.

“Bean, your eyes have gone purple. I think it’s working,” I heard Matt whisper from the corner.

When the tingling intensified, almost like small electric shocks, I gently turned Xander’s head, revealing his neck. A bright burst of hazy, purple light exploded behind my eyes, and I sunk my canines into Xander’s marking spot. I didn’t know how long I was supposed to stay latched on, but something told me not to let go yet.

Then it began. Amethyst began the melody, and I joined in with her. Gusts of wind swirled into the room and circled Xander and me. He began to shake and convulse underneath me, and his heart monitor beeped like crazy, but I held on, afraid that breaking the link too soon would ruin everything. Time seemed to slow down, and what lasted only thirty seconds seemed like hours.

The wind finally died down as Amethyst, and I finished our duet. I retracted my teeth, then licked his neck to clear the blood and seal the punctures. I left my head in the crook of his neck for a few moments, inhaling his scent. This could be one of the last times I could get to do this, and I was afraid of the possibility the marking had not worked.

Finally, I leaned back and looked down into Xander's face.

Nothing.

He looked exactly the same as he had before we started.

Then I heard the worst sound of my life. His heart monitor flatlined. Xander's heart had stopped. I had lost him.

THIRTY-NINE | DID YOU MISS ME?

Chapter 38 - Once Rejected, Twice Desired

For the last three weeks or so, I'd been floating in nothingness. I knew that my body was in a vegetative state and that I lost the ability to talk and mindlink, but the fact that I was in an indefinite limbo confused me. Was I dead? I remembered being poisoned and looking up into Alaia's tear-stained face before she was taken. But I didn't remember anything after that.

I haven't been able to communicate with Alastair, either. So, I must be dead.

But since when was the afterlife just a void?

Question after question passed through my mind, but I had answers to none of them.

I knew that Alaia would get past this, that she was strong and capable. And she had Kade and Matt to help her lead. My pack would be okay. I'd never see her again, run my fingers through her long curly hair, or feel her tiny body underneath mine. That thought sent a shock of pain right through to my chest. She had become my entire universe, and not seeing her again shattered me.

I felt the shock hit me again, and again, and again.

It was like my body was suddenly realizing the finality of my situation, and it was giving up the fight. My heart began beating out of control, then it stopped, and everything went silent.

It was all over, and I could move on. I prayed that I would be able to see Alaia once I left this place. I just wanted one last picture of her smiling face. I relaxed and held on to that hope. I'd find a way to see her again.

Then I let go, as the sweet smell of caramel filled my senses.

Matt POV

I stood back and watched as Alaia sobbed over Xander's still body.

I couldn't believe we hadn't been able to save him. I couldn't believe it was over. It had been a little more than a minute since his heart monitor had flatlined. The sound was driving me crazy, so I walked over to turn it off. Alaia deserved a few final minutes of peace with him.

When I stopped beside her, Alaia slowly lifted herself off Xander's chest and placed her forehead against his. She reached out and grabbed my hand and held it tight.

Kade went to her other side, and she reached out for him as well.

She began to hum her song. She has just lost her mate, but she was trying to offer us comfort. She was thinking of us when she had just lost one half of her soul.

She was truly amazing.

Beep . . .

I closed my eyes as a tear fell, and I felt the burden of grief peeling back.

Beep . . .

He would never meet his child; he would have been an amazing father.

Beep . . . Beep . . . Beep . . .

I opened my eyes and looked at the heart monitor I had forgotten to turn off.

It was showing peaks and valleys—Xander's heart was beating.

I clamped onto Alaia's hand. "Bean, look," I whispered to her.

"I can't right now, Matt. Just give me a minute, please."

I frantically mindlinked Kade. Kade! The heart monitor. Look at it!

What's the poi— Oh, shit.

I think she did it, man. He's still alive.

“Luna?” Hearing Kade address her formally made Alaia sit up and look at him, confused. “Listen.”

Beep . . . Beep . . . Beep . . .

When she finally registered what she was hearing, she gasped and jumped back. “He's alive?”

“He's alive, Bean,” I added.

She let go of our hands and reached down to lightly touch Xander's cheek. As soon as her fingers made contact with him, I saw his eyelids flutter. That was the most movement we had seen in three weeks, and I almost jumped for joy. She then leaned down and planted soft kisses all over his face and ended at his fresh mark.

When the beeping of his monitor sped up, I was afraid that we were losing him again. Was it just false hope?

My question was answered when his eyelids fluttered again, before opening completely.

He was finally awake.

Alaia POV

I felt like I was drowning: my ears were ringing, my lungs were burning, and my heart was pounding. What was I going to do? How would I do this without him?

I felt Matt squeeze my hand, a small offering of support during the worst time of my life.

“Bean, look,” I heard him say.

“I can't right now, Matt. Just give me a minute, please.”

I didn't want to move. It would make it all too real. Maybe if I just stayed here with my head rested against his, everything would be okay.

“Luna?”

Why are they using my title at a time like this? I picked up my head and looked at Kade.

“Listen.”

Beep . . . Beep . . . Beep . . .

Wait, that beeping. His heart is beating. He’s not gone! I jumped up in shock. Had I done it? I just had to touch him, so I traced my fingertips over his cheek and felt that all too familiar spark, as strong as it used to be. My love. He was alive. I kissed all over his perfect face and felt him twitch against my lips. Tears ran down my face as I placed a long kiss on his mark—my mark.

I felt his pulse speed up, and the feeling was so incredible I didn’t want to move. I wanted to feel this forever. But then I felt something far better. He lifted his hand and rested it on the back of my head.

I bawled my eyes out. I thought I’d never feel Xander’s touch again, and now his hand was rested on my head.

“Hey, little one. Did you miss me?”

I went into a full-blown ugly cry this time. I wrapped my arms as tightly as I could around him and let all my emotions out. The hormones from being pregnant didn’t help the situation either.

“Shh, baby. It’s okay. I’m here now.”

I leaned back and looked into his crystal blue eyes, eyes I thought I’d never see again. I placed my hands on his cheeks and crashed my lips down on his. Never had I needed to kiss him more than I did at that moment.

Xander wrapped his arms around my waist and pulled me down on top of him. My chest was pressed against his until there was no space left between us.

Warm sparks covered my entire body, and I felt fully alive for the first time in weeks. And to further remind me of just how alive I was, the baby let off a few powerful kicks, making me jump. “Oww, shit!”

“Are you okay, Little One? Did I hurt you?”

He didn’t know about the baby yet. I was actually going to get to share this moment with him.

“Yes, you did hurt me. But just a bit.”

Xander’s eyes widened as he sat up and started to look me over.

“Where, baby? Show me . . .”

I picked up one of his hands and lightly placed it on my stomach.

Feeling its daddy's presence, the little bean kicked again, just a bit harder.

Xander looked confused for a second before realization crossed his face. His eyes filled with tears when he finally asked, "Was that what I hope it was? Did we actually do it?"

"I think it's more accurate to say that you did it. You were determined to put a pup in me, and you succeeded."

"We're having a pup? How far along?"

"Almost eight weeks, so three months left to go."

Xander grabbed me again and crushed me in a hug, careful to avoid my stomach. He then pulled back and cupped my face. "I never thought I could be any more in love with you until now. You're giving me a child; I can't ever thank you enough for that."

"The feeling is mutual, handsome."

I heard Kade clear his throat behind me, causing me to remember he and Matt were still in the room. I had completely forgotten about them. "Xander, you have no idea how good it is to see you awake. As soon as you're released, I will gladly give you your job and office back. I'd much rather be a lazy, but good looking Beta."

The guys laughed at that; it was music to my ears. These three meant so much to me, and seeing them smile again was everything.

"Well, the first thing on my to-do list once I get out of here is to find whoever is responsible for all this and rip them apart." Xander's eyes flashed black, and I could tell there was a storm brewing inside of him.

Kade, Matt, and I exchanged a few nervous glances, which made Xander curious.

He raised an eyebrow before asking, "Do you three have anything you'd like to share with me?"

"Well . . . a lot has happened since the ceremony," I started.

"Luckily, we've got plenty of time, and I'm all ears, so let's have it."

Kade, being the Beta, took the lead. He was in charge while Xander was sick, so it was now his job to debrief him on all that had happened.

"So, let's start at the beginning . . ."

Xander POV

It was fucking Alexi the whole time, and now they had him sitting in my house, eating my food, breathing my fucking air? I didn't buy any of the 'it wasn't me, it was my wolf bullshit.' He knew what he was doing from the very start, from rejection to the challenge to the kidnapping.

And then he banded the rogues together—no one had ever done some shit like that—and they wanted me to show him mercy.

I took a deep breath before I addressed the room. “Do the three of you understand that because of Alexi, I almost lost the chance to meet my child? I would have never gotten the opportunity to marry the love of my life. All because of shit he set into motion. And now you want me to forgive and forget?”

“It wasn't the three of us, Xander; it was me who made this decision. You don't know him the way I do, the way Aaron does. Alexi would never do something like this. Not when he's in his right mind. He deserves—”

“He deserves for me to break every bone in his fucking body!” I roared.

Alaia jumped back at my outburst, causing Kade and Matt to step in front of her protectively.

On the one hand, I respected and appreciated their instinct to shield their Luna, but on the other hand, they felt the need to shield her from me.

“Do you two really think I'd ever do anything to hurt her? Seriously?” I growled.

“Xander, calm down, man. You're understandably pissed off, but you need to chill the fuck out,” Kade said.

How dare he tell me what I needed to do. I saw red. “Kade, don't forget your place or who you are talking to!”

He gave a small nod of submission, but never removed himself from between Alaia and my fury.

“Xander, please. Just relax a bit. Neither you nor Alaia should be stressing like this right now. This isn't good for the pup,” Matt soothed.

My pup. I had to calm down. It would kill me if my anger caused my child or my mate any harm. “You're right, Matt. I apologize.”

Kade and Matt relaxed a bit but didn't completely let go of the protective stance they held in front of Alaia.

“You know, if you'd allow me my mate, I'm sure I'd calm right down,” I said with a smirk.

That was all they needed to hear to let down their guard. The guys stepped aside, and Alaia took a few timid steps toward me.

Seeing her, even the slightest bit afraid of me, crushed me. I would never do anything to hurt her. I took her hand and gently pulled her into my lap. She snuggled into my chest, and I buried my face in her hair. “I’m so sorry, little one. Please forgive me, baby,” I pleaded.

“Of course I forgive you, Xander. I know you’d never hurt me. I guess the last few weeks has made me a bit skittish.”

I rubbed my hand over her bump to clear the seething hate I felt for Alexi and his wolf. They held Alaia hostage, under conditions that were so poor she could have had a miscarriage. And I couldn’t protect her. I think that’s what angered me the most. “You’ll have to give me time, little one. Alexi and I haven’t had the best relationship. From the start, he was trying to take you from me, and he almost succeeded this time. Just give me time to digest it all, okay?”

“Well, I’ve got one more bit of info to share that may help take your mind off Alexi for a while,” Kade said.

He had his ‘I’ve got something that I know you want to hear’ look on his face, and it made me want to punch him.

“Cut the shit, Kade. What is it?”

“Maximus had an accomplice. Two, actually, a pair of sisters.”

“And?”

“Alexi was only coherent for a short period, but while he was, he saw someone he described as ‘a fake ass blonde, with the body of a brick wall.’”

I was getting annoyed with Kade’s games, and I could see my annoyance was just pumping him up. “Who. Was. It?”

“Fran-fucking-cesca.”

Alaia shot up at hearing the name and pasted a scowl on her adorable face.

“Francesca? Really? Did she really hate me that much?”

“I guess we will just have to wait and see. It looks like Alexi has gotten himself a stay of execution for the time being. I have got other matters to attend to. Matt, use that pretty boy charm of yours and get Francesca to the packhouse tomorrow. Let’s see if we can get her to talk.”

Chapter 39 - Once Rejected, Twice Desired

Xander POV

I had made myself a promise that if Francesca ever did anything to hurt Alaia again, I would peel her flesh from her bones. It looked like it would soon be time to make good on that promise.

After Matt and Kade finished filling me in on what had happened while I was in the coma, the doctor came in and checked me over. Besides being a bit weak, I was otherwise perfectly healthy, which absolutely shocked him. Hearing how close to death I was really showed me just how powerful and incredible my little mate was.

I made a call to my mom, letting her know that I was all right and that I would see her tomorrow. I didn't want any more interruptions tonight, and I knew that if I didn't make that call, she'd be camped out at my bedside until I was released.

It was just me and my little one now, making me realize how much I had missed our alone time. I scooted over in my bed and pulled Alaia in to lay in front of me. Her little body molded to mine perfectly; she was home for me.

My hand came around to rest on her belly when I asked, "Have you told anyone about the pregnancy yet?"

"No, just Aaron, Kade, and Matt right now. We didn't know what the outcome would be with you, and it just didn't seem appropriate to announce something like this to the pack without you."

"That was a possibility, though, wasn't it? Having to make the announcement on your own?"

"It was. But it was one I chose to ignore. I didn't want to celebrate a new life when we didn't know if you would be able to keep yours. It just seemed selfish."

"There is nothing selfish about you, Alaia. You are the most generous person I've ever known. Matt told me what you did for them when you guys thought I was gone. If you were selfish, you wouldn't have bothered with trying to take the pain from them, but you did. You're an angel, and you deserve all the happiness in the world."

Alaia chuckled, then said, "When you put it that way, maybe I will announce the pregnancy soon."

“My mom is going to go insane when she finds out. You thought she was intense before? She’s been begging me to give her a grandpup since I turned eighteen!”

I felt Alaia shiver, which made me laugh.

“Don’t worry, little one. I’ll protect you.” I leaned down, and after pulling her hair away from her shoulder and neck, I placed a kiss on her mark.

I had missed the feeling of her body reacting to mine, and it instantly filled me with lust and need. My tongue began to lick circles around her neck, in between small bites and sucking.

I heard her let out a soft moan that pushed me over the edge.

I spun her around to face me and engulfed her mouth in a searing kiss. I bit down on her lower lip; then, when her lips parted at the sensation, I explored every corner of her delicious little mouth. She was the sweetest candy, and I was addicted. I could never have enough of her, no matter how hard I tried.

She finally pushed back for a much-needed breath.

The sight of her chest rising and falling as she filled her lungs made my mouth water more. I reached down and ripped her thin T-shirt off her body, leaving her beautiful round breasts spilling out of her bra and exposed to me. I brought my hands up and cupped each one. “They are bigger and heavier,” I said, almost in awe.

“Yes, and a bit sore today, so be a little careful with them, okay?”

Gently, I reached behind her and undid the clasps of her bra before removing it and throwing it to the ground. My eyes traveled lower to her tiny bump; it was so perfect. I placed kisses along her neck and collar bone, and down to each breast, gently sucking and teasing her sensitive nipples before my lips moved farther south to land on her belly. I kissed every square inch of that golden caramel skin that would soon be stretched tight to hold the life I had placed there. I put my ear to her skin and just listened. With my amplified hearing, I hoped I could hear my pup moving around in there.

Instead, I felt a small thump right at my cheekbone. I couldn’t help but look up at Alaia and smile. This was the happiest moment of my life.

“You’re invading little bean’s space. That was their gentle way of letting you know.”

“Little bean?”

She shrugged a shoulder.

“Matt called the baby that the day they found me. It just kinda stuck.”

I chuckled at that, then got back to the business at hand. I ran my hands up and down Alaia's body, just wanting to feel her warm, soft skin. When I reached her hips, I hooked my fingers into the waistband of her pants before slowly dragging them off. I sat back and drank her all in; to call her perfect wouldn't do justice to the sight before me. She was everything I had ever wanted and more. I brought my face to her neck again and hovered my lips above her mark, taking a long deep breath.

At the same time, she reached up and ran her fingers across my mark, sending a bolt of pleasure straight to my already throbbing dick. "I've marked you; now I can tease you just as bad as you can tease me, Daddy."

I had never wanted or needed her more. I stood by the bed and stripped off all my clothes. I wanted her bare body against mine with nothing in between.

Before I could get back to the bed, though, Alaia had stood up and placed her small hand on my chest, pushing me back. "Sit," she commanded.

I raised an eyebrow at her. I had always been the one in control, and it looked like she was trying to take the reins here.

She returned the look and even folded her arms across her chest to look more intimidating. She actually looked adorable, but I wouldn't tell her that.

I took the few steps back before I sat in the chair she directed me to.

She then walked over and stood between my legs. "You've just woken up from a three-week-long coma. There will be no strenuous activity for you tonight." Before I could object, she had wrapped her hand around the head of my dick and began to tug lightly.

I let my head fall back against the chair as euphoria spread within me.

"Let me take care of you, okay, Daddy?" she whispered in my ear before flicking her tongue over my mark. She didn't wait for me to respond. She swiftly got down on her knees and took me down her warm tight throat.

"Ahh, shit baby . . ."

She began to take long, slow strokes up and down my dick, flicking out her tongue to rub the underside while massaging and playing with my balls. With her other hand, she wrapped her fingers as far around the shaft as she could and began to squeeze and twist, giving every part of my member the attention it craved.

She was driving me insane, and I loved it. I took the opportunity to pull her hair back so I could watch her work. With one hand, I held a firm grip on her curls, while the other was dug into the arm of the chair.

Tears were streaming down her face, mixing with the saliva flowing from her mouth and pooling at my crotch. She picked up her pace and began to hollow out her cheeks, creating an almost vice-like sensation on my shaft.

“Baby, slow down . . . you’re going to make me cum.”

But she didn’t. She sped up even more, taking as much of me as possible down her throat.

The feeling of the head of my dick brushing past that little ball at the back of her throat was enough to make me erupt. I held on to her head with both hands as my body spasmed and I pumped spurt after spurt of my seed into her hungry, waiting mouth.

Alaia never missed a beat; she continued to suck and lick and swallow everything I fed her without spilling a drop. When she had finally emptied me out, she slowly pulled me from her mouth, then used her tongue to clean me up. She stood between my legs and pulled her hair up before placing it in a bun, all while licking those plump, pink lips of hers.

Watching the way her body moved, doing just the most basic tasks made me hard all over again.

This was likely what she wanted because she proceeded to place one knee on either side of my hips and straddle me.

Our bodies were like magnets, instantly drawn to one another.

She held herself up and gently rotated her hips, causing the tip of my dick to slide across her soaking slit.

There was nothing I wanted more than to pull her down and fill her up, but this was her show, and she was doing things her way. I placed my hands on her smooth hips, waiting for her next move.

“Daddy?”

“Yes, little one?”

“Keep your hands on the arms of the chair, understand? If you move, then you will be punished.”

Alaia was looking me right in the eye when she said this; she was taking the dom role, and I had to admit that I was loving seeing her like this.

I put my hands where she told me and said, “Yes, ma’am.”

As soon as the words left my mouth, she slammed herself down on my lap, ripping a growl of pleasure from me. “Fuuucckkk!”

“Do. Not. Move.” She punctuated each word with a roll and drop of her hips. Alaia placed her hands on my chest for leverage and began to move so torturously slowly that I didn’t know if I wasn’t being punished already.

My knuckles were white from the grip I held on the chair. I shut my eyes and let my head fall back and roll. Alaia was killing me.

She raised a hand and grabbed a handful of my hair, then pulled my head up.

“Eyes open, Daddy. Look at me. Do not close them.”

I had taught her well. A little too well, but I did as she said.

My eyes locked onto her golden-brown orbs while she continued to grind and rotate against me. “You’re so beautiful when you’re not in control, Daddy.” She then began to lift herself higher and drop back down harder and faster, taking full deep strokes each and every time. This goddess then leaned back, propping her hands on my knees, making her breasts jut out toward me, begging for my attention.

She told me I couldn’t move my hands, but she didn’t say anything about the rest of me. I leaned forward and bit down on a deliciously swollen and perky nipple.

She hissed at the contact, and when I switched to gently sucking, I felt her clench down then drown my dick with more of her sweet, sweet nectar.

Two could play this game, little one. The sound of skin slapping against skin, along with her moans, filled the room and made my dick grow harder. I released her nipple and sat back, taking in the view in front of me.

I could see she was getting close to reaching her own climax, and took the opportunity to lift my hips from the chair, matching her thrust for thrust.

When she would grind her hips, I rolled mine. As she prepared to slide down my dick, I’d thrust, meeting her halfway and increasing the pleasure tenfold.

“D-Daddy . . . you are being . . . so, so bad . . . I said . . . ahh mhmm!”

She was losing at her own game, and I loved watching her fall apart.

She began frantically bouncing now. Her hands were up on her head again, pushing her breasts into my face.

Fuck the rules! I let go of the chair, took a firm grip on her hips, and slammed her down into me.

Alaia had to lean over and wrap her arms around my neck for support.

My hips were moving at an inhuman speed, making me drunk off the feeling.

Alaia dripped all down her thighs and soaked both me and the chair underneath her.

Her lotus began to spasm and tighten, and I knew just what needed to be done to push her over. I reached down between our slick bodies and pinched onto her blood-filled clit.

She screamed with pleasure, then out of nowhere, sunk her teeth into my mark.

My orgasm tore through my entire body so fast, and hard it sucked the air from my lungs. All of my muscles spasmed at the same time, leaving me crippled in euphoria. White spots clouded my vision as I dumped load after load of my sticky white fluids inside her. After what seemed like forever, the orgasm finally crested before fading away. My vision began to clear, and I took a much-needed deep breath.

Alaia was slumped against my chest, covered in beads of sweat. I pulled her head back so I could look at her. She had that after sex glow that made me want to lick her clean then start all over again.

“You broke the rules, so I’m pretty sure I won that round,” she breathlessly said to me.

I wrapped my arms around her back and stood up. Alaia’s legs came around my waist as I carried her a few steps forward. I placed her on her feet, then spun her around and bent her over the bed.

“Feet spread, shoulder-width apart. Keep your legs straight and hands on the bed. Understand, little one?”

She turned to look over her shoulder and looked me straight in the eye. “Yes, sir.”

As I took a firm grip on her hips and positioned myself at her juicy, swollen entrance, I thought to myself, let’s see who’s going to win this round.

FORTY-ONE | HORMONES

Chapter 40 - Once Rejected, Twice Desired

Xander POV

Waking up with Alaia in my arms again was bliss. Despite her decree that there would be no strenuous activity, she completely wore me out. I decided to blame it on the three-week coma.

I brushed a stray hair from her forehead and looked down at her sleeping form.

Her mouth was parted just a bit, making me want to suckle on her petal-soft lips. She had these long, thick eyelashes I just had to reach out and touch. I ran the tip of my finger along the seam of her eye, causing her nose to twitch. She was so damn adorable without even knowing or trying. When I couldn't hold myself back anymore, I leaned down and placed a soft kiss on each of her eyes, then her nose.

She snuggled into her pillow a little more as a small smile played across her face.

As carefully as I could, I pulled my arm from under her head and eased out of bed. I had always been more of a morning person, while my little one would sleep until noon if we let her.

I decided to take a quick shower before I linked Kade and Matt.

Rise and shine, gentlemen. It's time for a friendly round of sparring or two.

What the fuck, Xan?! It's not even 6:00 AM, and I haven't had a decent night's sleep in weeks.

It sounds like you're up first, Kade. Thanks for volunteering.

Ugh! I'm not volunteering for shit. I'm going back to bed. I can kick your ass later after the sun is up.

Xander, we'll be at the training grounds in ten minutes.

Perfect. See you soon, Matt. And Kade, make sure you brush your teeth before you leave your room. I don't want to have to deal with your morning breath today.

I walked over to the small table beside the bed and left Alaia a quick note, letting her know where I was going. It was better than me waking her up. Number one: she hates having her sleep interrupted. And number two: she wouldn't be too happy about me going out training less than twenty-four hours after waking up. But I needed to get my strength back. As Alpha, I had no room for weakness. I had a pack to lead.

While walking through the halls, I passed a few omegas who were up cleaning or heading to the kitchen to prepare breakfast. I stopped one of the kitchen workers before she disappeared around the corner. "Sarah?"

"Yes, Alpha?"

"Please ask Mrs. Dyson to prepare the Luna her favorite pancakes this morning. If her breakfast could be ready at 8:00, that would be perfect. We'll eat in the dining hall today."

“Of course, Alpha. It’s good to have you back with us. You gave us all a scare for a while there.”

“Thank you, Sarah, I’m happy to be back.”

She smiled before she turned and continued to the kitchen, and I headed out the back door to the training grounds.

It felt terrific being outside again and feeling the cool morning breeze on my face. I had always been a lover of the outdoors, and after three weeks inside, this was long overdue.

Hey, Alastair. How about a run a little later on?

Will our mate be running with us?

She’s carrying a pup, so no. She will not be running with us.

Boring. But fine. I do need to stretch my muscles.

You and me both. I’m thinking a little after lunch I’ll let you out for a while. Now it’s time for me to kick Kade and Matt’s asses in this sparring session.

I stopped at the sparring circle and began a series of quick stretches. My muscles were tight and sore and really needed the workout.

A few minutes later, the guys slowly walked over the hill and into view.

Kade looked like he’d just been run over, twice, while Matt was just as fresh-faced as usual.

“Why do we have to be up before the sun? Sparring before dawn should be illegal,” Kade grumbled at me.

“Stop bitching, Kade. I’ve just come out of a coma, in case you forgot, and I need to get back at it. How do you expect to give my job back to me if I’m too weak to do it?”

He looked me up and down before a smile broke out on his face. “Ohh, I see now. Bean wore you out last night, and now you feel like you need to redeem yourself. By sparring. With us. Before fucking dawn!”

I wanted to deny it, but I couldn’t. The truth was the truth, and if I couldn’t share it with my closest friends, then who could I share it with? “You’re a dick, man. It’s got to be the hormones, right? Shit, I don’t know, but she was insatiable, and I had to struggle to keep up. Luckily, she finally passed out before I tapped out.”

Clearly, I was a comedian now, because both of these assholes were bent over holding their stomachs laughing at me.

“I’m glad this is all so funny for you. In the ring, now. Both of you.” I stripped off my shirt and walked to the middle of the ring, taking an offensive stance.

Kade soon followed and stood right in front of me.

“You sure about this, man? We wouldn’t want you to have to tap out on us.”

As soon as the words left his mouth, my fist connected with it.

“Fuck!”

“Get in position, now!”

Kade removed his shirt and crouched down, preparing for my next move. “You split my fucking lip, Xander.”

“And you’re bitching again. Matt, we ain’t got all day. Get your ass over here.”

Matt finally entered the ring and took his stance.

“Do not go easy on me. Give me everything you’ve got. Understood?”

I didn’t even realize that I had used my alpha tone on them until they responded with, “Yes, Alpha,” in unison.

“Alright, let’s get started . . .”

Alaia POV

I woke up and stretched my tired muscles, still sore from last night’s activities. When I realized I was in bed alone, I opened my eyes and looked around the room. Xander wasn’t here. That was strange. I wanted to get up and find him, but little bean had other plans. We needed to go pee. Now.

I decided that I’d take a quick shower while I was in the bathroom before getting dressed to find my missing mate.

When I finally came out, I saw his note on the bedside table.

Good morning, little one,

I've gone out for a little training with the guys this morning, but I should be back before breakfast. Meet me in the dining room.

XOXO Xander

At the mention of breakfast, my stomach rumbled, and I was hit with a wave of nausea. "I get it, you're hungry, too. Just give me a few minutes, and I'll get us some food," I said while rubbing my belly.

I dressed in a loose-fitted shirt and yoga pants before heading out to the dining room. When I arrived, I found piles of my favorite strawberries and cream pancakes, scrambled eggs, juicy sausages, bacon, fresh fruit, and yogurt. "This is heaven. This is absolutely my own personal heaven," I moaned.

Mrs. Dyson walked over to me with a glass of fresh orange juice and passed it over.

I took a sip, letting its crisp and tangy sweetness wash my nausea away.

"How are you this morning, Luna?"

"I'm great. I'm starving, but still great."

She laughed and began plating my breakfast for me. When she was done, she set it down in front of me. "I'll be making blueberry muffins a little later, Luna. Feel free to stop by to get one whenever you are free."

"Yes!" I squeaked with joy. Food always managed to excite me, and I wasn't afraid to show it. "Thank you so much, Mrs. Dyson. This all looks amazing."

"You're very welcome, Luna. Enjoy."

Just as I was beginning to cut into my pancakes, the guys staggered into the room, looking like they just walked off the battlefield.

I jumped to my feet and ran over to them.

Each one looked beaten to a pulp. They were covered in dirt and blood and sweat.

Panic instantly took over. "Xander? What happened? Why are you guys bleeding? Were we attacked again?"

I looked over at Matt, whose left eye was beginning to swell shut. Kade's lip was split open and swollen as well. Xander was covered head to toe in bruises, scrapes, and cuts. He looked like whatever had happened; he had suffered the brunt of it.

"We're alright, bean," Matt said as he winced. "We were just sparring."

Maybe it was the hormones taking over, or perhaps I was just hungry, but I was absolutely livid. “Wait. I couldn’t have heard you right. You did this to each other? Why would you do something so stupid? There are punching bags in the gym, damn it. Why would you use your fucking faces?”

They were shocked to see my reaction, and I was as well. But I was already deep into my tirade, so, oh well.

I walked over to Matt and looked up at him while poking him in his chest. “Whose idea was this?”

His eyes went wide, and he looked away from my face. He really didn’t want to tell me, but I didn’t care.

“Matt, tell me. Now.”

“Come on, bean. Don’t do this to me.”

“Who, Matt?”

His back slumped before he let out a long sigh. “It was Alpha.”

I shot Xander a fiery glance before looking back at Matt.

“Thank you, now sit.”

He immediately sat down, which gave me a better view of his grossly swollen eye.

“You guys are absolute idiots.” I placed my hands on Matt’s cheeks and began to hum.

I heard Xander growl behind me, causing me to open an eye and glare over at him. “Oh, don’t you even start with that shit, Mr. Alpha. I wouldn’t have to do this if you hadn’t decided to start an early morning fight club. You and Kade sit, too, I’ll be with you shortly.” I pointed to two other chairs at the table before I turned my attention back to Matt.

When he was back to his usual, pretty self, I stepped back. “Now eat.”

“Yes, Luna,” he replied before piling food on his plate.

I then moved over to Kade.

“Luna, this really isn’t necessary. I’ll be healed by the end of the day. Don’t waste your powers on me.”

“Do you honestly think I want to see my boys looking like shit all day?”

The question was rhetorical, but I still waited for him to answer.

“No, Luna.”

“Exactly. Now shut up and sit still.”

When I finished with him, I pointed to the food on the table and raised an eyebrow.

He quickly began to fix himself a plate.

I saved Xander for last. I turned to him and sat down in his lap. I grabbed his face and turned it right and left, looking over his injuries. “I can’t believe you three.”

“And I can’t believe Matt ratted me out to you.”

I pressed a finger on an oozing cut over his cheekbone.

“Fuck, Alaia! That shit hurts!”

“It was supposed to hurt. And I’m Matt’s best friend and Luna; he had no choice. And you just woke up from a coma. Last night! What in the hell is wrong with you?”

“I have to fight Alaia; I’m an alpha. I don’t have time to sit back and recuperate. I have to push myself back to the top.”

“You don’t Xander, not like this.” I cupped his face, then leaned down and pressed my lips against his before starting my melody. Once he was perfect again, I bent over the table and fixed his plate before sitting it in front of him and standing to return to my own breakfast. “If you guys ever do this again, I’ll kick your asses myself.”

Just then, Katherine walked into the room and stopped by Xander’s chair. “Alaia, dear. That was the best thing I’ve ever witnessed. I have never seen anyone handle these three so flawlessly. This pack couldn’t be in better hands.”

I saw an omega peek her head in from the kitchen before jerking back when she realized that she had been caught. She then laughed with another unseen woman before I heard, “Our Luna is a total badass.”

“Thank you, Katherine. I won’t have anyone bloodying up my guys unless it’s me. Otherwise, there will be hell to pay.”