

## Chapter 7 - Once Rejected, Twice Desired

Aaron POV

It was about an hour into the party, and I hadn't seen the birthday girl yet. If anyone knew where she was, it would be Jordyn, so I walked over and asked. "Hey, babe. Have you seen Alaia?"

She scrunched her nose in thought before replying. "No, not since we got dressed together. Do you want me to go look for her?"

"No. I can find her. We're twins remember; she can't hide from me." I gave her a quick kiss before I headed into the house to start the search. When I reached her room, I could feel something wasn't right. I knocked on the door, but it was just silence on the other side. But something was telling me this was where she was. "Alaia, I know you're in there, so open the door, please."

Still, I got no reply. I was getting more and more worried, so I pulled out my emergency key and put it in the lock. As I twisted the knob and tried to open the door, I felt resistance on the other side. What the hell? I applied gentle pressure and slowly widened the crack enough for me to squeeze through.

As soon as I stepped in, my heart stopped. I looked down to see my beautiful sister curled up on the floor.

She'd spent so much time straightening her hair, but now it'd began to matt and curl around her face, soaked with her tears.

I bent down and asked, "Alaia, what happened? Why are you lying on the floor?"

When she looked up into my eyes, my heart broke. My sister was hurting, and I didn't know why. I did the first thing I could think of and scooped her up into my arms. As I began to walk her to her bed carefully, I heard her whisper, "He rejected me."

Instantly my body tensed, and my wolf, Ajax, came to the surface, ready to destroy whoever did this to her. "Who rejected you?" he growled.

He wanted a name, and he wanted it right then. No one rejected my sister and lived to see another day.

Alaia simply shook her head, the pain of rejection still too much for her. I sighed and fought for control before I placed her in bed and pulled the covers up. I then climbed in behind her, held her close, and just let her cry.

Before long, her breathing was slow and shallow, and I knew she was asleep. I gently removed myself from the bed and made my way back downstairs.

When I reached the bottom, Jordyn came up to me. "Hey, where have you been? The party's almost over." She saw the look on my face and knew something wasn't right. "Where's Alaia?"

I took a deep breath before replying, "She's upstairs asleep. She was rejected."

"What?!" Jordyn roared. "Where is the son of a bitch? I'll fucking kill him for hurting my girl. Who was it? Was it one of the visiting alphas? I knew I didn't like them, just wait—" She spun around, ready to go back to the party and open the gates of hell.

Before she could take two steps, I grabbed her and pulled her to me. I placed my head in the crook of her neck and inhaled deeply, calming myself down and her too in the process. "I don't know who it was, babe," I said, still holding her. "She was too broken even to tell me his fucking name! Maybe in the morning, she'll be able to tell us what happened." I grabbed her hand before saying, "Come on, let's go back to the party. At least one of the birthday pair should be in attendance."

Jordyn nodded her head before we set off.

I could play the happy birthday boy then, but the next day I was going full alpha on some unsuspecting soul.

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Unknown POV

I walked around the party, feeling a sense of unease. I knew I was in no danger, as many of my pack warriors were here with me, and the Opal Moon pack had always been close allies, but still, something seemed off. I took a sip of my drink and noticed plenty of shewolves giving me the eye, trying desperately to get me to see them.

At twenty-one, I hadn't found my mate yet, and I had no desire to fool around with any randoms. I ignored their pathetic excuse for flirting and turned to my best friend, Kade. "Isn't this supposed to be a birthday party?" I said. "Where are the guests of honor? I know I've seen their son, Aaron, around, but I don't think I've seen his sister yet."

"Beats me," Kade replied, before adding, "but the Opal Moon shewolves? Man!"

I laughed before I rolled my eyes at him. "Be careful, man. We don't leave until tomorrow night, and I don't want you starting any shit, messing with some chick who doesn't belong to you."

He feigned innocence as he replied, "I would never!"

"Yeah, sure," I stated before making my way to the buffet. After grabbing my food, I sat down at my table and began to people watch.

The Opal Moon pack was huge, and I'd learned one of the reasons for their continued growth was the exceptional leadership of their Alpha, Jonathan. I'd spoken to him and his Luna briefly upon my arrival, and they were nothing if not gracious hosts.

Once I found my mate, I planned to lead as well as the two of them had.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw that Aaron had returned to the party, but I'd still not seen his sister. Why was I so focused on this girl?

At this thought, my wolf Alastair began to stir.

What's going on, man?

She's here.

Yeah, who is this "she" you speak of? Because if she's not my mate, then I don't—

Mate!

I shot up from my chair and looked around.

Mate, mate, mate! Alastair chanted in my head in between howls.

Chill out, man. Are you sure she's here? I don't see anyone remarkable, I thought, doubt slowly starting to creep into my mind.

She's here, you dick!

Goddess, dude, chill.

I continued to scan the crowd. Alastair was usually just as cool and calm as me, so I knew that if he said she was here, she was here.

Kade came back to join me and asked, "What's up, bro, what's got you all tensed up?"

"He's found her," I replied.

Kade gives me a 'huh' look before I dragged my hand through my hair.

"Alastair, he says our mate is here, but I can't find her."

“Oh, shit. Congratulations, man. Is she one of the Opal Moon chicks? I bet she’s sexy as fu—”

I cut his thought off with a deep growl.

Kade looked over and apologized. “My bad, man. I just got excited for you.”

Alastair still paced back and forth in my mind, and he rolled his eyes and mumbled, “Idiot,” as he continued sniffing around for our mate.

I walked past the dance floor, and I smelled the faintest hint of caramel. Alastair picked up on the scent almost immediately and carried me straight to the packhouse and up the stairs. The smell was getting stronger and stronger until it pulled me to a stop at one of the bedroom doors.

When I stopped at the door, Alastair yelled at me. What are you doing? Mate is in there. Go get her! Now!

It took all my strength and composure to push him to the back of my mind and gently knock on the door.

I waited for a response, but when I didn’t hear anything, Alastair chimed in. Go. Get. Our. Mate.

I slowly opened the door, and the intoxicating smell hit me full force. I walked farther into the room and saw the beautiful figure lying on the bed. My only thought at that moment was, Damn an angel; this girl is a Goddess.

Alastair agreed with a loud and happy howl.

“I’ve finally found her . . .”

EIGHT | MINE!

## Chapter 8 - Once Rejected, Twice Desired

Alaia POV

I’d been rejected. My mate rejected me. I pulled my blanket back over my head and willed the world to just swallow me whole. So far, being an adult sucked. I rolled over and buried my head in the pillow. Amethyst stirred, and I immediately tensed up.

What is it? I asked her, almost too afraid to hear the answer.

Mate.

We don't have a mate, remember? He rejected us! I spat.

She let off a small whimper, which immediately led me to apologize. I'm so sorry, Amethyst. None of this is your fault, and I shouldn't be taking it out on you. We'll get through this together, right? Maybe if I say it enough, my heart would finally start to believe it.

He was here, Doll.

Alexi was here? Why would he come to my room after he ripped my heart out and stomped on it? I took a deep breath before I caught a scent.

Someone was here, I think, but it wasn't Alexi's sandalwood and fresh-cut grass scent. No, this one was even better. It was the smell of fresh-baked bread as you walked into your favorite bakery. This smell made my mouth water in more ways than one, and I couldn't help but wonder what was going on.

I nuzzled farther into the pillow and inhaled deep. Goddess, this smelled so good, but where did it come from? Confusion clouded my mind as I heard Amethyst say again:

It's our mate, he was here, and he wants us.

With that thought fresh in my mind, I dragged myself out of bed and into the shower. I turned the jets on full and let the hot water rain down on my body. My muscles relaxed as I tried to unravel the events of last night.

I pulled out my favorite caramel apple body scrub and rubbed it all over my body, repeating over and over in my head: Alexi came to my room last night? Why does he smell different?

Still not getting anywhere simply talking to myself, I rinsed off and stepped out of the shower.

I just needed to talk to Alexi myself to get to the bottom of this. I quickly dressed in a pair of blue jean shorts, a yellow tank top, and my trusty Chuck Taylors. I pulled my hair into a messy bun before leaving my room and heading to the kitchen.

As I rounded the corner, I spotted Mrs. Wilson, who offered me a bright smile and a huge hug. "Good morning, my sweet girl. I've got your favorite strawberries and cream pancakes waiting for you."

I moaned out loud. "Mrs. Wilson, you truly are amazing."

She smiled again before sitting the plate before me. I took an appreciative look at the masterpiece in front of me before diving in. They tasted ten times better than they looked!

As I was polishing off my breakfast, Jordyn came in and immediately gasped.

I turned to see what the matter was and had to catch myself from falling backward off the stool.

She'd wrapped me in the tightest bear hug ever. "Oh my Goodness, Alaia, I'm so sorry this happened. Tell me who the fucker is, and I'll make him wish he never even thought about rejecting you."

Realization dawned on me.

"Of course, Aaron told you. Why wouldn't he? He's your mate, after all."

Jordyn seemed slightly hurt by my comment.

"I'm sorry, babe. I just saw him after he left your room last night and he looked so hurt and broken. He told me what happened, and we had to literally keep each other from tearing the bastard apart."

That made me chuckle. "I would have loved to see that. I don't think anyone is more protective over me than the two of you."

Jordyn seemed to relax a bit before she dropped her voice to an almost whisper and asked, "Do you want to talk about it?"

Did I want to talk about it? "No, not quite yet. I'm just so confused at this point, and I don't even know where to start. Once I've made heads or tails of it all, you'll be the first to know."

"Okay," she reluctantly replied, "but at least tell me who he is so I can make him pay."

That got another laugh out of me. "Nope. I'm not quite sure if I want that to happen yet."

Jordyn looked at me with a confused look on her face before she sighed. "Fine, I guess."

We sat and talked for a while with her filling me in on what happened at the party that I unfortunately missed. It sounded like it was a massive success with all the visiting alphas and their guests enjoying the hospitality of the pack.

Before long, Aaron came in and rushed toward me.

Jordyn stood to intercept him and said, "Don't worry, she's fine. Or, at least, she seems to be. She'll tell us what's up when she's ready. I still don't know who we're going to kill though, so stay on the ready." She then kissed him on the cheek before he walked up to me and pulled me into a hug.

I relaxed into his arms as I heard him ask, "You good, sis?"

I smiled and nodded my head. "I will be soon enough."

Aaron accepted my answer and sat beside Jordyn and me at the counter. Mrs. Wilson proceeded to serve them both full stacks of her famous pancakes, and I smiled as I watch them begin to devour them.

“So, what’s on the agenda today, guys?” I asked.

Aaron washed down his mouth full of pancakes with his orange juice before he replied.

“Dad has his meetings with the Alpha’s today. Since I’ve found my mate already, he feels like I may be able to take over as alpha soon, so Alexi and I will be sitting in with them for most of the day.”

At the mention of Alexi’s name, my body stiffened, and I felt a chill move all over me.

Jordyn noticed and leaned over. “You alright, sweetie?”

I just nodded my head in reply. I needed to talk to Alexi, and soon. I didn’t understand what was going on, but I was determined to find out before the day was out. “Well, I’m off, guys. I’ve got something I need to do real quick. I’ll see you two later.” I left the kitchen and started my search for my mate.

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I headed out to the training grounds and saw our lead warrior and trainer, Jason, sparring with some of the warriors from the visiting packs.

“Hey, Jay. Have you seen Alexi this morning?” I asked him while he quickly and smoothly put the other guy into a headlock.

He released him before shaking his head and replying, “Uh, no. I haven’t seen Alexi. When you find him, tell him that drinking too much at your party is no excuse for missing training today. He’ll be on two-a-day for the rest of the month.”

“Yikes. Well, that sucks now, doesn’t it?” I said as I started to walk off. “I’ll talk to you later, Jay!” I yelled as jogged back toward the packhouse.

When I got back inside, I looked everywhere but still couldn’t find Alexi. I started to mindlink Aaron to ask where Alexi was before I realized they both had to sit in on the alpha meetings today. I headed over to the conference room, hoping to catch Alexi before everything got started. When I reached the room, I saw that the doors were still slightly ajar, so I knew the meeting hadn’t started yet.

I poked my head in, and I was again hit with the smell of fresh-baked bread. He was here.

Amethyst paced in my head, purring, telling me to go to our mate.

I took a step in and saw my dad, Alexi, and a few other alphas and betas sitting at the round table in the middle of the room. I started to head over when out of the corner of my eye, I saw a figure move toward me.

Time stopped as I took him all in.

At 6'6, he was easily the tallest man in the room. His bronze skin was flawlessly pulled across his taunted muscles. I glanced down at his chest and saw the thin T-shirt straining to cover his eight-pack. I forced my eyes to move back up to his face, and that's when I saw it. A face that could only be described as carved by the Gods. His thick, curly black hair was perfectly tousled and looked like silk. I wanted nothing more than to run my fingers through those curls. He had thick, dark eyelashes that drew my attention to eyes so blue; they were almost clear. His straight nose ended at a perfect point, and his lips were full and lush. I immediately imagined those lips roaming all over my body and latching on to my nipples.

Before I could control myself, I started to feel the moisture pool between my legs, and I noticed those once crystal blue eyes go dark. He could smell my arousal.

I immediately blushed then I heard a loud growl from the table. I pulled myself out of my trance and thought, "What the hell was that?"

I glanced over at Alexi and saw him fuming.

Shit, I'd just totally eye fucked this stranger in front of my mate.

Great.

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Unknown POV

When she walked into Alpha Jonathan's office, to say I was surprised would be an understatement. Her warm caramel scent hit me like a ton of bricks, and Alastair howled in absolute happiness. I watched as she scanned the room with those golden-honey eyes of hers before landing them on the Opal Moon pack's future beta.

Why is she looking at him? Alastair whined.

Not knowing the answer to his question, I stood up and walked toward her.

When her eyes locked on mine, that was it for me. At that moment, my heart became hers, and I knew I would do any and everything for this goddess. I stood there as I saw her eyes roam all over my body, taking me all in. Needless to say, I was doing the same. She was so tiny and perfect, barely 5'2. She had the most beautiful dark hair, and it was pulled up, exposing her sexy neck. I couldn't wait for that neck to bear my mark. And the way her thick thighs glistened in the sunlight made my dick twitch in my jeans. All I could think about was having those thighs



wrapped around my waist as I buried myself deep inside her, fucking her until she saw stars. I wanted her to have my pups—all of them.

I caught the scent of her arousal, and Alastair fought to take control. My eyes went black as I had an internal battle with myself.

Not yet, you beast. Let me at least talk to our mate before you try to mark her.

I heard a low growl and realized it wasn't coming from me. I saw my mate look down before the future beta barked out, "Why are you here, Alaia?" with an ugly sneer.

I balled my hands into fists and took a few steps forward. Who was this kid to talk to my mate that way?

Kill him! Alastair shouted in my head.

As I saw him stand up and place a hand on her arm, I lost all control and let loose a terrifying growl.

MINE! Alastair yelled as he forced his way to the surface.

Just then, the future alpha, Aaron, came into view. "Well, this just got interesting," he said with a smile.

NINE | WAIT...WHO'S MY MATE?

## Chapter 9 - Once Rejected, Twice Desired

Alexi POV

As Alaia walked into the room, I sucked in a breath. I didn't want to have to face her yet. It hurt when I rejected her, but it damn near killed me when she accepted it without even putting up a fight. I didn't get a moment's sleep last night; I just sat in bed, thinking over my decision to reject the Moon Goddess's most perfect gift. "She deserves someone better," I told myself over and over. I wasn't a good guy, I was tainted, and Alaia didn't need to have to deal with all of my conquests sending her evil looks or petty remarks.

She was too pure, too perfect. She was perfect—my angel.

This thought had rung over and over in my head. Max had shut himself off to me, and I feared I would never hear from him again. I had rejected his mate, his perfect mate.

“She was perfect, so, so perfect . . .” I repeatedly said out loud.

Before I knew it, the sun was coming up and had started to stream through my window. I wanted nothing more than to curl up in bed and never leave my room again, but as the future beta, I knew I had to attend the Alpha meetings that day.

When her golden-honey eyes landed on me, my mind went blank. I could form only one thought, one word. Perfect.

I watched as she took a couple of steps toward me before her eyes swept up to just over my shoulder.

As curious as I was, I couldn't tear my eyes away from her face to see what it was that had drawn her attention. I watched her eyes move slowly down then back up. Her breath began to hitch as she stuck her tongue out slightly and licked her delicious lips.

Then I smelled it—her arousal. Alaia was standing right in front of me, looking at someone else, and she was turned on.

A growl ripped from my chest, which pulled her attention back to me. She looked down, seemingly ashamed, and I took the opportunity to spit out, “Why are you here, Alaia?” I wanted to know what would possess her to reject me, then come and tease me with her scent. I stood up and grabbed hold of her arm. I was going to pull her out of the office and find out what game she was playing.

Before I could turn to walk out the room, I heard a heart-stopping growl behind me, immediately proceeded by, “MINE!”

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Aaron walk into the room and say, “Well, this just got interesting.”

I was lifted off the ground by my neck and stared into the eyes of an extremely pissed off Alpha Xander Black of the Blue Moon Pack.

What the actual fuck? I thought to myself before I started to blackout.

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Alaia POV

I stood there, speechless and unmoving. Alpha Xander was holding Alexi up at least three feet off the ground by his neck. Alexi was a beta, and a strong one at that, but he was clearly no match for a seething and possessive alpha. I watched as Alexi went limp before Xander loosened his grip and let him fall to the floor.

Xander then turned those pools of onyx on me before growling, “You. Are. Mine!” He grabbed me by my waist and lifted me like I weighed nothing, then pulled me to his chest with one arm while he cradled my head with the other hand. Xander buried his face in the crook and my neck and inhaled deep. Still shocked and more than a little confused, I placed my hands on his rock-hard chest and let out the breath I didn’t realize I had been holding.

That’s when I smelled it again—freshly baked bread. Amethyst was howling in pure bliss in my head.

Wait, why was his scent on my pillow this morning?

Who cares, doll? He’s our mate! Our mate wants us, he claimed us!

With all the strength I could muster, I pushed Xander’s face from my neck and wiggled in his arms to have him place me down. I saw a small flash of hurt in his eyes, but he quickly obliged and placed me back on my feet.

By this time, Aaron was standing right next to me and was looking just as confused as I was. I looked up at him and watched his facial expressions as he tried to process what he’d just seen.

I saw when something finally clicked into place, and he roared, “Is this your mate? The one who rejected you?” Aaron grabbed my arm and pulled me behind him before he stepped up to Alpha Xander, causing another deep growl to slip past his lips.

“Rejected?” I heard both my dad and Xander cry out in unison.

So, I was surrounded by my highly pissed off father and brother, a seemingly super possessive Alpha who claimed I was his, and a blacked-out mate.

This was all becoming too much, but instead of walking out, I decided to face it head-on.

“Aaron, Alpha Xander is not my mate, and he did not reject me. That honor goes to the one and only Alexi.”

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” said my dad’s Beta, Lucas, with a groan. “You’re telling us that my son rejected you?”

“Well, I didn’t want to announce it to the entire crew in attendance today, but yes. Alexi and I found that we were mates last night before my birthday party. Once he realized this, Alexi took me to his room, where he proceeded to reject me. I accepted his rejection.”

Anger rolled off the men in the room in waves, but it seems that I felt the wrath from Xander the most.

Lucas bent down and slapped his son across the face a few times in an attempt to wake him.

When Alexi came to, he looked around the room in a daze before his eyes landed on me.

Upon seeing this, Xander growled and again tried to lunge at Alexi; I'm sure to kill him this time. Luckily, the men were able to hold him back while Lucas and Aaron helped Alexi up and into a chair.

As the haze started to clear, Alexi looked over at his dad and asked, "What the hell happened? I remember trying to take Alaia out of the room to talk, and this idiot attacked me," he said, pointing at a now seething Xander.

I heard the rumble from Xander's chest, and instinctively stepped a bit closer to him and took his hand in mine. Xander quickly started to calm himself, and looked down at me, offering a small smile.

When Alexi saw the interaction, he jumped up and yelled, "Get your hands off my mate, you fucking mutt!"

Before I could register what was happening, I'd been pushed behind Xander, who then moved in front of Alexi so quickly, if I hadn't been a wolf, I wouldn't have seen it. Xander leaned down, looking Alexi right in the eye. "She. Is. Mine. From what I gather here, you rejected her. You were given this incredible gift, and you threw it away. You caused my mate pain; you made her cry. I could snap your neck here and now for that, but I won't. Out of respect for Alpha Jonathan and Beta Lucas, I'll spare you. But if you ever come near my mate again, or try to take her away from me, you won't live long enough to regret it."

The air in the room was thick with authority emitted from Xander's alpha aura. He turned back to me and again pulled me up and into his chest, inhaling my scent. "Are you alright, my little one?" I heard him ask while keeping his head down in my neck.

"Yes, I'm okay," I whispered back, still shocked, and not 100% sure what was going on. My hand came up and began to run through Xander's silky smooth curls, making his chest rumble with a deep sexy purr.

It's just as soft as we thought.

I nodded my head in agreement as a small smile played at my lips.

Xander took a couple of steps and sat in a nearby chair, pulling me into his lap. He placed a protective arm around my waist before turning back toward the group.

I tried to get up, but Xander firmly took hold of both my hips in his strong hands, immediately stopping all thoughts of relocation. Sparks shot up my body from the contact, and I internally sighed in contentment. My body relaxed into his touch as I leaned back and rested my head on his shoulder. I glanced over and saw Alexi looking at the two of us with so much hatred; it almost hurt. It made me sad to see before Amethyst reminded me that he rejected us. I closed my eyes and just breathed in my mates' scent.

I still needed to find out what happened last night. I had a ton of questions, and at that point, zero answers. Xander's scent was all over my bed, but I wasn't worried. Being close to him felt like home, so I decided just to be content with that.

"So, Alpha Jonathan, shall we begin?" Xander said.

I looked up at his face, and he sent me a wink and a dazzling smile that instantly made me melt. Damn, this man was delicious. I took Amethyst's loud purring as confirmation that she agreed.

"Wait, you expect us to have the meeting with her here?" Alexi asked, venom dripping from every word.

I looked up and saw him still shooting daggers in my direction.

What the hell was his problem? He rejected me!

"As the future Luna of the Blue Moon pack, my mate has every right to sit in on these meetings if she wants. It's really up to her; what my little one wants, my little one gets," Xander said while looking me square in the eye.

My mouth fell open a bit when I heard his words. He leaned down and placed a soft kiss on the tip of my nose, and I sighed in contentment.

"Oh, come on!" said Alexi from across the room.

"Alexi!" Dad boomed. "If you expect to become Beta of this pack one day, you'll learn to respect our allies. If Alpha Xander or his Luna feels that she should sit in on these meetings, then she will."

The tone was undeniable, and all Alexi could do was bow his head in submission. "Yes, Alpha," he said after a few seconds.

"Well, if we're all ready, gentleman, and lady," my dad said, sending me a quick smile, "let's get started."

TEN | MY MATE SMELLS OF CARAMEL

## Chapter 10 - Once Rejected, Twice Desired

Alaia POV

It had been roughly three hours that I'd sat with the Alphas and Betas, discussing pack borders, treaties, and revenue streams. I thought I would have been bored out of my mind, but to my surprise, it was the total opposite. Xander had a brilliant mind, offering fresh and cutting-edge suggestions to everything from rogue problems to agriculture. I could see the respect for him growing more and more in my dad, and even Aaron.

Alexi, on the other hand, not so much. I could feel his heated stare boring holes into me the entire time I was in the room.

Xander still hadn't let me up from his lap, so whenever he spoke, Alexi had to watch me, his ex-mate, sitting comfortably in the embrace of another. Did I feel bad? Honestly, yes, I did. At one time in my life, I thought Alexi was to be my entire world. But that all changed the moment he rejected me.

I was pulled from my thoughts by a voice in my head.

You good, sis?

I looked over at Aaron and offered him a small smile and nod

I'm confused as hell, but yes, I'm good. I don't know why, but being close to Xander like this just feels right. Maybe it was all part of the Moon Goddess's plan.

I'll kill Alexi for this, I swear. If I had known . . .

There was nothing for you to know, Aaron. Just talk to Alexi. You've been best friends since we were pups. You don't want to throw that all away. I'm moving on; maybe you can help him do the same.

What do you mean?

Well, he's been staring daggers at Xander and me this entire meeting. It's almost as if he believes that I've somehow wronged him in some way. I didn't ask to be rejected, and I didn't ask to get a second-chance mate. And I'm pretty sure if I wasn't sitting here calming him down, Xander would have ripped out Alexi's throat hours ago. So, just help him to move on. Please?

I heard Aaron sigh out loud before he responded. Fine, but he better have a damn good reason for doing what he did. I can't make any promises for Jordyn, though.

The mindlink was cut, and I audibly gulped. I started to furiously chew on my lip as I thought, Ohh, how would I save Alexi from Jordyn?

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Xander POV

As Alpha Jonathan wound down for lunch, I looked down and noticed Alaia deep in thought. She was chewing on that juicy bottom lip of hers, and it pulled a deep rumble from my chest. She looked up at me, so innocent and pure, and I fell even deeper for her.

I brought my hand up to cup her cheek, then leaned down and asked, “What’s going on in that beautiful head of yours, my little one?”

She smiled at me, and I almost forgot what I was saying. “It’s nothing, Alpha Xander. I was—”

“It’s just Xander, little one. You are my mate, my queen, and my Luna. You are my equal, so there is no need for titles and formalities.”

Hearing my words caused a deep blush to cover her cheeks. Goddess, she was adorable. “It’s nothing, Xander. I’m just thinking of how I can keep the peace with all that has happened today.”

“Say it again,” I said.

A look of confusion crossed her face before she asked, “Say what?”

“My name. Say it again,” I growled in her ear while running my fingertips lightly up and down her exposed thigh.

I felt her shiver against me, and I couldn’t help the immense pleasure that washed over me at the way her body responded to my touch. “Xander.” She whispered it so softly that I almost missed it. But I didn’t.

My eyes became dark with lust, and I wanted nothing more than to claim her lips as my own.

Before I could act on my desires, I heard someone clear their throat across the room. I shook my head clear of the lustful fog and looked up to see Alpha Jonathan looking at the both of us with a small smile on his face. “We’ve reached a good stopping point, so we’ll adjourn for lunch in the dining hall. Xander and Alaia? Would you two please stay behind for a bit? Lucas, Aaron, and Alexi, you as well, please.”

Even though it was framed as a request, I knew it wasn’t. As an alpha myself, I couldn’t be commanded, but the respect I had for Alpha Jonathan as a leader and my mate’s father pushed me to nod my head in agreement.

The other Alphas and Betas stood and made their way to the dining hall.

I looked over at my beta, Kade. and gave him a nod. He’d been my right hand for as long as I could remember, so he knew I was excusing him from the room as well.

“I’ll just go and grab a quick bite. Link me if you need anything,” Kade said while standing.

“Alpha, Luna,” he said to us before walking away.

Once the door clicked shut, a heavy silence fell on the room before Alpha Jonathan again cleared his throat. "To say this has been interesting would be the understatement of the century. So, if I've got this all straight, Alaia and Alexi found out they were mates less than twenty-four hours ago. But, because Alexi decided to reject Alaia, she is now mates with Alpha Xander. Before we get into details, I just have to ask. Alaia, baby girl, how are you holding up with all . . . this?" He waved his hands between Alexi and me.

I felt her tense before she took a deep breath and closed her eyes. "Honestly, Dad, I'm so confused. I always thought I didn't want a mate, but when I locked eyes with Alexi last night, that thought completely vanished. I had never been happier. But then he ripped that happiness away from me." She took a moment to steady herself before continuing. "If Aaron hadn't come and found me, I would have just been a crumpled mess lying on the floor the entire night. I cried myself to sleep last night . . ."

Hearing the way her voice broke filled me with rage. I glared at Alexi, and he at least had the decency to look ashamed.

"But this morning all that pain I had felt seemed to have disappeared. I couldn't explain it, but my wolf, Amethyst, was overjoyed. She said that our mate came to us last night. He wanted us and accepted us."

Alexi looked up at this with a comical look of confusion. "I didn't come to your room last night, Alaia. I was in my room the whole night."

"It was me," I said, causing the whole room to look over in my direction.

Alaia lifted her head and studied my face. "What?"

"It was me," I repeated. I look deep into her eyes before I continued. "I was at the party, and my wolf started going insane in my head. He told me our mate was here, but after searching for more than three years for you, I was skeptical. When I walked past the dance floor, we picked up the faintest hint of caramel in the air, and I knew. I knew that we had finally found you."

"Bullshit!" Alexi shouted, snapping all our eyes to him. "Alaia doesn't smell like caramel; she smells like warm honey. And she was my mate last night, so how could your wolf had sensed her?"

I balled my hands into fists before I felt Alaia take them into her tiny hands and rub her thumbs over my knuckles.

With my mind clearer, I continued. "My mate smells like caramel," I said, accentuating the first two words. "And by the time we found her, I guess she was no longer yours, was she?" Looking back down at Alaia, I continued. "I followed your scent through the packhouse, and it led me to your room. I just stood at the door for goddess knows how long before I got the nerve to knock. But you didn't answer. Having you so close and so far away was driving me and him crazy, so I slowly opened the door and looked inside. Your scent filled my senses, and before I knew it, I



was standing beside the bed, looking down at the most incredible creature I had ever seen. I could see that you had been crying, your tiny, exhausted body was still hiccupping while trying to sleep. The fact that I didn't know who or what had caused you this pain broke me. So, I climbed into bed and pulled you to my chest. When I felt you snuggle further into my body, I was the happiest man alive. You started to relax, and soon you were sleeping peacefully in my arms."

"Wow," she said, looking up at me. What I saw in her eyes, I could only describe as gratefulness. "You put me back together, and I didn't even know who you were," she breathed.

Her statement caused me to laugh slightly. "Exactly why I left before you woke up. I figured you wouldn't appreciate waking up in the arms of a strange man, no matter how dangerously good looking he was."

Alaia blushed at my comment before turning her attention back to her dad. "Well, there you have it, Dad. It looks like a bunch of my questions have been answered thanks to Xander."

Alpha Jonathan nodded at her then turned to Alexi. "Alexi, do you have anything to add here? Maybe you'd like to share with us why you thought it a good idea to reject Alaia in the first place?"

Now, this I was excited to hear.