

Owned by the Alphas |

The General

I didn't want to die. I wanted more time with my alphas, and I wanted to protect my mom from whatever shitstorm Lucas was bringing on his hunt for revenge.

I had no choice. I had to survive.

Lucas spun away, disappearing into shadow as I fell. It was the last I saw of him, but I wasn't going to let it be the last time he saw me.

I closed my eyes, the idea terrifying since my stomach had dropped the second I had fallen off the cliff, but I forced myself to focus, using my memories to help coerce my shadows to help me.

I remembered Derik's smile when we were alone, just the two of us, the connection in Brax's eyes when our shadows played, the devotion in Kai's every action toward me.

It was everything I had ever craved, and I had it. I didn't want to lose it. I didn't want to say yes, no matter the future I missed out on because of it.

I don't know what part of my thoughts convinced my shadows to trust me again, but it worked, and then I wasn't falling anymore.

They burst out of me, wrapping around me like pure silk, soft and light. They warmed me up from the inside out and held me suspended in the air.

I pried open one eye and looked at the ground, gasping when I saw how close I had come to being impaled on the sharp rocks at the bottom of the cavern I had fallen into.

I looked up, and my shadows lifted me back to the edge of the cliff, where my alphas were.

Brax had shifted, was in human form, his eyes white as he shouted at others to get down into the cavern and find me.

Derik was holding up a groggy Cain, barking at him for answers, while Kai was tying a rope around a tree, then his waist, getting ready to go off the cliff after me.

I smiled at my alphas, my heart full. They cared about me. I didn't care what my brother thought, they were not the monsters he made them out to be. He was the monster now.

My shadows slipped down my body to create a walkway beneath my feet as I walked from the air onto the cliff.

Kai's head snapped up and he howled, tearing off the rope and tackling me to the ground, his huge body enveloping mine.

My chuckle was suffocated by his mouth crushing into mine, kissing me fiercely, his tongue pushing past my lips, sliding against it as his hands felt every part of me.

"Kai," I breathed. "I'm okay," I promised against his mouth, but he wasn't letting me go.

Derik kicked him off me, then helped me up, snarling at Kai, who growled, trying to take me back.

Derik spun me away, holding me to his body, almost too tightly, but I felt so safe in his arms that I didn't care. And then Brax was behind me, wrapping his arms around me too.

"I felt you. You were so scared. I thought you were going to die."

"I thought I was too," I admitted in a whisper.

"Which way did your brother go, winter born?" the female pack member from before snapped, and I broke away from the alphas.

"He disappeared into his shadows. That's not my brother anymore. Elias has too tight of a hold on him. He feels wronged by everyone and everything for what he is, and Elias is feeding off that resentment," I explained.

My lip trembled thinking of what I had to say next. "He's not going to stop. He's doing something with the humans, he said sacrificing them for the

greater good, but I don't know what that means," I admitted, and the female scoffed.

"And how do we know you're not working with him?"

"Because he just tried to kill me for siding with the wolves over him," I snapped back, and she glared before turning away, but I had seen the surprise in her eyes before she did. And felt the pang of respect.

"We need to get back to the city. Alert the council of what happened," she said.

"I've called a meeting," Derik replied, then looked at me, kissing my forehead.

"Are you hurt? Can you still ride back?" he asked, checking me over, sniffing. He paused, touching the back of my head with surprisingly gentle fingers. I still winced at the ache from the cut.

"It's fine. I can ride," I said, and I hoped he got my double meaning because after the day I'd had, I wanted a little relief from thinking.

He smirked, then stepped back to shift. Brax gave me a once-over, then shifted.

Kai pursed his lips and shook his head. "The wolves need to let out some of their anger before I take her anywhere near the city. I'll take her back to her village. We'll visit her father and find out what he knows, then I'll bring her back later," he said.

It was a good idea, but it had Derik shifting back instantly. "No, it's not safe for her outside the city with her brother out there somewhere."

Brax shifted back. "Kai's right. This involves a winter born, they may need some time to cool down, Derik," he said, and Derik was outvoted, hanging his head.

"Bring her back before the moon is at its peak," he huffed, and Kai nodded once, grabbing my hand.

I kissed both Derik and Brax before they shifted, then went with Kai. He shifted too, and I climbed on him. He ran with me, the other alphas flanking him, and I felt completely safe.

I wasn't sure why my brother was so hell-bent on revenge, but I was starting to think he had it worse at my father's than I did at my mother's.

Kai and I split off the main path and headed toward my villages, the bell ringing as we approached.

He stopped just outside of the men's village and shifted. I handed him his pants and he yanked them on, then grabbed my hand and led me down the path I had never been allowed to follow.

I had always imagined the men's village would be similar to the women's, but it wasn't. It was sturdier, with buildings of stone and cement, while the women's were thatch work and wood.

The men had no lines of washing between huts, no planter boxes or growing produce. They did have a whole bunch of armed soldiers walking between huts, all in armor.

Everything was so gray and unhomely. Like it was purely a training camp rather than a home.

I gripped Kai's hand tighter, and he looked down at me.

"I'm not meant to be here," I gulped as men stared, walking past with quick footsteps and narrowed eyes.

But none of them dared get closer. They rushed on as Kai found my father's hut, which was significantly larger than the others.

Kai didn't bother knocking and went in. "You are meant to be wherever I am," he reassured, then tucked me in closer to his bare body that was somehow warm despite the chill in the air.

"Nikolai. I wasn't expecting a visit from our alpha today," my father said, coming out of one of the doors, doing his pants up.

A female I recognized from the widows' lodgings scattered from the room and I went wide-eyed, my jaw dropping. My father's eyes fell on me hiding behind Kai's arm, and he went pale.

"Lorelai... I... She was..."

I slapped him. For Mom. For me. And it felt good.

“You’re an asshole and you don’t deserve her,” I snapped, and went to leave but I had to get the information on my brother.

“Lorelai, sweetheart, I—”

“Shut up. I need to know what Lucas has been doing,” I demanded.

I pushed away the tears that wanted to fall for my mom—who had only ever been a faithful, loving wife—and dealt with what I needed to before I didn’t have to see him ever again.

“Lucas? He’s on patrol, doing a sweep of the Forest village.”

“How long has that been his post?” Kai asked, and my father’s back straightened in a futile attempt to seem taller and less intimidated.

It just made him look pathetic.

“A few months. Since well before the offerings night. Why? What happened?” my father asked, his eyes running up and down me.

I probably looked filthy, but I didn’t care. His opinion was nothing to me anymore.

I had wanted to impress him, make him proud, thought he was the man I should look up to, but he was just like the rest of the pigs in my village, always sniffing around for a better offer.

“When was the last time you talked to him or saw him?”

“A while, I suppose. He’s been staying in the Forest village and with his wife in your mother’s village.” He shrugged.

“And what have you been doing, General?” Kai asked, his voice lowering, making my father stammer.

“I… Well, I don’t know what you mean. I have been commanding the humans’ army,” he said, trying to recover, but Kai growled, and even my skin bristled at the lie.

I wasn’t sure what Kai had picked up on, but my father was hiding something.

"I mean the amount of heartbeats I hear in this village is significantly larger than the numbers I was given in your report. Are you telling little white lies about how large your army is, General?" he threatened, getting closer to my father, edging him back against the wooden table.

My father stumbled against it, then moved out of the way, brushing his hair back and composing his fear.

"I wonder what you plan to do with an army so large, hmm?" Kai continued. "Maybe I should visit more often, keep an eye on numbers myself. Maybe even do a bit of a culling? Correct those numbers of yours, hmm?" he threatened again in that dark, menacing way that sounded sexy when he was playing but terrifying when he wasn't.

And my father looked terrified.

He turned to the kitchen bench and grabbed a drink of ale, sculling some back before clearing his throat.

"I'm sure it was just a genuine mistake. I will recount and give you a more thorough report." He gulped, and Kai chuckled darkly.

"See that you do, or I might make a mistake next time I'm here," he warned, then grabbed my hand.

My father's eyes went to it and he scowled. Something neither of us missed.

"Lorelai. Are you well?" he asked, and I nodded.

"Yes."

"Sweetheart, your head is bleeding and you are covered in scratches, bruises, dirt. Do you need help?" he offered.

It was brave of him to offer in front of Kai, but he couldn't just pick and choose when to play the father card. Especially since it was his son who had caused most of it.

"The alphas are taking care of me. I don't need help," I said, then got back to why I was there. "But I do need to know if you hear from Lucas. I need to speak to him, so if he shows up, let us know," I said, and he nodded once, holding the back of his dining chair, clutching it with white knuckles.

Kai dragged me from the house. I didn't miss the disgust in my father's eyes as I left, but it was aimed at the wolf that led me, and it had warning bells going off inside me.

My instincts had picked up on something, a thread it wanted me to pull. My brother, the armies, my shady dad. Something was going on, and I wasn't sure if they were all working together or just doing their own way of things.

Kai led me through the village, the path muddied and uneven. The men stared, their eyes hungry, and I felt every single second of it.

"She is a young, unmarried female. You can't bring her back here," my dad called, and Kai half turned his head.

"Who said she was unmarried?" he taunted, answering my father's threat with a bluff that had me choking on my breath.

I cleared my throat and half ran to keep up with Kai's strides as we moved toward the women's village.

"Kai, you can't say things like that," I whispered as he led me over a slight hill through the farmland toward the main part between the villages, where the offerings had happened.

"I can say whatever the fuck I want. Your father needs to learn his place, and when I get back to the city, I'll be talking to Derik and Brax about his place as general," Kai growled.

He was shaking, and I ran my fingers down his arm. "You'll strip his title?"

"If that's what it takes. He's creating a force to use against us, using his position to turn on us, and we can't allow that. But it's not just that..."

He took deep breaths, stopping for a moment before pulling me in for a deep kiss.

"You can't hear what I can, but I don't think his training methods are very humane. He is training boys and men into killers. Hunters. But we are the predators, Lorelai. They won't survive us if they attack, not with all the men they can torture to fight us."

He shook his head, kissing me again, my shock giving way to the desire that always stole me when he held me. Kai tightened his grip for a second but then let me go, holding my face.

“I thought we had a war against the vampires coming, but it turns out the humans have the bloodsuckers beat.” He smirked, then carried on walking.

I squinted back at the men’s village, then ran to catch up with Kai.

“Are we going to see my mother?” I asked, and he nodded.

“I thought you’d want to see her before we go,” he said, and I smiled.

“Yeah. I do,” I said, and moved ahead of him, ignoring the shocked gasps and whispers of the ladies, finding Mom’s hut and going in.

She was turning toward me from the kitchen bench, a hot cup of tea in her hand, Ryleigh sitting at the small dining table, when Mom’s eyes flicked to me.

She gasped, the cup dropping from her hands, shattering all over the floor. I sucked in a breath and rushed to help her pick it up, but she brushed passed me, her eyes filled with tears.

She threw herself at Kai, hitting and sobbing hysterically. He grunted, pursing his lips but taking the hits without retaliating.

“You promised! You said you wouldn’t hurt her! You swore to me she was safe! How could you?!” she screamed at him, and I rushed to her, pulling her back, Ryleigh helping me as Kai clenched and unclenched his jaw.

“I’ll give you a minute,” he said sternly, then stepped outside as my mom sank into me.

I lowered us to the ground and held her as she cried, clutching me. She turned, wrapping her arms around my neck, holding me.

“My baby girl. What have they done to you?” she breathed, her sobs hiccuping against my chest.

I swallowed back my tears, only a few escaping.

"I'm okay, Mom, I swear it. The alphas have kept me well, safe. They've been incredible. I promise you, how I look right now is not the normal," I said, trying to calm her down.

She gave me a once-over, her chin wobbling as she slowly stood, patting herself down, trying to collect herself.

Ryleigh finished cleaning up the smashed teacup, then went to the kettle over the fireplace. "I'll make some more tea," she said as I stood up with my mom.

She pulled me in again, then pulled me toward the bathroom.

"Come, baby. Let me wash you," she said, and I wanted to say no, but her comfort was everything to me.

I nodded and let her wash me. She asked about everything, and I told her. Not about my brother, of course, she wasn't ready for that and I didn't want to worry her more.

But I told her about my alphas and how they really were. Fun, caring, protective. A little crazy, but that made her laugh. Apparently all men were.

I didn't tell her about Dad. It would break her heart, and I had already done that once today.

I got out of the tub and dressed in some of my old clothes. She brushed and braided my hair, telling me about the latest village gossip, and it made me smile to have her smile.

I felt her happiness within me, and as much as I wanted to confide everything in her, find out what she knew, I couldn't bring her down.

Kai joined us for supper. My mother warily apologized, watching every move he made around me.

He was on his best behavior. He kissed me, my forehead, my cheek, my hand. He proved everything I said true, and in that moment, I almost felt complete, but there was something missing.

Two things, actually. Derik and Brax.

I felt them deep inside me, and it made me nervous. They were dealing with the fallout from today, while I was having supper with my mother.

It was my brother who had brought this on the werewolves; I should be there, weathering the storm with them, or at least providing the salve afterward.

“Lorelai, did you hear?”

My mother interrupted my thoughts, and I shook my head. “Sorry, I was elsewhere. What did you say?”

She smiled and looked at the time. “I suppose it is getting late. Your alphas will be rather anxious for you to get back to them if everything you say is to be believed. And I suspect that is where your mind keeps running off to.”

She smiled knowingly, clearing the dishes.

I wiped my face with my napkin and grinned. “I don’t like being away from them,” I admitted, and she smiled wider.

“That is probably a good thing, considering you are being kept there.”

She winked, and I chuckled at her taunt. Even Kai smirked, his hand on my thigh.

“You’re excused then, Lorelai, but Nikolai?” She turned to him. “If you bring her back to me on Sundays looking like she did, I will not send her back. Do you understand me? I will make you kill me before I let her back into the city if that is how she comes back to me,” my mother warned, and Kai nodded.

“Yes, ma’am.”

I smiled and hugged my mom goodbye.

“Be safe. I know I haven’t taught you much, but trust your instincts, Lorelai. You’ll know when you need to run and when you need to stay and fight for what you want. I love you more than anything, and you know if you need me, I’ll be there,” she breathed into my shoulder, squeezing me tight.

I hugged her closer, tears welling as I nodded.

I left with Kai after that, unable to linger or I’d find it harder to leave.

He shifted and I climbed onto his back, not caring who saw now. He ran us back to the city faster than before, and I lay down along his spine, hiding in his long fur.

I didn't let go until we were back at the mansion, and that's when I knew something was different. Derik and Brax felt different. Worn out, tired, defeated.

They needed me.