

# The Pack's Nemesis

## – Chapter 71 – 75

### The Pack's Nemesis (Quirin's Story)

Quirin

"What do you want to know, Quirin?" Alpha Warren asks me.

"All of it, I guess. You said my father was after Luna Yara?" I ask.

"Not at first," he says and sighs. "You know, the day I killed him, I told your father that if he had been a different man, he and I could have been friends. Maybe that's why I've tried so hard to have a relationship with you. You're enough like your father that you and I have a lot in common but you're different enough that we've never been at odds like your father and I were. For all of the money that your father had, and I know it was a lot even back then, he always wanted more. What he had was never enough for him. It was pure greed, nothing more. He didn't need my lands, but he wanted them. He didn't need Yara, he had your mother. But he wanted her because he recognized that her strength would make him stronger."

I nod. "I remember talking to him about that. He said you were getting stronger, that you were threatening our livelihood. But what he really meant was that you might have become stronger than he was, right?"

"I think so. He was in an alliance with two other Alphas and their packs were attacking mine nearly every day. All three of them wanted Yara..."

"All three?" I ask. I had two after Kennedy and that nearly made me feral.

"There was actually a fourth. Simon. He didn't want her for power. He was just obsessed with her."

"I would have killed them all," I growl.

"I did. Your father had the most honorable death of all of them. Simon wasn't so lucky," he snarls.

"Why did you give my father an honorable death? If he was after Luna Yara, why did you make his death quick and easy?"

"There were multiple reasons. The biggest was because he traded his life for yours. That was the honorable thing to do. I've said it before and I'll say it again now while we're talking. I think the only person that your father loved in this world, was you. I remember hearing from my Beta that your father offered to trade his life for yours, not your mother's. Charlie, that was my Beta, is the one who asked about your mother."

"I remember that too. From my child's perspective, I wanted to save my father, to do whatever I could to keep him from dying." I say, remember that awful time in my life.

"You realize now, you could never have saved him and he would never have let you, right?" he asks me.

"Yeah. It didn't make it any easier back then," I say and then, I ask the question that has bothered me for years. "Why did you celebrate his death?"

He frowns. "I didn't. I was devastated. I hated killing your father."

I look at him. "I was there. The day you killed my father, I was there. I snuck out while my mom was sleeping and made my way to your pack. I'd watched as flowers were delivered all day. I watched you bring him outside and kill him while your pack prepared for a party. And then I'd watched while your pack members howled happily at his death."

"I didn't know you were there. If I had, I wouldn't have killed him in front of you. No wonder you've always hated me," he says absently, frowning as his eyes go unfocused.

"I'm sure the pack howled their triumph. They loved Yara even then. It's very much like what you see in your pack now and how they feel about Kennedy. But the flowers..." he says, obviously trying to remember back to that time.

"We weren't celebrating your father's death, we were celebrating Yara's return. Simon had kidnapped her and she was home. We'd also just decided on our Gamina and we were celebrating having a complete leadership team in the pack. It was a happy time for us, but not because I killed your father, or not explicitly. It was more about the pack's Luna being safe and

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our pack being whole again."

"I always thought you were celebrating his death," I say quietly.

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"No. had a lot of respect for your father. In a lot of ways, he was a good man, a good Alpha. He let greed eat at him and it made him into the person that ultimately got him killed."

"Thank you for talking to me," I say to him.

"Can I ask you a question?" he asks me.

I shrug. "I guess we're kind of being friends, right?"

He smiles a huge smile that I've seen Kennedy smile over the years. "I hope so,"

he says before becoming serious again. "Why didn't you know that Kennedy was being taken? How did you not feel it in the mind link?"

I look down, feeling like I disappointed Kennedy once again because I didn't hear her when she was taken.

"You saw me. You saw what I did to Jasper," I say, looking up at him. "That's who I am. That's the person that I am inside. Your daughter ... she's one of the few that has not only never been afraid of the darkness inside me, but she's able to push it away. But her soul is too beautiful, too bright, to feel that ugliness inside me. So, I keep the link between us closed, to protect her."

"You keep it closed?" he asks, looking shocked.

"Yes. I've always known that Kennedy deserved a better mate than me, someone like Henry perhaps. But just because she got stuck with me and I wasn't strong enough to deny the gift that was given to me, it doesn't mean that she has to suffer with my darkness."

He looks at me for a long moment. "I don't think you're a dark person, Quirin. You carry your darkness like a penance, like a cloak that you wrap yourself in. But you underestimate my daughter's strength. I'd bet that Kennedy's brightness, her light, is much stronger than your darkness. Open yourself to her and let yourself be happy. Surrender to her in a way that you would never surrender to another person. Believe me, she will give you more in return than you could ever imagine. And I'd be surprised if her light didn't encompass you all the time. For me, I don't know how I'd go through the day without being connected to Yara," he says smiling.

"She murmurs in her mind just like she does out loud, and I love every single minute of it. I wouldn't give it up for anything. The Moon Goddess mated you to my daughter for a reason. Maybe that reason is because she's supposed to push this feeling of darkness away from you. It will never go away completely. Believe me, it will always be there. If someone comes for her or your family, that darkness will rise to the surface like an avenging angel. But there's no reason why you should have to live under that cloud of unhappiness. Open yourself to her. Let her love you the way that I know she wants to. You

deserve to enjoy this life, Quirin. Stop punishing yourself. Stop holding yourself responsible for your father's death. He made his choice. You were a pup. There was nothing you could do to save him and he wouldn't have wanted you to anyway. You're going to be a father. Believe me when I tell you it changes you. You will love that pup with everything in you and you will love your mate even more than you do now. I know you don't think it's possible, but when you realize that she's given you the earth, the moon, the stars, and the sun, you will somehow love her more than you do today. So give her what she wants, what she needs. Give yourself totally and completely to her. And when you do, she will give you the world. And then, you have to forgive yourself, Quirin. You have to let go of your hate."

I feel the emotions welling up inside me, years and years of emotions bubbling to the surface. Alpha Warren stands and I struggle to get my emotions in check, but rather than walking out, he opens his arms to me.

"Can I give you a hug?"

I stand, the tears burning in my eyes and I nod. His arms wrap around me, and it all comes flowing out of me, nearly twenty years of anger, hate, guilt, and frustration. I cling to him as my body feels like it's falling apart, like I'm shattering into pieces and the only thing holding me together is Alpha Warren's arms around

me.

"I've got you," he says softly while I sob uncontrollably.

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I have no idea how long I cry, but when I finally pull away from him, I feel like a weight has been lifted off of my shoulders. He looks around, finding a box of tissues and while I dry my eyes and blow my nose, I realize that he is drying his eyes too.

"How do you feel?" he finally asks me.

"Better," I tell him.

"Good. Let's go check on the others and then go see how your mate is doing"

When we walk back into the waiting room, there are a small number of warriors and omegas, but most everyone is sleeping now. No one got much sleep in the last twenty-four to forty-eight hours.

I see my family, and Farrah looks at me with understanding in her eyes. I walk over to her and without saying a word, I pull her into my arms.

"Thank you, mother," I say to her, and I feel her body jerk at my words.

"For what?"

I pull back and look at her. "I've never thanked you for being the woman who was more like a mother to me than my own mother ever was. I'm going to be making some changes in my life and I hope that one of them is being able to call you mother."

I watch her lips tremble. "From the first day I met you, you have always been my son. I would be proud if you called me mother."

I nod, pulling her back into our hug and holding her until both of our emotions are back in check. Then, I turn and look at Alpha Connor.

"So, are you still interested in that alliance?" I ask him.

His smile is huge, the same smile his father and Kennedy share.

"I thought you'd never ask."

## The Pack's Nemesis (Quirin's Story)

Kennedy

As I wake, I realize several things at once. First, it's like there's a tight hold on my mind, like the entire pack is holding on to me. Second, Echo is silent. And third, for the first time that I can remember, Quirin's mind is open to me.

'You're awake,' his voice floats into my mind.

'What's going on?' I ask, shifting and realizing that I feel still.

What do you remember?' he asks softly.

I try to focus my mind, try to remember what happened. I was captured. I was injured. I ran ... "Echo!" I say out loud, terrified that I've lost my wolf.

"Shhh. I'm right here," Quirin says from beside me. "Raif, your family, and the pack all have a tight hold on Echo. No one is letting her go. We're all giving her the strength she needs to heal. Your mom says she exhausted herself and that you were both very weak..."

He stops and I turn to look at him. He looks awful. His eyes are red-rimmed and haunted looking, his face has at least a day's worth of growth on it, and his clothes are wrinkled as if he's been sleeping in them.

"How long have I been unconscious?" I ask.

"Two days."

I reach my hand out to him. He takes it quickly and pulls it to his lips. Then, more gently than anyone who knows my mate would believe, he lifts me out of bed and into his lap, careful of the wires coming out of me.

"You scared me Little Pu... Little Mate."

I smile at him, snuggling against him. "You can call me Little Pup. I sort of feel like one right now."

His eyes are intent on mine. "I can't though, can I? You've been keeping secrets from me." I can see the hurt in his eyes, but my mind doesn't want to work. Why can't he call me Little Pup?

"Is this because I yelled at you? I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings..." I begin, but he shakes his head.

"That's not why, Kennedy."

I frown, forcing my mind to focus and understand what he's trying to tell me. Keeping secrets? What secret... and then it hits me. My hands fly to my stomach.

"Are they okay? Is our pup okay?" I ask. If something was wrong with our pup and Echo was silent, I could have lost him or her.

"Your mother has been working overtime to make sure that she saves the three most important beings in my life - you, Echo, and our pup. You, however, are in so much trouble for keeping this from me."

"I didn't mean to. It all happened in the middle of everything else. I actually planned to tell you the night we were supposed to talk. That's what I wanted to talk about. It's why I went to the overhang. I wasn't sure how you'd feel about me being pregnant so soon and with the problems between us, but I wasn't going to keep it from you. I would never hide your child from you, Quirin, no matter how upset or angry I am with you."

I realize that I can feel the worry inside his mind. His fear wasn't that I would keep our child from him. He thought I was planning to leave him.

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"I would never leave you. You are my mate, my love, my life. I was angry with you, yes. I want things to change, definitely. I don't want what happened to Christy to happen to anyone ever again. But I would never leave you."

He presses his lips to my head and wraps his arms more tightly around me. "Thank you for that."

I lean against him, frowning when he doesn't close off the mind link. Curious, I begin to enter his mind, wondering why he's suddenly so willing to keep the link open. I feel his body tense, but rather than shutting his mind down, he opens it wide for me, giving me free access to him.

I feel tears prick in my eyes. It feels like acceptance, acceptance of me and our bond.

'It was never about not accepting you, Little Mate. It was about protecting you. But a wise man recently reminded me that I tend to underestimate you and that your light, your inner beauty, is so much stronger than my darkness, he says in my mind.

"You talked to my dad?" I'm so surprised that I ask out loud as I sit up to look at him.

"Yes, I did."

I look at him a moment and realizing that he's not going to shut me out, I snuggle against him, smiling when Raif begins purring at me. I tentatively begin going through his conversation with my father, gasping when I get to the most painful part of that conversation for him.

You saw him kill your father?' I can feel him wanting to close his mind, wanting to protect me from that information, but he fights to keep it open.

I follow the thread of that thought to original one, the one he's buried deep in his psyche, the one where thirteen-year-old Quirin watched my father kill his. In his mind, I wrap my arms around that teenage boy and hold him, rocking him to help ease the pain of what he saw. Then, I open my mind, letting my love for Quirin flow into his mind.

I feel his body jerk, hear his gasp of surprise, but I don't stop. My powerful mate can take everything that I give him and it's time for him to feel the power of my love for him.

"Fuck, Kennedy," he gasps, his head pressed against mine. I reach up, cupping his face in my hand as I continue to pour my love into him. I let my love spread through him, filling him, touching every part of his mind.

"You're going to wear yourself out," he says, panting as if we've just made love for hours.

"Loving you has never taken any energy on my part, Quirin. It's like breathing. It just comes naturally."

He pulls his head back and gently leans in to kiss me. 'I love you so much,' he says in the mind link.

"Do you know when you stole my heart?" he asks out loud when we pull apart.

I smile, liking this side of Quirin. "My eighteenth birthday?"

He shakes his head. "It was long before then."

"It was?"

"Mmhmm. You were a little pup, and I didn't know that we would be mates. I just thought maybe your father had some witch in his bloodlines and that you had bewitched me," he says, making me laugh as he runs his nose against mine. "Try again," he says, watching me as I think.

I think back to all the times that I saw Quirin over the years. It wasn't often, only on special occasions, usually my birthdays or Henry's. And then it hits me.

"That night in the garden? Henry's eighteenth birthday?" I ask.

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"That's the one. The one where you came searching for me. You were so small, but so confident. And fearless. You've always been fearless."

"I wouldn't say I'm fearless. I've just never been afraid of you, Quirin."

He looks at me, stroking my cheek. "Alphas quake in their shoes at my ferocity, Kennedy. Even Henry was taken aback at the level of violence that I used when I killed Jasper. But not you. You've never once shown an ounce of fear towards me."



"You've never given me a reason to be afraid of you," I say softly, watching him. "Tell me about Jasper."

I watch as his face transforms from the gentle man who loves me to the frightening man that other Alphas fear.

"He hurt you. He tried to take you from me. No one will ever take you from me. If I

had known that you were carrying our pup... well, he might still be alive, suffering for what he did."

"There was another Alpha," I tell him.

"Brogan. Henry killed him."

"How did Jasper know how to get to me?" I ask.

"It had to be Slater and that's what I wanted to talk to you about that night. I was going to warn you that he'd gotten away. I think it was Terrance that didn't lock the cell properly that night, but when I realized his mate was having a rough labor, I couldn't really blame him. The other guards should have checked and they obviously didn't. They got extra patrols to remind them that when we have a person in our cells, you can never be too cautious."

"So where is Slater?" I ask.

"I don't know. I have warriors out looking for him now."

"Oh, I bet they love that. Out hunting one of their own for me," I say, knowing that they will probably hate me even more than they already do because of this.

Quirin tilts his head at me. "They volunteered, Kennedy."

That surprises me. "Volunteered? Why?"

He begins stroking my cheek again. "Don't you feel it? The change in the pack? They're all worried about you. They all wanted to know that you were safe. When you first came in, every warrior and omega not on shift was in that waiting room. Now, there's always a steady stream of them and there's probably even more since they will have felt you waking up. They wanted you to know that they love you and I told them you'd be proud of them for how they helped search for you while also protecting the pack."

I stare at him, shocked.

"The pack has fallen in love with you, Kennedy, just as I have. They want to

please you, make you happy, and we all want to be the kind of pack that you're proud of. That includes me. But I'll need your help. I don't know much about being a family, but I want to learn. I want to make sure that our pups never wonder what family should feel like. Will you help me? Will you help our pack become a pack that you can proud to call yours?"

"I love you so much," I say, feeling my emotions welling up in my eyes. "Of course

I will help our pack to become the family that it should be."

"Good. Now get some rest. You need to get stronger so Echo can come back. I'll be right here when you wake up."

He shifts me in his arms so I can snuggle against him more comfortably. When I'm settled, he kisses my head, his arms securely wrapped around me.

"I'm surprised you didn't ask me how I knew you were pregnant," he says softly,

his lips still pressed against my head.

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"Oh, I know how you found out. My mother mumbled it, didn't she?" I ask. I know

my mother well. I've worked with her for years. The woman can't keep a secret to save her life.

My mate's body begins bouncing with his laughter. "She didn't even realize she'd said it."

"She never does

"Get some sleep. When you wake up again, it will be time to eat. Your mom has

been giving you all kinds of stuff in your IV, but you and our pup need something more solid in your system."

I'm still tired enough that Raif's purring and my mate's warmth put me back to

sleep very quickly.

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# The Pack's Nemesis (Quirin's Story)

Arianna

We all felt Luna's consciousness when she woke up. What we didn't feel was her wolf's.

"Do you think she'll get her wolf back, Kier?" I had gone to seek him out, needing reassurance. I know he's working hard, keeping the pack safe while Alpha Quirin is with Luna Kennedy in the hospital. So, I brought him some food. It was a good excuse to go see him.

As busy as he is and as exhausted as he looks, he stops what he's doing to come pull me into a hug.

"I trust Luna Yara and she says Luna Kennedy's wolf will come back, so we're all going to believe that," he says, wrapping his arms around me. I feel him sigh as he breathes in my scent. I wrap my arms around him and hold him, letting him take strength from the mate bond.

"What do you have planned for today?" he asks.

"I thought I'd go see Christy. I don't know if I can help her, but I have some understanding of what she went through," I tell

him.

I'm surprised when he smiles at me, gently running his hand over my hair.

"What is that look for?" I ask.

"You act like a Beta female, even though you haven't accepted the position yet."

I blow out a breath. "I think the position is even more scary than being mated to you," I say.

"Hopefully the idea of being mated to me isn't as scary as it used to be," he says, his voice hopeful.

I shake my head no. Then I run my fingers through his hair, smiling when he leans into my touch and closes his eyes. "You may very well be the most patient man I've ever met."

He opens his eyes and looks at me. "If having you as my mate is the prize, I can be patient for as long as is necessary."

Damn. He's such a good man and he deserves a woman who isn't tainted like I am, but he doesn't care what happened to me in my previous pack. He just wants to love me.

"I got pretty lucky when the Moon Goddess paired me with you," I say.

"I feel pretty damn lucky too," he says, leaning down to kiss me softly.

Because I trust him and because I know he needs it, I lean into him, encouraging him to deepen the kiss. He does, his arms wrapping more tightly around me, but he doesn't rush the kiss. It's soft and gentle and so very sweet that it brings tears

my eyes.

When he finally pulls back, he wipes the tears from my cheeks.

"You know, if you cry when I kiss you, I'm going to take it personally."

I laugh, looking down at his chest. "It's because you make me feel so special. You make me feel things that I never thought I would ever feel with someone. But I do with you," I say, looking up at him.

"Good, because you are special. You're special to me."

We hold each other a bit longer, before he kisses the top of my head. "What did my sweet mate bring me for lunch?"

"I made you some meatloaf and mashed potatoes."

"Is it YOUR meatloaf recipe?" he asks excitedly.

"As if I would bring you someone else's," I tease.

"Ahh, I can't wait. If you go to the hospital, let me know how Luna Kennedy is doing."

"I will. Eat some food. And uh... I'll come see you tonight."

"I'll wait up for you," he says, smiling. He walks me to the door and watches me as

I walk down the hall. His sweet gesture makes me smile and I wonder if it's finally

time, time to agree to let Beta Kier mark me as his mate officially.

I think about that as I walk to the pack hospital. When I arrive, I see several warriors and omegas sitting in the waiting room, hoping to see our Luna. "Any news?" I ask.

"She woke up, talked to Alpha Quirin, then fell back to sleep. This time she's sleeping like she's supposed to be according to Luna Yara," Susie says to me.

I turn, going in search of Luna Yara.

"You can't see her. Alpha Quirin is keeping her quiet for now," Susie says.

"I was going to go sit with Christy," I tell her.

"Oh," she says, then waves me over, away from the other warriors in the room. They glance at us, curious what she's doing, but they don't say anything.

"Leo's with her," she says when we're far enough away.

"What? Why?" I ask. All of the omegas know that he rejected her. We all had to cover her shifts while she suffered from the broken mate bond. It's a lot harder for omegas than it is for others and Christy suffered for days before she was able to come back to work.

"I don't know but Luna Yara has allowed it, so there's not much I can do about it," she tells me.

I nod. "I'm going to go see Christy and Leo can go screw himself for all I care." Susie smiles, trying not to laugh, but fails. "That's actually pretty impossible, but thanks for that mental image."

I smile then turn to head down the hall to Christy's room.

When I get to the room, I knock lightly before stepping in, not waiting for a response or to be let in. Leo is sitting beside the bed, holding Christy's hand.

"Hey Arianna," she says as I walk in. It's hard to see her like this. She still has bruising around her mouth and throat. I feel the bile trying to come up but I push it back down.

"Hey Christy. I wanted to come see you," I say, turning to Leo. "Why don't you take a break. I'll stay with her."

Before he can answer, Christy looks at him. "You should go. I'll be fine."

I can tell he resistant to leave her but I step forward. "She'll be fine, Leo. Luna Yara is around here somewhere. If something happens to Christy, I'll make sure to go get her," I say, giving him no possible way out of leaving without an argument. If he does, I'll link Kier to come order him away. I won't have him upsetting Christy any more than she already is.

"Okay, but I won't be far," he says, leaning over to kiss her forehead.

She gives him a small smile before he walks to the door and steps out. I wait until he's gone, then turn back to her.

"How are you?" I know it's a dumb question. I'm sure she's not okay, but I want to know if Leo is making it better or worse by being here.

She shrugs, the motion looking like it takes a lot of effort as her eyes fill with tears and she sniffles.

I hurriedly walk to the bed and take her hand. "I'm right here, I know that only does so much, but you're not alone. How are you healing?" I ask her.

"Slowly. Sanjana is still silent. Luna Yara said that's to be expected, but..."

"It makes you feel lonelier," I say and she nods.

"What's with Leo? Do you want me to have Beta Kier tell him to stay away?" I ask her.

She surprises me by shaking her head no. "He's been really sweet. He said that Luna Kennedy has made him and all of the pack realize that strength comes in multiple ways. He said..." she looks down, plucking at the blanket that's laying over her. "He said he made a mistake and he wants me as his mate now. But, how do I do that? He didn't want me before because I was weak and I'm even weaker now," she says.

I lean forward so she sees how serious I am. "Maybe you are at this moment, but you won't always be weak. You survived, you'll get stronger."

"You don't know that," she says, looking away. I take a deep breath.

"Actually, I do. It's why I ran from my pack before.

"What do you mean?" she asks.

I tell her about my past, about the abuse that I suffered, and how my own wolf went silent for a long time.

"Is that why you won't accept Beta Kier as your mate?" she asks me, surprising me.

"How did you know?" I ask her.

She gives me a look. "Oh, please. You make him something special to eat every day. He's the only one who wasn't starving when we weren't allowed to cook and there's been more than one time when someone tried to find you in the evenings and you weren't anywhere to be found. It took me a bit, but I eventually realized that when you weren't around, neither was he."

"He's been willing to take the time I needed to let me get used to having a mate, to the idea of being intimate with someone consensually for the first time in my life. If I'm being honest, it's terrifying. But he's so patient and he's such good man and Beta," I say.

"He is. Maybe it's time you gave him a chance," she says.

I look at her and smile. "You know, I came here to support you and to help you find some peace with what happened to you. I didn't expect you to be the one supporting me."

"Leo said that Luna Kennedy told everyone that she expects this pack to act like a family. Family supports each other, right? At least, that's what they should do. That's what Luna Kennedy's family does. So, I'm just trying to follow Luna's orders and treat you like family, like a sister that I love."

I feel tears prick my eyes. "Oh Christy, you are so special," I tell her, knowing how much it meant to me to hear Kier's earlier. I lean over her bed and hug her. "I will be here for you every step of the way. I will stay with you at night if you're afraid. I'll be there if you have nightmares. I'll find a way to kick Leo's ass if you want him gone," I say making her huff a laugh. "I'll be the best sister you could have ever asked for."

"And maybe someday soon you'll be the best Beta female any pack has ever seen?" she asks me.

"Maybe. Do you need anything while I'm here? I can hear Leo clomping around in the hallway wanting to come back in

"No, I'm good. He fed me and keeps asking if I need water or to go the bathroom. That was embarrassing, He refused to

leave me after carrying me to the toilet, telling me that he could smell the blood on me. It stung to pee and when I hissed at the pain, he was right there, holding my hands. His wolf, Javier, even purred at me to help me get through the pain. It was pretty sweet."

"Good. Well, I'll be back and Susie is outside right now, We're all trading off, waiting for Luna to wake up for good so we can tell her how much we love her

and how glad we are that she's back"

"I need to thank her. She saved my life."

"I'm pretty sure that you surviving will be all the thanks she needs. Get some sleep. I'll let Leo back in and I'll see you soon....

sister."

She smiles at that. It's a small smile, but I'll take it. "See you soon, sister."

I step outside and before Leo can walk back into the room, I stick my finger in his face. "Listen up. You hurt her again, I will bring the wrath of the omegas down on you. I will tell Luna Kennedy what you did and if I have to, I'll tell Beta Kier, Luna Yara, Alpha Warren, and anyone else that will listen what you did. So you better make sure that if you want her, that you mean it. Because if you screw up again, it's your life on the line."

"I'm not going to hurt her again. I told her I made a mistake and I want to fix it. I know it will take some time, but I want to make it right," he says.

"See that you do," I say, turning to stride away.

I have my own things to make right. Christy is right. It's time for me to take my place at my mate's side and as a ranked member of this pack.

## The Pack's Nemesis (Quirin's Story)

Quirin

"She's still asleep?" Luna Yara asks, coming into the room.

"Yeah, I think she's starting to wake up. Her mind is feeling a bit more active," I say, looking down at my mate who is still sleeping in my lap. I didn't want to move her and I knew that she'd sleep better in my arms, and well, I just needed to hold her.

"I think she might be a bit too comfortable. She needs to wake up to cat," Yara says, smiling as she comes over to check her daughter.

I look up at the woman who changed the path of my life so many years ago. "Thank you for saving her life."

She smiles at me. "You never have to thank me for saving a life. It's what I do, and it's what Kennedy does. We're both very good at it, but I think that when she's finished with medical school, she'll be better at it than I am."



I ignore the part about not needing to thank her. Luna Yara has always been very humble about the significance of what she does. She saves lives and by saving one medically, she saves so many others by keeping mates healthy and strong and pups with their parents.

"I'm not sure I ever properly thanked you for saving my life all those years ago," I say.

She stops and tilts her head, looking at me. "What's this about, Quirin."

"You changed the course of my life, Luna. You made all of this possible for me. It's no secret that I've never liked your mate, well, until very recently," I say, making her smile. "I hated him. I wanted to kill him. I was consumed with hurting him the way he hurt me. I was willing to destroy everyone that he loved so that he felt the pain I felt," I say, looking down.

"I'm not proud of that. I realize now it would have meant losing everything that I have in my life. It would have meant losing my mate and the life that she's giving me. I was an angry young man who was ready to die, but you wouldn't let me go, even knowing the animosity that I felt for Alpha Warren, you wouldn't let me die."

She shrugs as if what she did is no big deal. "No one dies in my hospital." I watch her, having learned that she thinks through a lot of what she says before she says it or at least mumbles it.

"You were a very angry young man. You had a lot to be angry about. You lost your father, you lost your pack, and then you lost your mother, all in those very formidable teenage years. That was a lot for anyone to come to terms with, but even harder for an Alpha heir. I've always believed that love heals more wounds than I ever could. I always believed that some day love would heal you too. I just didn't realize that that love would come from my daughter. But I'm glad it did. Kennedy has always been drawn to you, Quirin. As Alphas, maybe you both felt the pull to each other long before the mate bond kicked in, who knows. What I do know is that my daughter loves with every ounce of her being. She loves like Warren loves, with no hesitation or restraint. It's a heady thing being loved by someone like that, and very hard to resist."

"Impossible to resist," I chuckle. She smiles again, looking at Kennedy.

"She will give you everything, but she will also expect the same from you. As someone who is loved by a man who gives me everything I could ever want in this world and so much more, I will tell you that you will feel like you get much more out of the relationship than she does. But that's okay, as long as you continue to give her everything that you are. That's all she wants. Just everything," she says, making both of us chuckle. "And even if you don't feel like your everything is enough for her, she will and that's what matters."

"Thank

you for giving me a second chance at life, a chance to become the man and mate that Kennedy deserves."

"No one dies in Mom's hospital," Kennedy says sleepily.

"There she is," Luna Yara says, as I press my lips to the side of my mate's head.

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"Did you sleep well?" I ask her.

"I'm warm, safe, and surrounded by my mate's sandalwood scent. I slept great, but I really have to pee," she says.

"Let me unhook you and then Quirin can take you to the bathroom, Luna Yara says.

I carry her to the bathroom, helping her stay steady while she goes to the

bathroom then standing behind her to hold her steady while she washes her hands. I can feel her in my mind, her mind like little butterfly wings gently moving around.

"You've kept your mind open to me," she says, her surprise obvious.

"I told you I was going to. I'm not going to close it off to you again, not ever."

As weak as she is, she still smiles her brilliant fucking smile at me. Luna Yara was right. I'll never feel like I'm good enough for her, but as long as I'm giving her what she wants, every-damn-thing, then I'll accept that she thinks I'm good enough.

She turns, lifting her cool hand to my face. "You are perfect for me." "Thank the goddess for that. Because I'm not sure I could live without you. Now, you need to feed my mate and my pup," I say, scooping her into my arms.

"...ridiculous mates who think they aren't worthy. He's the strongest, most powerful Alpha in the region, maybe the world and he doesn't feel good enough for my daughter. Seriously, what does it take for a man to realize that he's perfect just the way he is? If he were different, he wouldn't be perfect for my daughter, would he?" Luna Yara is mumbling to herself when we walk out of the bathroom. 'See, even Mom knows you're perfect for me," Kennedy says smugly in the mind link.

Luna Yara turns, obviously having no idea that she was talking out loud to herself about me. "Kennedy, how are you feeling? Any nausea?"

"Yeah, I feel pretty gross actually."

"That's not surprising. You haven't eaten in days and you may have morning sickness on top of it. I had Deborah bring some crackers for you. You'll want to make sure that you keep food on your stomach even when you feel nauseous. It will help. Once you feel a bit better, I've got some broth ready for you too. We'll take it slow today, but I'd like you to try and eat every couple of hours, and nibble on the crackers as much as you can," she tells her, handing her a packet of crackers.

I can feel my mate's nausea through the bond and Raif begins purring at her, trying to help calm her stomach.

"Thanks, Raif," Kennedy says as I sit, keeping her in my lap. "What about you? When did you last eat?"

My mate is so sweet, always thinking of others. "I didn't want to make your stomach feel any worse and I didn't want to leave you, so I'll eat once you're back in bed, or when Luna Yara says you can leave."

"Any mental flickering from Echo yet?" Luna Yara asks her.

"Not yet," she says, and Raif's purring increases as we feel her sadness and fear of losing her wolf.

"I'm not surprised. You're still very weak and with the pup, she'll be working overtime to heal herself and protect the t You focus on getting stronger and that will help her get stronger too.

Luna Yara agrees that Kennedy will be more comfortable in her own room at the packhouse and after forcing me to go eat, and assuring me that she won't leave until she feels that Kennedy is strong enough, she unhooks Kennedy from the IV and gives her clearance to leave.

I help her get showered and dressed in the hospital, and by the time we're done, she's too weak to walk. I scoop her back into my arms, ready to take her to see the pack.

"Can we stop and see Christy first?" she asks me

"Of course," I tell her, walking her out of the room and into the room next to hers.

I'm surprised when Leo is the one sitting with Christy.

"Hey, Christy."

"Luna! Oh, I'm so glad that you're better. Do you get to leave the hospital?" Christy asks her.

"Yes, but I'm on bedrest until Mom says I can come off. What about you? Mom says she's keeping you overnight again. How are you healing?" Kennedy asks

her.

She looks at Leo and then back at Kennedy.

"Do you want Leo to leave while we talk, Christy?" I ask her, not sure what that look meant. I frown, picking up a thought in Kennedy's mind.

'They're mates? Christy turned eighteen months ago. They would have known before now, I tell Kennedy in the mind link.

I can feel my mate watching Leo, studying the interactions between him and Christy.

"That doesn't mean he accepted her. He would have considered an omega a weak mate, she says.

"It's okay with me if he stays. It's not like I have a lot of secrets right now. Everyone knows what happened to me," she says sadly.

"And it should never have happened in the first place, Christy. I'm sorry I let you down. It won't happen again," I tell her. There's power behind my words, but I force my aura to stay gentle in front of her.

"I should have trusted you to help me, Alpha. I'm sorry I didn't."

"You have nothing to be sorry for. But in the future, if you have any concerns at all, with anyone, let me or your Luna know."

She nods, then tells Kennedy about how she's feeling better but that her wolf is still silent.

"Mine is too," Kennedy tells her and somehow that seems to make Christy feel better that her own wolf is still silent. "Mom says we have to make ourselves strong so our wolves can get stronger. So you need to do whatever you can to get stronger. And if there's any concern that someone is impeding that healing process, I will send Alpha Quirin to get them until I'm strong enough to do it myself," she says, looking pointedly at Leo.

"I'll make sure I don't do anything to impede her healing, Luna. I just want to help."

"Make sure that you do, Leo," she says firmly. I have to fight my smile.

My mate may not be back to full strength, but she's back.

# The Pack's Nemesis (Quirin's Story)

Kennedy

I don't like feeling weak, I hate that Echo is silent, but I'm loving every minute of being inside Quirin's mind. His mind is just like he is, rough and rugged on the outside, but soft and gentle underneath, or at least it is towards me. And I like that a lot too. Now that I'm in his head, I can feel the difference in how he feels about me and how he feels about others, even our pack members. He loves them, in his Quirin way, but his love for me is all-encompassing.

'I like having you in my mind. I didn't think I would, but it's like walking through a meadow on a sunny day. It feels like the birds are singing, the bees are buzzing and butterflies are fluttering around, he says in the mind link.

I smile up at my mate. My mate who apparently makes Alpha quake in their shoes, but tells me my mind feels like something out of a Disney movie.

'If you tell anyone, I'll deny it,' he grumbles.

'Your secret is safe with me, my love,' I say, watching his sexy Quirin smile spread across his face. He'd been focusing on carrying me out to the waiting room, but

his gaze turns to me.

'You think I'm sexy?'

'Is that really a question?'

'Yeah, I guess it is.'

'You're the sexiest man I've ever met in my life. All that dark, broodiness that becomes raging passion when we're together is so hot I can barely wait to have you inside me again,' I tell him honestly.

He stops walking, leaning forward to take my mouth in a passionate kiss.

'I can't wait to be inside your body and your mind at the same time. As great as it always feels to be inside you, I bet it will feel even better, and I'm not even sure how that will be possible.'

I moan softly as he continues to kiss me. 'I can't wait either.'

When he finally pulls back, he smiles at me. "Let's get you healthy first. We both know I lose control when I'm with you and I won't risk hurting you or our pup," he says out loud but quietly.

"Does the pack know?"

"Not yet. I wanted you to be with me when we tell them. I'm going to make sure they know that I will be even more protective of you now," he says.

"Does that mean that you're not going to let me out of your sight?" I ask, pressing my face against his throat.

"When you're not in my sight, you'll be with Lane or another guard. I realized that one isn't enough. You need at least two, preferably three. So you need to think about who you want on guard duty. And you should know that Lane feels as guilty as I do that Jasper got to you."

"It wasn't his fault," I say as we walk into the waiting room. Everything else that I was going to say stops as those in the waiting room all stand.

"Hi, Luna."

"We're so glad you're okay, Luna."

"We love you, Luna."

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Everyone who is here says something to me, carefully approaching me. I'm not sure if that has more to do with Quirin's protective aura, their concern that I won't accept them, or just concern for my healing. Whatever it is, they slowly approach until I reach out one hand. They take it, one by one, and I squeeze their hands, telling them that I appreciate them being here:

When we finally begin making our way to the packhouse, we have an entourage following us. I look over Quirin's shoulder, talking to our pack members and catching up on what I've missed while I've been in the hospital.

"What happened with Lillian and her pup?" I ask Quirin.

"Your mother released them. She's checked on them once or twice, but mother and baby are doing very well. I believe Lillian's wolf has already healed her, but your mother wants her to take it easy for a couple more days. They should be at the packhouse," he says.

As we approach, Beta Kier comes out to greet us. "Luna, it's so good to have you back."

"It's good to be back, Beta."

I feel the funny thought flicker through Quirin's mind and I smile, looking at Kier. "So, my mom likes you. Well done, Beta."

He smiles. "She's mumbled it a couple of times."

"If it came out of her mouth, whether she meant to say it to not, it's true," I tell him.

When we step inside the packhouse, everyone gets quiet, pushing forward until Quirin growls softly, warning them not to crowd me. He walks me through the crowd and I say hello to everyone, once again extending my hand to squeeze each of theirs, letting them know that I'm okay and that I accept them. Lillian and Terrance are there and I get to officially meet their son.

When we get to the omegas, I look at Quirin.

'I want to hug them,' I tell him in the mind link.

'Fine, but I'm not putting you down,' he says.

Susie comes to me first. When she takes my hand, I pull her closer, wrapping my arm around her shoulder.

"Oh, Luna! We were so worried about you," she says, beginning to cry.

It's like that with all of them. They all cry as I hug them, and I know it's as important for them to hug me as it is for me to hug them.

"We love you so much, Luna. We're so happy to have you back," Arianna says, as she hugs me.

After my pack, my family is waiting and they also give me a hug.

"It's good to see you awake, sis," Connor says, then looks at Quirin. "Did you tell her?"

"Not yet."

I frown and I'm about to ask, when the image of Connor and Quirin signing an alliance comes into Quirin's head.

Now it's my turn to cry. "You entered an alliance with Connor?" I whisper.

"I did. It's time for things to change and as my very intelligent Luna once told me, that change starts with leadership."

He turns to address the pack. "We have so much to be thankful for. Our Luna is getting stronger and is home with us. We, as a pack, have a long way to go to make our Luna proud of us, but I've already started making some of those changes. As your Luna said, I have entered into an alliance with her brother, Alpha Connor. That will strengthen the alliance that we already

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have with Alpha Henry as they are in an alliance as well. I know many of you have strong feelings about Alpha Warren. Any animosity between our pack and his ends today. If you have concerns or need to talk about it, let me know. I have had my own conversation with Alpha Warren to get the answers that I needed about what happened so many years ago. I'm sure that Alpha Warren would be willing to discuss your concerns as well, if you are willing to listen." Quirin says, turning to look at my father. He nods, his eyes taking in our pack members around the room. Through Quirin, I can feel that there are some that aren't thrilled with our alliance. Quirin makes a mental note of those individuals and I can feel that he plans to talk

them later.

"We will make our Luna proud of us. We will do whatever it takes to make her proud to be the Luna of this pack. My earlier comments about putting her first haven't changed," he says.

I've been watching him intently while

he talked to the pack. He's such a natural leader and he's a good one in many ways..but this is the longest speech Ive ever heard him make and through the bond, I can feel that it's the most important one to him that he's ever made to the pack. He truly intends to make this pack a pack that I'm proud to lead. I feel like my heart might burst with love for this man.

He doesn't look away from the pack, but he leans over to kiss the side of my head, acknowledging my thoughts.

"I will never again second guess my mate's intuition about what's going on in this pack. So you'd better make sure that you never give her a reason to doubt you. Now, your Luna needs to rest. I can feel her fading on me," he says, smiling at me. "Any questions before I take her upstairs?"

"Umm, it's not a question, but can I make an announcement?" Arianna asks, looking around and blushing brightly.



"Of course, Arianna," Quirin says.

. She clasps her hands together, her knuckles turning white as she takes a deep breath, then looks up at Kier. I smile, already

knowing what she's about to do.

"I've known that I was Beta Kier's mate since the day I arrived here. We, all of us,

have come from bad situations and I was terrified to find my mate, so terrified that I almost left the pack. But Beta Kier asked me to give him a chance. He said he was willing to take whatever time I needed to get to know him and he's done just that. So, in front of the entire pack, I wanted to let everyone know that I accept you as my mate, Kier. And if you still want me ..."

She doesn't finish before she's in his arms and his mouth is on hers. The entire pack begins howling and clapping happily.

'You knew?' Quirin asks in the mind link as I sniffle through happy tears.

I look at him. 'You didn't?'

He shakes his head slowly. "You never cease to amaze me, Little Mate. Come on, let's get you upstairs. I have a feeling our Beta couple is going to be busy tonight."

He walks me up to the happy couple. "Congratulations!" I say, seeing that Kier's eyes are bright with unshed tears.

"Thank you, Luna. Thank you so much," he says, holding Arianna against his side.

As we walk away, I hear the sounds of the pack congratulating Kier and Arianna. I lean my head against Quirin's chest. The pack is already starting to feel different, in a very good way.

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Comment