

Payment To the Alpha by Ms.M Chapter 44

Avery's POV

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I was staring at the man sitting across from me. His eyes didn't falter. The corner of his mouth was jiggled up and made out an uncomfortable smile.

"I'm visiting." I stated simply. Not making room for further conversation. Or so I thought.

"Visiting family?" He asked me.

"I guess you could say that." I said.

"You know, being out here all alone can be dangerous for such a young girl. Nobody to protect her, to save her from harm. To watch out for her. Or perhaps your man is around here somewhere?" The last was more of a statement from his side. He wanted to know if I was completely alone.

"No, I'm here alone," I said and leaned forward as I continued.

"And I'm perfectly fine protecting myself. Whatever the danger might be, I'm not as easy to get to as it may seem." I said. Trying to sound as confident as possible. His smile faltered, and he leaned back.

"You know, having a strong man by your side means you don't have to protect yourself. Why don't you think about it?" He said, and I looked at him in disgust. He was wearing ripped clothes with stains on them. He reeked of alcohol and was not at all a sight to see.

But the thing that hurt me most was the fact that he just gave his GIRLFRIEND an anniversary gift. And now he's sitting here, hitting on me!? Jackass.

"Why would she need a strong man when she has a strong woman in her corner?" An all too familiar voice came ringing in my ears and filling the venue. I looked to the door and saw Natasha standing there. With Lydia.

I jolted up from my seat and ran to hug her. Lydia reciprocated and held her arms around me tightly. Lydia tried pulling away after a while,

"No, not yet. I need this." I said, and her arms once again embraced me in a strangling tight, warm hug.

Natasha walked over to the man, who simply rolled his eyes.

"Natasha, what an unpleasant surprise." I pulled away from Lydia and looked at her quizzically.

"They know each other?" Lydia simply nodded her head in response.

"Marco, you and your girlfriend are going to have to find some other lonely human being to disgust and feed on." Natasha said. Marco was turned away from me, so I couldn't see how he reacted.

"To feed on?" I asked, and Lydia smirked at me.

"You know we're going to have to school you on the supernatural one day. Marco over there and Wendy in the bar are vampires. They usually scout for lonesome people, preferably those who don't have anyone or are on the run and are easy targets. They then see if the people will come with them willingly and if not, they're coerced, a form of manipulation. And then they feed on them, which means they drink their blood." My eyes shot up, and Lydia shrugged. All of this was so normal to them. I was still getting used to werewolves and witches.

"So wait, vampires can be out in the sun?" I asked, remembering all the movies I've seen. I was fighting the migraine that was working its way up my head. Lydia shook her head,

"No," she went to the windows and pulled a loosened piece of what looked like tape.

"This is a film that keeps the sun out, and Marco there, when he walks out, his car is parked right by the door. He barely takes a step in the sunlight."

"aha..." I managed to get out. My mouth was stuck wide open, and I couldn't for the life of me figure out what to say.

"I know that it's a lot, but hey, I'm here now. I'll tell you anything you wanna know." Lydia assured me and placed her hand on my shoulder.

"Here you go, sweetheart!" Wendy yelled from the counter as she brought out my food. Which looked delicious, by the way. If I didn't close my mouth soon, my saliva would start dripping down. That thought alone made my gap shut quickly, and I went to retake a seat.

"Oh, that looks good. Can I have one?" Lydia said to Wendy, sounding giddy.

"Me too, please." Natasha chimed in. After they had placed their orders, Marco stood up and left the cafe. In some weird sense, I felt bad for him. I know how I get when I'm hungry.

However, I am glad that I wasn't his meal ticket for the day.

James' POV

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A week. One fucking week had gone by since Avery left, and I'm losing my fucking mind.

I nearly killed one of the warriors during practice yesterday morning because I couldn't control my anger. The other warriors had stared in shock, and it wasn't until Damon came with three others that they managed to somewhat pull me off the poor bastard.

For me to stop completely, Alex had come and given me a right hook to the face. It didn't hurt, but it made me focus my anger on him instead. We had both shifted and were going at it for five hours until we called a truce, or well, I did when I realized the sun was going down.

Only then did I see how badly I fucked up. Only when my brother was bloody and beaten did I comprehend what actually happened. How I nearly killed an innocent pack member.

Nobody talked about it, and the warriors and I had a conversation where I apologized. However, I know that I need to do a lot more than that.

What the fuck are we going to do?

'I don't know. But something needs to happen, quickly.'

The only thing that made this worse was that Blade was just as angry as I was. Meaning that I couldn't in my human form nor my wolf form control myself.

This shit was just getting worse and worse. I needed to find a way to make this work until Avery comes home. But how the fuck am I going to do that? I need my mate, my love.

Natasha's word about Avery being safe isn't cutting it anymore. I need to see it for myself. There is a fucking wizard out to get her, and I swear by the goddess if anything happens to her. I will burn down the world and step on the ashes of those who burnt with it.

"FUCK!!" I roared, and my hand flew through the wall, leaving a hole behind.

Alex's POV

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I was walking to my brother's study when I heard his growl and something smashing again from down the hall. I walked down to his bedroom and saw that the door was slightly open. I went in, and there he stood, with his hand through the wall, sweat dripping down his face and his chest heaving.

"This has to end." I said and stared at my brother, befuddled by sight.

This wasn't him. Alpha James Knight wasn't the man to lose his temper without a cause, he wasn't the man to nearly killing a pack member, and he was definitely not the unstable kind.

He turned his head and looked at me, his eyes were pitch black, and his nostrils were flaring.

"Oh fuck," I groaned, knowing what was to come. I took off my jacket and pulled up my sleeves.

James stood there staring at me, watching my every move. With everything, I did his eyes started to lighten up, his breathing slowing down. He looked at me with precision, and with every move, he got more and more confused. James' eyes met mine, and the pain behind them made me ache. My brother was being tormented, tortured by memories and situations he couldn't control.

He knew as well as me that this wasn't him. He didn't want to be this person. But how the fuck can we change this without me blabbering things he's not supposed to know. James looked down at his hand as he flexed his fingers, the broken bones slowly healing. He then looked back up at me and shook his head before walking over and taking a seat on the edge of the bed.

"What the fuck is happening?" He asked me with his face buried in his hands. I walked over and sat beside him.

"You lost your mate. That's what's happening. Neither you nor Blade can cope with the loss." I said in a sigh.

"I can't continue like this, Alex." James stated. I wanted so badly to tell him what Avery had told me, but I couldn't. There was a reason for James not to know. I couldn't compromise her plan.

"We'll figure this out, brother." I said reassuringly and put a hand on his shoulder.

James nodded his head and looked up at me.

"How?" He asked, desperation clear in his eyes. I scratched the back of my neck and shrugged.

"Honestly. I don't have a fucking clue, man. But we'll fix it. We always do." I said.

"I need her back."

"I know you do."

"Then help me find her," He said, and I removed my hand, placing it on the bed. Sorry brother, but I can't do that.

"James, she will be back. This isn't forever. She said so herself in the letter. Until then, however, you need to get your shit together. This pack is nothing without their Alpha, and it's only a matter of time before word spreads about the unstable Alpha James. Packs will gather and believe they can start a war, fight for your position. You know as well as I do that losing your mate weakens you. We can't afford to have packs swarming here right now brother," I stood to my feet as I continued.

"If you want to change, then you have to let yourself change. You have to live like you did before Avery entered the picture. You have to be the all mighty Alpha and rule your pack until the day when she comes back. There is a war brewing. We don't need you to be an unstable, emotional wreck when it starts." I saw the color in my brother's eyes once again darken at the end of my speech. However, this time, there was determination where there once was desperation.

James stood to his feet and straightened his clothes, shaking his head and looking at me like I was his target.

"You're a jackass. You know that?" He said.

"Well, someones has to be." I said with a shrug and a smirk.

"I'm going for a run." James said as he walked towards the door.

"Hey, brother!" I called out for him. He turned around with a raised eyebrow.

"With the emotional instability and all, stay away from the cliffs, would ya? Can't have you falling to your death just yet," I said with a wide smile. He opened his mouth to say something but closed it up again and rolled his eyes before taking his leave.

I was in my room, changing and ready to hit the fields for some practice before dinner. I promised Jackson that I would join the warriors in training for the witch hunt.

As I grabbed the pair of shorts that were lying in my drawer, I saw the letter from Avery.

I exhaled a breath and picked it up, remembering what it said. I opened it up and sat down on the armchair, re-reading it for the third time.

'Dear Alex,

Where do I begin...

You made my life with you guys more fun, exciting, and frustrating than I ever imagined possible. You were the brother that I never had. I do have a brother, but we've never had any contact. He's never cared. You showed me how it was to have a brother who truly cares for you, who fights for you, and who wants to genuinely help you. You did so much for me in the short time that I was with you guys, and I wish I didn't have to end that. But I had to leave, and I hope that you can, in some way, understand my actions.

Also, I need you to keep James safe. I won't be gone forever, but neither will I be home soon.

I need to ask you for a favor Alex, one that you must keep a secret from the others, including James.

There is a war brewing, and much blood will be spilled, and only when the war begins will I be able to come home. 'The war is where everything begins where everything will come to an end. The closure will be given to those wise enough to listen.' This is all I know, Alex, but I'm hoping it's enough. I need you to prepare everyone. They know that there is a war coming, but they have no idea to which magnitude this war will be. It's not a small one. Many people will die, and I need you to make sure that all the warriors are prepared so that the blood being spilled isn't ours.

When it's time, and the war is beginning, burn this letter, and I will know. I will come home. Please, keep James safe. I don't mean from others, but keep him safe from himself. Natasha explained to me what happens when one loses his mate. And that it is amplified when it is an alpha. Take care, Alex, and thank you for everything.

Love, Cupcake. '

"Don't worry, sis, everything will be ready for your arrival."

With a smile plastered on my face, I tucked away the letter and got dressed for practice.

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Avery's POV

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"Okay, but wait!" I yelled with my hands in the air and laughing. Lydia, Natasha, and I were in my room, eating snacks and catching up. Lydia told me to ask any and all questions I had regarding anything, and she would answer them. So I had, for the past two hours.

"How come you," I said and pointed to Natasha.

"Didn't know that it was Lydia when she walked out of the forest that day?" I asked. This question had burnt a hole in my mind ever since that day.

"Well, because I didn't get my wolf until I was eighteen, and by then, I was living in Brooksten. So my mother never knew what my wolf looked like. I had only shifted once before that day, so I barely knew myself." Lydia said with a shrug and popped another sour worm in her mouth.

"I see," I said, taking a sip from my wine glass. Being here, with Lydia, talking and drinking wine. It reminded me of how things were before. Whenever I would feel sad, confused, or lost, Lydia was always there to guide me in the right direction.

I missed that. She was my best friend. She is my best friend. And I will never let go of her again.

"How are they doing back home?" I asked, and the uncertainty was noticeable in my voice. I don't know if I wanted to know the truth. Lydia and Natasha looked at each other, neither of them answering my question. I nodded my head and took another gulp of wine, twirling it around my mouth before swallowing it.

"I see." I said with a 'tsk' sound at the end.

"I'm sorry, Aves. I don't want to lie to you, but I honestly don't think knowing will do you any good. However, I did promise 'no more lies.' So if you want to know, I'll tell you,"

"Lydia," Natasha said sternly, in a warning.

"No! She deserves to know. I promised you, Avery that I wouldn't keep anything from you, and I won't. She deserves to know, mom." Lydia said. Natasha knew that there was nothing she could do to change her mind. That was also a thing about Lydia; if she had set her mind on something, there was no stopping her.

Natasha put her hands up in defeat and then clasped them in front of her.

"So?" Lydia asked and looked at me expectantly. I raised a brow at her,

"So what?" I asked.

"So, do you want to know?" She said, emphasizing every word. I looked between my best friend and Natasha a few times. I grabbed my wine glass to take another sip but noticed that it was empty. I guess I'm taking pretty big sips.

I groaned, and as if she was reading my mind, Lydia took the bottle and poured me some more wine. I gave her a smile and started drinking like it was lemonade.

"No. No, I don't think I want to know." I said honestly. What good would it do me? They were obviously not doing too well. Neither was I, but at least I knew that I'd be back. They were left with the notion that I will be back, but none of us were sure when.

"Wise choice." Natasha said. I nodded my head, and Lydia quickly changed the topic.

"SO, what's up with James' brother, huh? Is he taken?" Lydia asked me with a raised eyebrow making me giggle.

"Lydia Marie Claeson!" Natasha scolded her daughter. Lydias' hands flew up in surrender as she looked at Natasha with her big eyes.

"I'm sorry, but hey, it's a reasonable question." She said with a shrug and then looked back at me with guilt and a small smirk.

I laughed to the point where I nearly fell off the bed.

"Lydia, you're the daughter of his uncle!" I shrieked, scrunching my nose and shaking my head.

James' POV

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What a fucking week. I thought to myself as I dragged my hands over my hair and walked through the woods. I had let Blade out for a run, thinking it might be a good way to get rid of some of the built-up frustration. I am beginning to realize, however that I didn't need a run. I needed blood.

I needed to kill someone, rip someone's throat out, hit someone until they're lying in a pool of their own blood.

Holy fucking shit.

I was walking near the cliffs, thinking about what Alex said.

Dick head.

I went and sat on the cliff, with my legs dangling off the edge. How did life take this turn?

How did this all happen? I needed Avery. I needed her here with me, by my side. Only then will I be able to relax. Only then will I crave her presence more than blood.

"Thought I told you to stay away from the cliffs?" Alex said, coming up behind me. I had sniffed him out earlier but didn't bother to acknowledge him.

"Thought I told you not to sneak up on your Alpha." I retorted. Alex scoffed as he took a seat next to me.

"If I could sneak up on you, you wouldn't be my Alpha." He said with a smirk, and I felt a jolt of childish amusement flood through me.

"I know that it's hard, brother. But suicide is not the answer," Alex's smirk grew even wider as he joked with a fake seriousness to his words.

"You know, one little push is all it takes, and you'll never be able to annoy me again." I said and leaned forward, looking to the river at the bottom. Alex started laughing beside me and shook his head.

"What do you think they would've said had they been here right now?" I asked him as I looked up at the heavens. Alex let out a breath of air before looking up.

"Honestly, they would be on the road, looking for the son of a bitch who's threatening their family." He said. And I couldn't agree more.

"So why don't we?" I asked my brother.

"You know why. He's coming here, James, soon. We just have to be patient." That's the problem. My patience is running thin. It's barely hanging on by a thread.

"So you-" Mid-sentence, Alex was cut off. We both got a mind-link.

'Alpha.Beta. There is a man here saying he wants to meet you.'

'Who is he?'

'He won't say Alpha.'

'We'll be right there.'

'Yes, Alpha.'

Alex and I looked at each other before standing up and heading back.

"Who the hell would willingly want to meet you?" Alex said, walking beside me. I stretched out my hand, sending him into a tree. He quickly recovered, though,

"Jackass," Alex cursed, patting his clothes free of dirt.

'It's starting.'

What is?

'The war. It's almost time.'

I looked at Alex, who was already looking at me with furrowed eyebrows.

"Blade?" He asked, and I nodded my head.

"He said the war is almost here." I said. Alex clenched his jaw and looked ahead.

"So did Ceasar." He said, and my head snapped his way. Cesar isn't the one to normally know about the pack business deals. Normally nobody did. This means that Ceasar is talking with the moon goddess as well. I believe this to be much greater than any one of us had expected.

Amber's POV

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I was watching the unknown man sitting on the chair in my brother's office. His hair was ruffled and dirty, as were his clothes. They were ripped and had stains of dried blood on them.

Whoever this man was, he didn't seem to know it himself. He had walked onto our territory, where the patrol guards had caught him. They asked him what his business here was, and all he said was that he had to meet the Alpha and that it was urgent. The man hasn't spoken three words since walking in here. So I decided to see if his tongue had started working.

I walked up to him and sat on the chair next to the man.

"Excuse me, sir," I said and leaned forward. His eyes were glued to the window behind the desk. He barely blinked. I could tell that his eyes were a darker shade of green and that he had bruising all over his face. He looked like he had been in one hell of a fight.

"Sir, can you tell me your name?" I asked but was met with silence once again.

"Why do you need to see the Alpha?" I asked, trying my luck one more time. He didn't budge, his eyes not moving, nor his head. It was like he was in a trance.

"What happened to you?" I asked, sounding concerned. I scanned his face, as much of it that I could see, and there were bruises, black and blue, blood, and I saw a few broken bones. His nose was one of them. That question seemed to have done something as the man slowly turned his head towards me. We now had eye contact and usually, this is the part where I see a person's true intentions. Where I get a sense of who they are. But from him, I got nothing. It was blank. His eyes showed no emotions, no feelings, no nothing. It was like a pit of darkness behind otherwise telling eyes.

"H-he-He did this to me," The man stuttered. Struggling to speak but managing to get that sentence out. I leaned in a little closer.

"Who did that to you?" I asked him, hoping to get some sort of explanation. But before he could answer, the door opened up, and my brothers stepped in, followed by Jackson and... Sebastian?

James walked around the desk and took his seat, the man looked towards the three men standing behind us, and when his eyes landed on Sebastian, I thought I saw something.

James didn't speak. He studied the man from top to bottom, locking his eyes with his. James' eyebrows furrowed, and I could tell that he saw the same thing I did, nothing.

"Who are you?" James asked while looking suspiciously at the man. Even he was met with silence. However, James and I deal with silence in different ways. Where I may be patient and understanding, my brother is not.

"If you can't speak, then I can't help you. So either talk or scribble it down on paper. If neither of those work for you, then-"

"Crow." The man said, cutting James off. And suddenly, all ears perked up, and all attention was on him.

James' POV

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His eyes that earlier held no emotion were now suddenly black and angered. When he said the name of the man I desperately wanted to meet, his eyes changed, but so did his entire facial structure.

I didn't know much about the man sitting in front of me except for the fact that he was a werewolf, based on his smell and the fact that he had information about Crow. But one thing was made clear from the moment I saw him, he can't be trusted. However, he had information on Crow, the question was, is it believable?

"Speak." I said firmly, leaning back in my chair. The man gave me a weird stare, and what looked like a smirk he was trying to suppress.

"I met Crow," He said with hatred laced in his words. He spat venom as well as saliva that landed on my desk. I looked at him with a raised brow and waited for him to continue.

"He is the one who did this to me,"

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James' POV

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"He did that to you?" I asked the man after the shock had settled. He nodded his head and never removed his eyes from mine. I felt as though he was waiting for something. Like he was waiting for me to believe him.

"What's your name?" I asked him and his right eye twitched. All eyes in the room were on him and you could tell he knew that. He was uncomfortable but didn't want it to show. Amber gave me a quick look, showing she noticed the same thing as I did.

"Well?" I asked him again with a raised brow. So many red flags.

"My name is Carlson." He said.

Blade, what do you think?

'I don't trust him.'

Good. Neither do I.

'Let's play along and see where it leads.'

"Well Carlson, you wanted to speak to me, it was urgent you said. Yet here we are and I have to pull the words out of your mouth." I leaned forward and met his gaze with my own. Who is this man? And what the fuck is he doing in my pack?

"I understand that you have your reservations when it comes to new people. But I can assure you Alpha, I mean no harm," Carlson said. That was the longest he had spoken since his arrival.

"Then why don't you cut to the chase and tell us why you're here." Alex said, impatiently.

Carlson turned his head, slowly towards my brother, eyeing him before turning back to me.

"I am here because I've heard that you are looking for Crow, and I believe I can help you find him."

"I don't know what you've heard, but we aren't looking for him," I smirked and looked at Carlson.

"We're waiting for him." I said, waiting too see a reaction. But It didn't come.

Instead it looked as if he became determined. Not the emotion I was expecting. Reading Carlson won't be easy.

"Then I want to wait with you. I want to fight him, I can help." He said. His facial expression and eyes showed nothing but the truth in his words.

"Why? If he did that to you, why would you want to meet him again?" Amber asked.

"Because of what did to me. This wasn't all he did. Before he fought me," Carlson looked at Amber, and clenched his jaw.

"He slaughtered my whole family." Carlson's eyes were now black. He was raging, and I don't blame him. Anybody would want revenge on the person who hurt their family. The problem is, I'm not sure if I believe him.

"I'm sorry for your loss. But I'm not sure that this is the place for you to wait." I said honestly. Because it wasn't. I didn't trust him, and I can't allow a person I don't trust to roam amongst my pack.

Carlson's eyes started to soften up. He showed another side. Now all I could see in his eyes was his pain. Perhaps that's all this really is. He's upset, angry that his family was murdered by the one person we all want to kill.

"I understand," Carlson said as he lowered his head. Regardless of how I feel about him, I guess he deserves the benefit of the doubt. At least if he is here, I can keep an eye on him. And he has seen Crow. He knows what he looks like, which could be useful, seeing as neither of us has any idea.

I looked at Carlson and thought over my decision. My brother looked down at me from where he was standing, and I could tell that he, too, was in conflict with his opinions.

I knew loss, I knew pain, and I knew grief. This man seemed to hold all of those emotions and recognizable traits in his eyes.

"On second thought, why don't you follow Jackson, and he'll show you to a room where you can stay for the time being. I need to talk this over with my Beta, and then I'll call for you to let you know my decision." Carlson's head flew up, and his eyes met mine. He smiled courteously before standing to his feet and bowing his head.

"Thank you, Alpha," He said. I gave Jackson a nod, and he too stood up and escorted Carlson to one of the guest rooms.

When the door had closed, I leaned back in my chair.

"So, what do you guys think?" I asked the remaining members in the room. Alex, Amber, and Sebastian looked at each other. It seemed as though we were all on the same page. Meaning none of us knew whether or not he could be trusted. None of us knew whether he was telling the truth or not, and none of us knew what to do with him. I locked eyes with Sebastian, who seemed tempted to speak. What was holding him back? Sebastian was wearing a long grey coat and clothing he borrowed from one of the warriors.

"Yes?" I asked him, seeing as he didn't speak up on his own. Sebastian faltered with his words for a bit before managing to put together a sentence.

"Alpha, I'm not sure whether or not he can be trusted, as I'm sure you've already guessed. However, I do know what it is like to lose your family to that son of a bitch. If anything he said is true, he deserves revenge." Sebastian said. Not very confidently, but I'm guessing my authority is showing, seeing as the others are fumbling to.

"I see. And you Amber?"

"I honestly don't know. Either he is a mourning husband and father, or he's one hell of a liar."

"All we know is that he's a werewolf. The rest, if we want to know, we have to wait and see." Alex spoke. I turned my head to look at him.

"And to do so, he must stay." I stated. I guess that's it then. Carlson is staying here.

'Tell Carlson that he's welcome to stay until we get this all sorted out. Make him comfortable and bring him spare clothes. Meet me in my office when you're done.'

"Jackson is tending to our guest. You may all leave," I said before continuing, having one other precaution to put in place.

"Keep an eye on him at all times. If anybody asks, you say he's a guest and nothing more, nothing less. If he is to speak to any of the pack members, one of you must be present. Understood?"

"Yes, Alpha."

As the others were exiting my office, Jackson showed up.

"Alpha," I gestured for him to have a seat and handed him a water bottle.

"I need you to look around for something without anyone noticing. I need you to find out as much as you can concerning our new guest. And as I told the others, keep a very close eye on him." Jackson bowed his head, indicating he understood.

"So, off the book," Jackson said with a grin. I rolled my eyes and took my seat.

"How are you, man? You seem to be holding up a lot better than before, but I can imagine it's still challenging." I released a breath and turned around on my chair, facing the window.

"She's out there, alone. I won't be able to rest until she's back home, safe, where she belongs. Until then, I will be doing everything in my power to speed up the process." I told him and spun back around. Jackson nodded his head raised his water bottle in a toast.

I chuckled, but nevertheless, I followed his gesture and raised my bottle.

"To the future," He said, and we both drank. I need to make sure to protect my family, as Avery is protecting me.

Avery's POV

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Lydia and I were sitting on my bed and reminiscing about the past. Everything we had done, everything we planned to do, and all of the craziness in-between.

"Did you know?" I asked her quietly as I chewed on a Dorito. Lydia knew what I was getting at, seeing as we had talked about my so-called family for the past thirty minutes.

"Did I know what?" Lydia asked me. I looked at her with a raised brow and waited for her to answer my question. She sighed and shook her head.

"Yeah, I knew. I'm sorry, Aves. There were so many times that I wanted to take you and run, take you away from that misery. You never realized their lack of love for you because, in your head, it was normal. You saw how they treated Isabel, yet you refused to believe that there was a divided love between you," It was true. There were so many different occasions that their true colors would show, but I refused to acknowledge it.

They were my family, and I didn't want to believe that they didn't care. So I chose to rather live in a lie than to face the truth.

"Don't criticize your choices," Lydia said as she grabbed my hand.

"You wanted a family. Many people would have done what you did in a situation like that. Because facing the truth would mean losing those you believed you love. And that pain isn't something one normally chooses to go through." She continued.

"I've missed you so much." I said as I wrapped my arms around Lydia and held onto her tightly. Something I'm going to do for the rest of our lives.

"I've missed you to Aves,"

The sun was starting to set outside the window. Natasha had gone on an errand and would be back soon, and Lydia was asleep with her head leaning on my shoulder.

I held the picture of James and me in my hands, caressing it like I did every day how I wish for all of this to be over.

"I'll be home soon." I whispered to the picture.

"I wouldn't be too sure about that," My head snapped to the door, and my breath hitched in my throat. It couldn't be. Am I dreaming?

"Hey there, sweetheart, I think it's time we had a talk." He gritted through his teeth as he took short menacing steps towards me. Lydia was still sleeping beside me. I wanted to get off the bed and run, but I couldn't leave her. I pushed myself up against the wall as hard as I could. Thinking that it might be some sort of protection. There was nothing else I could do. He was standing beside the bed, Jack, the man I believed to be my father. He raised his hand and was ready to strike. As always, I closed my eyes and waited for the impact.

"AVERY, GET DOWN!" Natasha yelled from the door as she lifted her hands, and Jack was thrown into the wall.

Natasha came running up in front of me, shielding me while holding her grip on Jack. He was Immobilized.

"YOU CLOSE YOUR EYES WHEN BEING ATTACKED?!" Natasha scolded me. I shrugged and shrunk back on the bed. I really needed to stop closing my eyes.

I looked behind me to see Lydia still sleeping. How could she not wake up?

My eyes grew wide, and I felt myself starting to hyperventilate. With a shaky hand, I reached over and slowly placed it on her neck.

"No, come on." I begged as I pressed harder. I felt it. She was breathing. She had a pulse. But why isn't she waking up?

"She's under a spell. Give her this!" Natasha yelled and threw me a dried piece of plant. I looked at it and then back at Natasha.

"What do I do with this?!" I screamed in panic. Jack was struggling to break free, and Natasha was visibly struggling to keep him at bay.

"Put it in her mouth!" Whatever magic Natasha is doing, it's powerful. Everything in the room started to move, her hair was flowing, and the winds were making it hard for me to move. Like there was a storm brewing in the room, and you were waiting for the lightning to strike.

I quickly opened Lydia's mouth and pressed in the plant before closing it up. She still looked to be deep asleep.

"Come on, Lydia, please, wake up." I begged. I stroked her head and kept an eye on Jack in the meantime. He wasn't supposed to be this strong.

If Natasha's magic could contain James, then Jack shouldn't be much trouble.

Unless, Oh no. I looked at Natasha in panic, only to see that she was already looking at me. She showed me a weak smile. Her eyes looked drained. She wouldn't be able to hold on much longer.

The winds in the room were growing stronger. Natasha's dress was aggressively flowing around.

I shook my head. This can't be happening. Her eyes are growing weaker by the second.

"I know," She whispered to me. She knows. Then she knows what he is doing, what she's letting him do to her. Only to protect me. Natasha is dying.

As Natasha was fighting with the last of her powers, a loud howl was heard from behind me. I looked back and saw that Lydia wasn't lying in bed any longer. She had shifted. She was baring her teeth, and saliva was dripping down from her mouth.

She pushed with her hind legs and jumped over the bed to stand in front of her mother. Jack's eyes when he saw her made me realize that he was just as weak as they said. His eyes were bulging out of his head at the sight of Lydia's wolf. She growled at him, and just when Lydia was about to lunge at Jack, Natasha fell to the floor.

My head jerked back to Jack.

"This isn't over." He said before shifting to his wolf and trying to run past Lydia, but she had other plans in mind. Lydia took hold of his hind leg and dug in her canines.

Jack whimpered in pain, and that's when I remembered that this is exactly what he had done to her. When Lydia was satisfied, she pulled back, and we watched as he scurried out of the room on the three legs he could support himself on.

I ran up to Natasha and fell to the floor beside her. Lydia shifted back and went to sit on the other side of her mother. She grabbed her hand as well and checked for her pulse.

As she did that, an amused smile crept up on Natasha's face.

"Didn't think you could get rid of me that easily did you?" She asked as her eyes fluttered open.

Both Lydia and I released a breath of relief and helped Natasha to the bed.

"You knew what he was doing, yet you didn't stop. Why?" I asked her, befuddled.

"I think you know why." Natasha answered, her voice sounding weak.

"Let's get one thing straight," I said as I looked at both Natasha and Lydia.

"Nobody is allowed to die for me. Is that clear?" Lydia scoffed and crossed her arms over her chest.

"Tell me, why are you here again?" Lydia asked. I didn't know how to respond because I knew what she was getting at.

"You're here, hiding because you didn't want to put anyone in danger. You left a pack with hundreds of highly trained werewolves to live alone in order to keep them safe. I mean this with all my love Aves, you really can be an idiot sometimes. Whether we die to protect you or not is up to us because that's exactly what you're doing. You would have let him take you had my mother not shown up. Because you knew that if you hadn't, he would have taken me."

I bit my cheek to keep myself from saying something stupid. Lydia was right, about everything and there was no denying it.

"Good. Now on a different note, what do you mean 'you knew what he was doing?'" Lydia asked me before looking at her mom.

"Jack isn't that strong on his own. Alpha or not, he shouldn't have been a match for Natasha's magic unless he was protected by magic himself. The wizard had protected him, knowing that if someone came to my rescue, they wouldn't be able to win against him. He was draining your mother of her powers by fighting back. He could have

probably broken free right away, but he wanted her weak, and by weakening Natasha, he was weakening himself. Which is why when you woke up and came for him, he knew he wouldn't be strong enough to fight." I explained, and Lydia looked at her mother with such love in her eyes. She went and sat on the bed, wrapping her arms around Natasha.

"But I don't understand. How could he find me?" I asked Natasha, and she looked over at Lydia with a smile.

"I hid your scent, Avery. I never hid Lydia's." She said knowingly. As if she wanted this to happen.

I gave Natasha a confused look and was met with a wink.

"Yes, Avery, this was meant to happen. I needed the wizard or someone who works for him to come out of hiding, and now he has. But don't worry, he won't remember a thing. You're not in any danger after we've left." I was honestly more confused than ever. That explanation didn't do much of explaining.

"I'm sorry..., huh?" I asked. My face scrunched, and my eyes squinting.

"The plant you gave to Lydia to wake her was wolfsbane mixed with Ginkgo leaves. The wolfsbane was to kickstart her heart and nerves with pain. The Ginkgo leaves are more commonly used to treat memory loss. However, if treated right, they contribute to memory loss. They can erase the memories of a person for up to an hour, which this one did. When Lydia bit down on his leg, she injected it into his system." Natasha said, and it dawned on me.

"Okay yeah, that I understood." I said with a nod.

"But doesn't this mean that I can't be here anymore?" Lydia asked. She pouted and sat upon the bed, her hands hanging by her side. Natasha's smile fell at the realization.

"What, no! She has to be here. I need her! I'm already closed off from everyone else. You can't take her too!" I yelled in defense. She can't take my only friend. Sure, Natasha would still come, but it's not the same! Lydia is like a security blanket. Whenever we're together, it just feels like things are going to work out.

"I'm sorry, girls, but no, Lydia can't come here anymore. And we have to leave tonight. I'm sorry, sweetheart." Natasha said and looked at me. I couldn't say that I liked it, but at least there was something Lydia could do for me.

"Then I'm going to need to ask you for a favor." I said and looked at Lydia with pleading eyes.

"Anything," She said.

"Go to the pack, my pack. Be with them, please. I think they could benefit from your bubbly energy, and I need to know that they're looked after." I said with a smile that didn't feel all that true.

"I promise,"

Payment To the Alpha by Ms.M Chapter 47

~1 MONTH LATER~

Avery's POV

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I grabbed the glass of water that was standing on my nightstand aggressively and threw it across the room. The glass hit the wall and shattered into a hundred pieces that laid across the floor.

"IT'S BEEN A MONTH, NATASHA!" I shouted. I was succumbing to the anger and frustration that had been slowly building for the past month.

I grabbed the nightstand and threw it up in the air. It landed harshly on the floor, breaking the drawer. The only thing perhaps in the room that wasn't broken was the framed picture of James and me. It was lying safely on the bed.

"I know, sweetheart, it's time soon, I promise." Natasha said from the chair she was sitting on. I turned my head and looked at her in disbelief.

"YOU SAID THAT A MONTH AGO!" I shouted.

"I know," Natasha remained calm. She had one leg over the other, and her hands were clasped in front of her, laying on her knee. I shook my head, dragging my hands over my face.

"You say you know, but after this, you can go home to your family. To your mate. I can't do that, Natasha, and it's killing me," I said. Desperation was evident in my voice.

For one month, I had been isolated from the people I love. Seeing Natasha once in a while did the job in the first week, but after that week, everything went downhill. I met Natasha lesser than usual. I had to be more careful on my walk and limit my time outside so as not to be spotted.

I had to go every day with constant worry about James' well-being as well as the others.

I couldn't make the nightmare scenarios stop. I couldn't make the nightmares stop. I would wake up in the middle of the night after a dream about James getting killed by the wizard and the pack being slaughtered.

Sweat would dribble down my face, and my breathing hitched in my throat. I couldn't make it stop.

No matter how many times I thought about the plan, the outcome, the fact that the wizard would hopefully be killed, it didn't help. It didn't help me keep my sanity which was slowly fading with every passing moment.

"Avery, it's almost time. I can feel it." I dropped to the floor and leaned against the wall. I pulled my knees up to my chest. What if when he finally comes and the war begins, James will have forgotten about me? What if he's moved on or doesn't believe that I will come back?

What if I lose him?

The only family I have ever truly loved. The only people that ever loved me.

James' POV

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"James, you need to calm down," Alex said. My eyes were pitch black, and all I could see were interferences standing in my way.

"Don't you fucking dare tell me to calm down," My breathing was heavy and ragged. My chest was heaving and my nostrils flaring. Alex stared at me. He didn't show what he was feeling, and I didn't care.

"IT'S BEEN ONE FUCKING MONTH, ALEX, AND SHE'S STILL NOT HOME!" I growled, trying my best to restrain the urge to hit something. Or someone.

"Yes, but-" Alex was cut off by a knock on my office door. I turned to my brother, and we both looked at each other in confusion. Everyone had been informed not to disturb.

"Come in!" I yelled from the seating area. The door opened up slowly, and a hesitant man carefully stepped in. It was Carlson.

"I-I'm sorry to disturb Alpha,"

"Everyone has been told not to disturb us. What is this regarding?" I asked. Sounding angrier than I had hoped.

"Um, it's about your Luna. I was wondering when I'd get the pleasure of meeting her?" He asked me. Alex's head turned my way quickly. Fearing for what was to come. And fear he should.

In less than a second, I was in front of Carlson, holding him up by his throat.

"YOU DO NOT EVER ASK ABOUT MY LUNA! IS THAT CLEAR?!" I growled, and I saw the panic on the man's face. I tossed him across the room, and he hit the wall, knocking down a painting that was hanging there.

He stayed down for a while before seeing that it was okay to stand.

"I'm sorry, Alpha. I didn't mean to overstep my boundaries." He said.

"So why did you?" I asked him. Who the fuck comes into my office and asks about my girl? For no reason at all.

"I simply wanted to know when she will be back." Carlson said. Trying his best to sound confident, although it didn't quite work. His eyes faltered, and he looked down at his feet than looking at my eyes.

He knew who I was by now. He had been with us for nearly a month. Carlson integrated well with the others. He was a good fighter. He never went for a run with the other pack members, though. He never showed his wolf. I do wonder!

"Look at me." I demanded. Carlson raised his head and looked me in the eyes.

"The Luna won't be back. She has left, for good." I said, and there it was. That flicker in his eyes. It was anger.

"Wha-What do you mean, Alpha? The pack doesn't have their Luna?" He asked me. He cleared his throat and straightened his back. I looked at Alex, who had his eyes glued to Carlson. Alex's eyebrows were furrowed, and his arms that were earlier crossed were now hanging on his sides.

"That is exactly what I mean. That's what this meeting was about." I said. Sounding undeniably honest. Alex and I knew that I was lying, but Carson didn't.

He looked at me in disbelief. His lips were pressed into a thin line. In all his time here, nobody had noticed any strange behavior. I had around-the-clock surveillance on him, and it showed nothing. He talked to the others, helped the pups, fought with the warriors, and ate with the youths. He seemed as ordinary as they come. The one thing that the ranked members noticed was the fact that he never shifted.

We had tried everything to get him to show us his wolf, but with every suggestion we laid forward, he somehow turned it around. As if he didn't want us to see what his wolf looked like.

"Say, Carlson, would you like to go on a run? To blow off some steam? I know I certainly need to." I said, stepping towards him. He stayed in his spot and raised his head.

"Actually, Alpha, I promised some of the pups that I would play with them and teach them some fighting moves. Perhaps another time?" He said. He may not notice it himself, but his face had changed completely.

I allowed him to leave, not wanting to mind-link anyone whilst he was in the room.

I gave him a nod, and he turned on his heel and walked out of the office.

'Do not let Carson leave the territory!' I said in the mind-link to all warriors and ranked members.

Alex looked at me and then back the door.

"Something is off with that guy, huh?" He asked me.

"It sure is. The question is what, and why did he have such a need to meet Avery?" I asked no one, really. I merely spoke aloud.

'Alpha, Carlson is in his room. It seems he is packing.' Jackson said through the mind link.

Alex and I went to Carlson's room, and sure enough, he was gathering his belongings.

"Going somewhere?" Carlson spun around. He looked jumpy, as if he didn't expect someone to visit him.

"My brother and I were thinking. Why is it you want to meet the Luna?" I asked him.

He scoffed and shrugged, shaking his head. He continued packing the little things he had in his bag and zipped it up. He put the bag on the floor before turning back to us.

"It's nothing, Alpha. I simply feel that I should take my leave now." He said.

"But I thought you wanted to meet the wizard? Get revenge and all that?" Alex asked him sarcastically.

Carlson didn't take well to his tone. His eyes got serious, and he stepped towards us.

"I do, but something tells me that this isn't the place to wait," He said, spitting venom with words.

"Yeah, you're probably right. We can handle the wizard on our own anyway. He's pathetic and weak, a coward if you will." Alex said, crossing his arms and smiling widely.

Carlson's eyes were growing black, his body was tense, and his hands were balled up into fists.

Something about degrading the wizard made him mad. I wonder why? It was as though he wanted to protect the wizard as opposed to fighting him.

"Enough of this. Why don't you grab your bag, and we'll go downstairs, grab something to eat, and then you can be on your way." I said, extending my hand for Carlson to grab. He looked at me for a moment, his body starting to relax.

"Sounds good." He said and shook my hand.

We were in the kitchen and eating lunch. Alex and Carson were talking about the fighting and the wizard. Nothing to demurring as we didn't want our guest to up and leave just yet.

I was waiting for the final piece before I could put everything together.

And then I sensed it, the final piece to unraveling the truth.

"Hello Natasha," I said when I smelled her walking into the kitchen. I looked to my left and saw her standing a few meters away, staring at Carlson. My gaze turned to him, and once again, he tensed.

"Who's your guest?" She asked me as she came closer. Natasha extended her hand, which he took and shook.

I saw Natasha's face upon contact and knew that something was way more off than I thought.

"Natasha, this is Carlson. Carlson, meet Natasha." I introduced them both and then leaned back and waited for the mask to drop.

Natasha pulled back her hand and gave Carlson a polite smile.

"Pleasure to meet you," she said with a slight head bow. Leaving me utterly confused. I thought there would be some sort of revelation.

"Likewise," Carlson said.

I looked between the both of them and leaned forward, placing my hands on the table.

"Carl, come play with us!"

"Yeah, I wanna punch!"

Two pups came running into the kitchen and started pulling at Carlson to go with them.

"Well, I guess a little play before departure won't do any harm." Carson said with a big smile on his face.

"No!" Natasha started before seeing everyone's confused faces.

"I mean, does your teacher know where you are? Ms. Wallis gets worried when you run off like this." Natasha said to the two pups, who lowered their heads and pouted.

"But we want to play," One of them whined as her bottom lip trembled.

"You can play later. Now go find Ms. Wallis." Natasha said.

The two pups grabbed each other's hands and ran off, pushing each other and playing chase on the way out. When they were gone, Natasha's face faltered. With a swing of her hand, she closed the doors to the kitchen. She turned around to face Carlson, who was standing as well. He had a grin on his face, and he was pretentious. Natasha raised her hands, causing a whirling wind to move across the kitchen. With it came glass, porcelain, and utensils. It all gathered behind her before she swung her hands forward, aiming it at Carlson. I jumped to my feet,

"Natasha, what the fuck are you doing?!" With the flick of her right hand, I flew to the other side of the room and Alex to the opposite side.

I saw the objects flying at Carlson, but instead of running or moving, he stood still, awaiting the damage. He raised his hands in front of his chest, his palms pointing outwards, and as the objects were about to hit him, they instead turned to smoke and evaporated.

He was a wizard? What the fuck is going on here?

"We'll be seeing each other soon," He said with a grin before ripping his necklace from his neck and tossing it on the ground. As he did, he too disappeared into thin air. There was no sight of him.

Natasha looked blankly at the emptiness in front of her.

I stood up and walked over to her. I pulled out a chair, and Natasha sat down. Her face looked as though she had seen a ghost.

"Natasha, what was that? He's a witch?" She looked at me, a single tear falling down her cheek.

"Did you tell him anything about Avery?" She asked me.

"What does that matter?"

"Did you tell him anything about her?!" She repeated, louder and more impatiently. I nodded my head.

"He only knows what I allowed him to. I told him that Avery isn't coming back. He showed an interest in her. I said that she's gone, for good." Natasha closed her eyes and sighed.

"I need to move her. She's not safe. Prepare your warriors. The war is about to come. I give it 48 hours maximum." She said and stood to her feet.

"Who was he, Natasha? He smelled like a werewolf and told us about the wizard, how he had slaughtered his family and then attacked Carlson. Is he working for Crow?" I asked her. If he did, I've fucked up badly. Natasha looked at me. She took her hand and laid it on my shoulder.

"That was Crow, James."

Payment To the Alpha by Ms.M Chapter 48

Avery's POV

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"Natasha, slow down!" I yelled after her as she ran down the stairs with her hand firmly holding onto mine. A big hunk was with her this time. At least two meters long, bald-headed and dark brown eyes and the lack of words, I quickly found him not to be messed with. He took my bags and brought them down to the car before sitting in the driver's seat.

Everything had happened so quickly. I was lying on my bed, watching TV, when Natasha threw the door open and barged in. She took the remote and turned it off before taking out my bags and throwing them on the bed. She told me to pack my things quickly, that we were leaving.

I did as she said, knowing that something bad had happened.

"Get in." Natasha said as she held the backseat door open for me. She was looking around frantically like she was afraid we were being followed. Her tone of voice left little room for argument.

When I got in, Natasha went to the passenger seat and climbed in. We buckled our seatbelts, and no sooner had we settled in than the car drove off in a hurry. A cloud of smoke is the only thing I saw when I looked back at the B&B. A nauseating feeling growing inside me as I realized I didn't say goodbye to Rose. She had been so lovely during my stay here. She treated me like family.

"Goodbye, Rose, thank you," I said to no one in particular. Perhaps the wind would hear me and forward my message to her one day.

"Natasha, what the hell is going on?!" I broke the silence after several moments of nobody talking or explaining.

"Crow, he was at the pack."

"James..." Panic started building up within me, and I felt my palms getting sweatier. I was starting to hyperventilate.

"James is fine. So is everybody else." Natasha said as she looked at me through the rearview mirror.

"Thank god..." I whispered, feeling myself starting to relax. The fear of what happened, however, was still there.

"He posed as a werewolf, saying Crow murdered his family and that he wanted revenge. He smelled like a wolf, according to the pack members, but he never shifted. When I met him and shook his hand, was when I sensed his magic. Not only that but..." She trailed off, her eyes stuck to the road.

"But what, Natasha?" I asked her.

"Nothing, I just sensed that it was a powerful wizard. He said that he's coming soon. I told James to get the warriors ready. I believe the war is merely one day or two away. Where I'm taking you, you won't be staying long. I need you to stay inside until you get the message. Is that clear?" Natasha said. Her voice was stern and left no room for discussion. I nodded my head.

"Words Avery! I need to know that you understand what I'm telling you." I jumped at the sudden change of pitch. Natasha, for the first time since I met her, was afraid.

"I understand. I will not go out. I'll wait for the message." I said. The rest of the drive was silent. Nobody spoke. Everyone was probably preoccupied in their own minds, thinking about the war.

James' POV

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"Anna! Make sure they do combat! Grayson, keep them on their feet! Damon! Train them in wolf form! NOBODY RESTS!" I was walking across the training fields, barking orders, and ensuring that everybody knew what was going on. We have good fighters, but they can also be a lazy bunch.

I walked to Anna's group and saw one of the guys sitting down, laughing as his friends were getting beaten. I walked up to him, and the second he saw me, he flew to his feet and bowed his head.

"Alpha," He greeted.

"Why the fuck aren't you practicing?" I growled. His hands started shaking.

"I'm sorry, Alpha, I'll train with Chase." He said. Chase, the guy that had a thing for my mate.

"No. You're with me," I said and walked out on the field.

Chase looked at his friend with pity in his eyes. But also a sense of relief that I didn't choose him to fight me. Sure the kid was nice and all to everyone. But the whole touchy, feely thing he had going on with Avery put him on my blacklist.

Call me possessive. I just don't like other males touching what is mine.

All eyes were on us by now, and they were waiting for me to throw a punch. After I had nearly killed that warrior a month ago, they've all been on edge. And no one was particularly fond of training with the Alpha.

"LET'S GO!" I shouted, making him hurry the fuck up. I didn't have all day to teach someone a lesson.

"What are you guys looking at? Start training!" Everyone turned around and resumed their tasks, training, and whatever it was that they were doing. I looked at the guy, his name was Sam, as he neared me, standing a meter away before raising his hands and preparing for the fight.

I observed him, even though I could beat this punk's ass with my eyes closed. I wanted the others to see how it's done. With every move he took, my eyes followed. I saw everything without turning my head away from him.

Sam went in for the first punch. I grabbed his arm, twisted it, making him roll over, and land on his back. He groaned from the impact before getting back up. More determined this time.

He went in for a round kick. I pulled up my knee, causing him to hit the small of my leg. He bit his teeth together so as not to show any pain.

"That's all you got?" I teased. I decided to end this and get on with what had to be done. I moved forward, threw a punch to his ribs, grabbed his hand, and tossed him up in the air. As he was falling, I grabbed his throat and smashed him down at the ground.

This particular move causes the air in your lungs to vanish. The person inflicted will have a hard time catching their breath, and that was Sam right now. He laid there, trying to find oxygen. I kneeled beside him and looked him in the eyes.

"When the war starts and blood is spilled, do you think you'll have time to sit around and watch the others fight?" I asked him

"N-N, no Alpha." He stammered.

"When your friends are being killed, their bodies ripped to shreds, your family being threatened. Do you think laughing will help them?"

"No, Alpha." He said.

"Then get back to practice!" I shouted before straightening up and walking away.

"Yes, Alpha..." I heard sam whisper as I left.

Alex's POV

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"Amber, you and Lisa make sure that the women and children are tucked away when the war breaks out. Trish, make sure that the elderly come into the mansion-"

"Alex, I'm fighting. I'm not going to stay inside!" Amber argued.

"I don't care what you want. You're staying inside with the others! End of discussion." I said.

"I'm fighting this war, Alex!"

"It's Alpha's orders that you stay inside, Amber!"

"The Alpha can shove his orders up his ass! I'm fucking fighting, and neither you nor the Alpha can say otherwise! Don't forget who taught you how to fight, little brother," Amber said and came to stand right in front of me. I looked down at her. I didn't want my sister to get hurt. The wizard knows who Avery is closest to. He knows that Amber is one of them.

"Listen, sis-"

"Don't! I'm fighting. And if you have a problem with that, then you're welcome to chain me down with silver. Because that's the only thing that will stop me from going there once it starts." There was no arguing with Amber once she set her mind to something. I understood why she wanted to fight.

"It's Avery, Alex." Amber said. I nodded my head in understanding.

"I'll talk to James." I said. Amber seemed to be somewhat satisfied, and so I continued giving out orders to those present.

"Fine. Lisa and Trish, you both make sure that the women, pups, youths, and elderly are inside the house before noon tomorrow."

"Yes, Beta." They said in unison.

"Elisabeth, I need you to go to the pack hospital and tell them to prepare for casualties and tents. Everything must be set up tonight. Alice, make sure to cook for war, not dinner." I said, and they both nodded their heads.

"Yes, Beta." They both left to do what I had asked. Now it was just me, my sister, Lisa, and Trish in the hall.

"It'll be big, won't it?" Lisa asked me as we walked towards the communal area.

"Bigger than anything we have faced before." I answered honestly. We haven't given anyone much detail in regards to what we're up against. But I won't make it sound better than it is.

We aren't even sure ourselves what we're up against. We know that Crow will be there, but we have no idea who he is working with. It could be other wizards, vampires, and werewolves. There is no telling what force he will hit us with. All we can do is prepare and hope for the best once the day arrives.

Avery's POV

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We had reached the destination, which looked like a burnt-down house. A gate led onto the garden, a garden that looked like death had passed through it. The house was no better. The wood from the house was chopped. There were ashes where there once was a wall.

The roof only covered half of the house, and the door was hanging by its ridges. The small porch had holes and broken floorboards. The squeaking sound it made when you stepped on it reminded me of the house I once called home.

"Natasha, where are we?" I whispered as I neared the door and looked around on the porch. The flowers were dried and dead. The soil was barely there.

Natasha didn't speak. She didn't say a word. She walked up to the door and carefully placed her hand on the handle, moving it over so we could enter. The house was ghostlike, spooky, like something taken out of a horror movie. There were spider webs on the ceiling, and every picture that hung on the walls was covered in dust. Some of the picture frames were broken, with cracks going along the glass. As soon as we entered the house, there was a staircase in front of us to the right. And when I looked up to the top floor, I saw nothing but darkness.

I closed my eyes, collecting courage. Something I didn't have much left of these days.

I felt the breeze from the spring wind blow through my hair, caressing my cheek. The whistling noise it made as it came in through the cracks of wooden boards.

And then, amongst the peaceful noises, a horrific scream was heard. The sound echoed in my head, causing every fiber in my body to tremble. It sounded as though a woman was being tortured. Her screams were like nails to a chalkboard in my head.

I raised my hands to my ears, covering them, trying to close out the sound. But the sound wasn't coming from the outside. The sound came from inside my mind.

'No, please! Stop this! I'm going to die!' The woman pleaded in-between the torturous screams.

A menacing laugh was heard too. He was laughing while the woman was in pain. She was dying. I heard her dying.

"Avery!" My eyes flew open, and I realized I was kneeling on the floor, tipping back and forth.

I looked up and saw Natasha kneeling before me, placing her hands on my shoulders.

"Someone was killed here," I said, sounding out of breath. My hands shaking, and my hair falling in front of my face.

Natasha looked at me in shock before casting her eyes to the top floor. She nodded her head and helped me back on my feet.

"Yes, my mother."

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Avery's POV

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"Yes, my mother." Natasha said.

My mouth fell open, and I didn't blink. That's the woman I heard—Natasha's mother. I heard Natasha's mother die, but that must mean that the menacing laugh came from...Oh god.

Natasha walked to one of the pictures that were hanging on the wall. It had a crack along with the picture. She wiped it clean on her dress and stared at whoever was in it.

Natasha handed me the picture. I was hesitant at first to grab it. Not sure what I would see. But I decided to take it, and when I saw it, I felt the pain that this house was holding.

It was a beautiful woman. She was blonde, with hazelnut eyes and an almond-shaped face. She was smiling widely in the picture. The smile reached her eyes, showing her teeth. I looked back at Natasha.

"Is this her?" I asked her in merely a whisper. Natasha nodded her head once again. She wasn't much for words right now, and I understood why.

"This," Natasha started and walked over to one of the door frames, putting her hands on it and giggling before continuing.

"This is where I grew up." She said with a smile. It was nice to see her smile. I just wish I didn't have to see the pain in her eyes.

"Alright, um, Avery, why don't you take your bag upstairs and settle in one of the rooms? I'll go and put a spell around the house," Natasha said and was about to walk out. My eyes grew wide at simply the thought of walking up the stairs of death and enter the darkness of hell.

No offense to those who lived here, or those who still do, and no offense to the house itself. But it's really dark up there, and I'm scared as hell.

I had just heard a woman scream for her life. Not just any woman at that, but Natasha's mother. I looked up the stairs and swallowed hard.

"Umm," I could only make noises. The mere thought of walking in this house alone gave me the creeps. I felt as though I was being watched.

"Problem?" Natasha asked. I turned back to look at her, and she looked amused for some reason. She bit her lip, and it looked as though she was trying to contain her laughter.

I couldn't tell Natasha that I was scared of walking here alone. It was her childhood home. I didn't want to offend her.

"It's creepy, huh?" She not so much asked but rather stated as her eyes scanned the hallway. I tilted my head back and forth.

"Not...creepy exactly. It's just," I didn't know how to form a sentence. Natasha snapped her fingers, and the lights were turned on. There was lighting along the staircase on the wall. The lamp in the hallway lit up as well, and so did the lights and candles in the other rooms.

Suddenly it didn't feel as scary. I guess light in the midst of darkness truly is important. I could see the home in the house. I saw the carpets, the photographs, the decor, even if broken, was lovely. I saw the fireplace in the living room. It had a crack in the middle, the thick stone overhead was broken, and pieces of stone were lying amongst the ashes.

But still, it had charm. I looked back to Natasha, who tilted her head and looked at me with a smile.

"Thank you," I said and grabbed my bag.

I made my way up the stairs carefully so as not to step on a broken floorboard.

As I was reaching the second floor, I almost fell backward but quickly grabbed the railing and threw myself up the last steps. I didn't lose balance. It just felt as though something went through me.

As though something tried to push me down the stairs. I stood up and dusted off my sweats before looking left and right. There were rooms on both sides, but something told me that I shouldn't go left. I kept walking down the right hall and walked past two rooms, one closet, and one bathroom, before I reached a bedroom. The door to the room, like the others, was off its hinges. It was lying on the floor and looked as though it had been burnt.

There were big black spots and holes where once a thick oak wood had been. I could see the beauty it once held. This house used to be amazing, I could tell. I walked into the bedroom and placed my bag on the bed, which made a cloud of dust rise from the covers.

I coughed as the dust reached up to my nose and down my air-pipe. After I was done with my little allergy attack, I started looking around. There were pieces of a desk, an old wardrobe, and drawings lying on the floor. It looked like a child had lived here. I went over to the single window and looked out. The view from the room was a big tree in the garden. The tree had a swing attached to it. Pictures of Natasha playing on the swing came popping into my head.

She, laughing and having fun with her mother. Natasha never told me much about her mom, but something just made me think that they were close.

"Wise choice," Natasha said from behind me. I turned around and saw her standing by the door with a bag in hand. I looked at her, confused.

"What's that?" I asked and pointed to the bag she was holding. Natasha raised an eyebrow and placed the bag on the bed next to mine.

"You didn't think I would leave you here alone for the night, did you?" A sense of relief came rushing over me.

"Oh, thank god," I said before I could think. Natasha laughed and came to take my hand.

"You're not alone, Avery. I hope you know that." She said and looked at me for an answer.

"I know I'm not. I just can't wait for all of this to be over." I said.

James' POV

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"No! You're staying inside with the others!" I yelled at my sister when she came barging out on the field after I had told Alex my answer regarding Amber fighting in the war.

"James, I'm a warrior. You can't forbid me from fighting!" She yelled back.

"You might be a warrior, is, but I'm the Alpha, and my word is final. I'm not saying this as an Alpha. However, I'm saying this as your brother. I don't want to lose you." I told Amber as I stepped closer.

"And I'm saying this as your sister, go fuck yourself." She said. I scoffed and shrugged before turning around and planning to leave.

"James, you can't do this!"

"YES, I CAN!" I roared as I turned back around. Amber winced and took a step back.

"James...Please. I want to fight, to help. We don't know what we're up against, and if you start benching people because you're afraid of losing them, then I'm sorry, but we've already lost." She said, and I felt my face fall.

"There is a reason why our pack has always let she-wolfs be warriors because we're equal. Because we're stronger when we come together. You can't be emotional in this, brother. I'm sorry, but you know you can't. This isn't only Avery-my sister-we're talking about. It's the Luna of our pack." I could see the pleading in Amber's eyes, but at the same time, she meant every word. I knew she was right. I couldn't be emotional, James can be, but the Alpha can't.

I walked up to my sister and grabbed hold of her shoulders.

"You're not allowed to die, understand?"

"I won't, James. I won't let this family lose another member." She said as she took one of my hands from her shoulder and held it.

"What about me? Am I allowed to die?" Alex asked from behind Amber. His eyebrows were raised and his face serious.

"Yes," Me and Amber said at the same time. Alex's eyes fell, and he looked at us with a bored expression.

"But if you die, I'm gonna have to kill you." Amber said as she turned around and walked back to the packhouse. I laughed, and Alex chuckled. The others went after Amber, ready to eat after the intense practice schedule they were on. We couldn't afford to lose a second before the war.

I walked up to Alex, wrapped my arm around his shoulders, and gave him a big smile. He looked at me as though something was wrong. Which it was. I gave him a punch to the stomach with all my power, not bothering to hold back, and watched him fall to the ground. He clutched his stomach and groaned in pain.

"What the fuck was that for!?" He asked. I got down on one knee beside him.

"That's for even joking about your death. Do it again, and this pain will feel like paradise." I said with a smile as I got up and walked back to the house. I heard Alex

groaning and looked back, only to see him rolling over, clutching his stomach. A chuckle escaping my lips, and a victorious smile growing on my face.

I was sitting on my bed, staring at the wall. I couldn't believe or even grasp the truth of who I let into my pack. He smelled like a werewolf. A smell I've never sniffed on anybody unless they were one. He's a wizard and probably cooked about some shit to make us believe him.

All the red flags. All the warning signs. I should have sensed something!

But no. I let him near every pack member, from the youngest to the oldest. He seemed so, for lack of a better word, 'normal.' I kept a close eye on him, yes, but nothing indicated that he was a wizard. That it was Crow.

I condemned myself for not knowing. I could have killed him. Maybe not, but I could have tried.

'He will get his tomorrow.'

Tomorrow?

'Yes. Prepare yourself, James. The war is coming.'

Avery's POV

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I stretched my legs and arms, rubbing my eyes with my hands, trying to wake up. It was dark. There was no sun or light. Complete darkness covered every inch of the room.

I looked to my side and saw Natasha sound asleep with the ghost of a smile on her face.

She looked so peaceful. She told me once that whenever she's away from Carlos, she always dreams of him. It sounded kind of cheesy at the time but honestly? I would dream of James a million times over. Us dancing in the rain, kissing at sundown, walking on the beach, and every other cliché romantic scene there is. I would choose those dreams every day for the rest of my life if they replaced the nightmares of him dying.

They had become frequent lately. Always the same one. We were out on the field. A wizard with a dark hood covering his face raises his hands and plans to kill me. James gets in his way and takes the blow. He always dies trying to protect me.

So I made a promise to myself that if it comes down to it, I will end all of it. I will destroy Crows' plans, and I will save James and the others. At the end of the day, the responsibility of the werewolf kind lay on my shoulders. I'll be damned if I let anything happen to the people I love.

I felt a sudden anguishing thirst, and my throat was drying up. I stood up slowly, trying not to make too much noise and wake Natasha. I made my way out of the room on my tip-toes and walked to the bathroom. I didn't dare walking down the stairs alone.

I opened the door to the bathroom, and the shrieking sound made me wince and look back to see if I woke up Natasha. I was relieved to see that I hadn't. As I entered in my groggy state, I put my hand on the faucet and turned it. Only to see no water pouring out. I turned it on and off a few times before giving up and giving in to the realization that I had to walk down.

I had seen Natasha turn on the water downstairs in the kitchen. With a heavy sigh and little to no courage, I walked towards the stairs. I carefully stepped on each board, again not wanting to wake Natasha or the ghost of her mother. I tip-toed my way to the kitchen, constantly looking over my shoulder. I'm a wuss, I know.

I walked into the kitchen and turned the faucet, happily watching the water pour out. I cupped my hands and used them as a cup to catch the water and drink.

The coldness slowly moisturizing my throat as it glides down. A quiet moan escaped my lips, and I dove in for more. When I was satisfied, I turned it off and decided to walk back up.

I walked out in the hall and towards the stairs only to stop dead in my tracks. My breath caught in my throat, which suddenly turned as dry as it was before.

There was someone sitting on the first step. It was a girl, a young one. She held on to the railing, pushing her head against it. Her eyes squeezed shut. She was dressed in a pink nightgown with a teddy bear on it. She didn't look to be older than five.

I walked towards her slowly, bending my knees in front of her so that I reached her level.

"Excuse me, sweetie?" I tried getting her attention. She, however, didn't seem to notice my presence.

I cleared my throat and placed a hand on her knee.

"Sweetheart, are you okay?" I asked. My heart, breaking at sight. She looked terrified. And then I heard it. The torturous screams I had heard when we first entered. The woman being killed.

Not just a woman. Natasha's mom.

But does that mean?

I looked at the young girl. Her black hair was braided in the back, and I saw her tiny hand reaching up to her face, wiping away a tear. Her bottom lip trembling.

"Natasha?" I said in a gasp. It couldn't be...

The little girl's head flew up, and we made eye contact. Her big brown eyes looked at me in pain.

"Hide," She whispered—a cold chill reaching down my spine, making every hair on my body rise.

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Avery's POV

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"Hide," She whispered—a cold chill reaching down my spine, making every hair on my body rise.

And then came the scream again. This time, it was louder. It was deadlier. Natasha's eyes closed once more, and she squeezed herself as far into the railing as she could.

I rubbed her knee with my hand, trying my best to calm her. My heart was racing in my chest. Is this a dream? She's sitting right there, petrified—a five-year-old Natasha.

I looked past her and up the stairs, seeing a light shine from the left side of the hall. It wasn't a lamp. This light moved in waves. Holy shit, it wasn't a light. It was a fire.

I quickly stood and ran past Natasha up the stairs. But before I could reach further, I felt a small hand grab onto mine. I turned around and saw her big eyes staring up at me. She was trembling. Her entire little body was trembling in fear. Her hand shook as she held on as tight as she could.

"You can't go up there," She said in the most broken voice I had ever heard.

"Sweetheart, I'm only going up there quickly, okay? I need to check on your mom. I promise I'll be back." I said as I cupped her cheek with my hand.

She shook her head violently before taking her other hand and standing up. She placed her hand in the air in front of me, two steps up. Her hand didn't move further. A glistening light was made where her hand touched. It was a barrier.

"Mommy made me promise to stay," she said.

"She put this here to protect me," Natasha's mom put the barrier up because she knew what Crow was going to do to her. She wanted to protect her child.

I put my hands on the barrier, pounding on it. Another scream was heard, cracking my heart into pieces. She was dying...

That menacing laugh followed the scream, and I felt my stomach turn.

I pounded harder onto the wall in front of me.

"NO!" I screamed in frustration when I couldn't get through.

"AAAAHHH!!" Another scream was heard, and this one was louder. I felt my fear shifting into a rage and my face going red. The heat was exuding from my body, and I so badly wanted to kill that fucker.

I took my hand and laid it flat on the invisible wall. Pushing it harder and harder. It felt as though I was setting my hand on fire with every inch that it moved further through the barrier.

"ARGH!" I yelled as the final inch was reached, and the barrier was broken. I fell forwards onto the steps, panting. I turned around quickly to Natasha and grabbed her hand. She looked at me in shock, her mouth slightly open.

"I'll be right back, okay? I need you to stay right here. Do not come up regardless of what you hear. Stay here until I return." I scanned her face and waited patiently for a reply. I couldn't risk her seeing her mother being harmed or worse.

And I definitely couldn't risk her getting hurt. She nodded her head slowly, and I ran up the stairs.

I ran over to the door that the fire was burning in and burst the door open. There she was.

Floating in the air, flames surrounding her, burning her slowly from top to bottom. Her flesh and been burnt off, and the flames had come of her waist. She was screaming in agony.

Crow was standing in the middle of the room. His hands moving. I saw that he decided when the flames move and stop. He was torturing her. I ran over to him, intending on knocking him down, breaking his focus. But as I reached him and threw myself at him, I went straight through.

He was a ghost. He didn't realize I was here. I laid on the floor and looked up at Natasha's mother. Her eyes looked lifeless. To my surprise, her head turns, and she locks eyes with me.

"You need to kill him!" She yelled, and I looked at her in shock.

Crow's eyes were focused on her. A sickening smile laying on his lips. He was enjoying himself. He was torturing his wife, the mother of his child, and he was feeling no remorse. I gasped and looked back at the woman in the air, engulfed in flames. I couldn't attack Crow; I couldn't save her.

She was going to die.

"You need to kill him, Avery! You are our only hope. The fate of our kind lays in your hands!" She yelled again, this time louder. Her eyes were turning black. Her head-turning more and more.

"How!?" I yelled back. Feeling more confused than ever by the events that are occurring. And my heart breaking more, every passing second that she's being burnt alive.

"You are connected! He is in your mind, Avery! With the magic he is using, it is not only your mind that he has occupied. It is your entire being! He and you share the same lifeline!"

I swallowed the words that were about to come out. She just told me how to kill Crow.

Her eyes were now completely blacked out, and her face turned serious. The pain was still visible, but the anger covered it.

"KILL HIM!!" She flew towards me, the flames following her, and I covered my face and screamed in fear.

"AVERY, WAKE UP!" I heard a booming loud voice ringing through my head. My eyes shot open, and I sat up quickly in the bed. Panting for air as the sweat dripped down my body.

"Avery, what happened?!" Natasha asked me. Panic and worry evident in her voice. I looked at her in shock and wrapped my arms around her tightly.

"I'm so sorry, Natasha...I'm sorry you heard that!" I blurted out. The air slowly leaving my lungs. I couldn't breathe. It was as if the world was closing in on me, and everything was getting tighter and tighter.

Natasha pushed me back. Her hands holding onto my shoulders.

"Avery, breath!" She told me. I shook my head furiously, unable to grant her what she's asking for.

"Look at me, Avery, you're awake, it was a dream, and now you're awake. I'm right here, dear." I looked down at my wrist and saw that Natasha had let go of my shoulder and grabbed onto my hand. She held my wrist, and I held hers. Feeling her pulse. I felt the slow and steady beats and closed my eyes. Feeling the calmness of her pulse relaxing me. My breathing soon becoming slower and steadier. I opened up my eyes and saw Natasha smiling at me.

"Thank you," I whispered.

"Avery, I need you to tell me about your dream." Natasha said slowly. My eyes shot open, and I couldn't find the words to speak.

Natasha looked at me in shock. Her hand cupping my face and her eyes scanning mine.

"You heard your mother die," I said in a hushed tone. My voice was raspy and quiet. The words I want to speak, I do not want to speak in volume. They aren't words you speak like any other.

Natasha raised her eyebrows, and she looked at me with pity. She wrapped her hands around me, and I pushed myself deeper into the hug.

"So did you, sweetheart, and I'm sorry for that." She whispered.

"I saw you, Natasha. You weren't older than five years. You were sitting on the staircase, pushing against the railing and squeezing your eyes shut. You were crying.

I heard screams, and I saw the shadow of a fire. I was running upstairs, but you stopped me. There was an invisible wall put up, meant to keep you from walking up there. But when I heard her screams, her agony, I pushed through it. I broke the barrier." Natasha looked at me, terrified. I decided to continue before I let her speak.

"I ran upstairs and into the room. I saw him, the man, he was," I didn't know if this part should be told. I advised against it.

"She looked at, she saw me. But he didn't. She told me that he needs to die." I stopped, realizing that this next part will reveal something that both of us know, but neither of us had told the other.

"He was the wizard that has been controlling me," Natasha gulped hard before averting her eyes and looking down at the bed.

"She told me that he needs to die, and then she told me how." When I said the last part, Natasha's head flew back up, and she stared at me. She shook her head slowly, unable to comprehend what I had just told her.

"What did you see in the room?" She asked me carefully. Neither her voice nor her eyes told me that she wants to know. She heard her mother dying, but thanks to the barrier, she didn't see it. And I don't believe that she needs to know.

"She was lying on the floor peacefully when I walked in. The fire surrounded her in a circle," I lied. I couldn't tell the truth about how her mother was burnt alive, held in the air, and the flames slowly eating at her flesh.

"Avery?" I snapped back from the horrific memory to see Natasha looking at me with her brows furrowed.

"You're lying, aren't you?" She asked me. A small smile tugging at her lips.

"Yes, but that is what I am sticking with. Sorry Natasha, but I'm not going to tell you what I saw," I was careful with my words. All I saw in front of me right now was that five-year-old little girl. And I'm not going to tell her anything horrific. She doesn't deserve to remember her mother like that.

With what the images are doing to me, I can only imagine what they would do to her.

"I understand," She said, nodding her head. I could see that there was something else she wanted to tell me, but she held back. The war is coming soon. We will all stand face to face with Crow and risk our lives. The truth shows itself when it is ready to be discovered.

I looked at Natasha and put my hands on my knees. Biting my bottom lip.

"I know that you're my sister." I said.