

Pregnant and Rejected by My Alpha Mate Chapter 26

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Chapter 26

#Chapter 26 The Weak Link

Selene's POV

I glance around the council chambers anxiously, wondering if anyone will step forward to challenge Bastien for control of the pack. The council can't force him to step down as Alpha, but if he loses a fight to a stronger wolf he won't have a choice.

I doubt there is anyone in Elysium strong enough to take on my husband, but this isn't only about winning. Perception is everything. Whether or not someone can actually succeed, pack members challenging Bastien means they've lost confidence in his leadership, that they believe he is weak enough to unseat.

Seconds drag on like hours, mutters swarming like angry bees as Bastien turns on the spot, staring down the complainers until the chamber finally falls silent. I breathe a sigh of relief. Whatever they might say behind closed doors, when push comes to shove no one is brave enough to actually take on the Alpha.

Once he's certain no one is going to speak up, Bastien turns back to the council. "There you have it gentlemen. You may not agree with my decisions, and questioning them is your right as advisors to this government, but until another Novan is strong enough to take my place – I am your Alpha." His deep voice echoes around the room, "You can work with me, or you can continue working against me, but I guarantee you will not like the results if you do."

A collective shiver works its way around the room, and I feel my own spine tremble. I've never seen Bastien release so much unchecked power, except perhaps when he faced down the Geminis. However it hadn't been directed at the pack then, and it certainly is now.

"Is that a threat?" One of the councilors interjects, tacking on a nervous "Sir?" at the end.

"Take it however you like." The Alpha replies cryptically, "I'm merely presenting the reality of your situation."

The head elder straightens up determinedly, his gray hair practically standing on end despite his facade of confidence. “And what about your reality, Alpha?” He inquires, “Do you intend to lead the women of this pack as well as the men?”

Color flushes my cheeks as heads turn in my direction. The man was smart enough not to say it outright, but everyone knows he’s talking about my defect. Though Alphas have equal authority over all pack members, their mates are traditionally de facto leaders of the she-wolves.

I am not, and I never will be.

You cannot lead wolves if you don’t have a wolf of your own.

Bastien growls, and the elder shrinks in his seat. “I suggest you retract that question, Counselor.”

Unfortunately another counselor speaks up in his colleague’s stead, “Forgive me, Alpha, but Grigore’s question concerns us all. The fact is that we need strength in all our leaders – a chain is only as strong as its weakest link.”

Bastien’s eyes glow silver, and I see his hands twitching as if he’s fighting to keep his claws retracted. His brawny arm jerks up, one livid finger pointing in my direction. “My wife has survived things no one else in this room ever could – myself included.” He snarls, tearing off his shirt.

His breath is coming in heavy pants, his body pushed to the brink by the effort of holding his wolf back. He throws out both arms now, drawing attention to his bare abdomen: a swath of rippling muscles covered in battlescars. “Why is it you look at my scars and see strength, but find only weakness in hers?”

At first I don’t think anyone will have the courage to respond, but after a few tense beats, the oldest counselor rises to his feet. “The difference is that your scars healed, and forgive me, but Selene’s never will.” His words drive into my chest like the sharpest knife. “It’s not her fault – no one is saying that – but the bottom line is that a shifter without their animal cannot protect themselves, let alone a pack. She is not a suitable mate for an Alpha.”

“I can’t believe you would stay after what they did to you.” Drake’s increasingly familiar voice filters through my cell phone.

We haven’t spoken since Gabriel’s funeral, and at the time we hadn’t the opportunity to discuss anything personal. Catching him up has been difficult in a house full of shifters with wolf hearing. I’ve finally secluded myself on the terrace, leaning against the railing and constantly scanning my surroundings for eavesdroppers.

“Bastien needs me.” I sigh. “The council was.. well they were awful.” I admit, my stomach roiling at the memory alone. “But he stood up for me – despite everything that’s happened between us. He stood up for me even though he doesn’t want me. I owe him the same loyalty.”

“That’s your heart talking, Selene.” Drake cautions. “Not your head.” When I don’t answer he presses on, “This man wanted nothing to do with you last week, but when something goes wrong for him he expects you to drop everything to help. That isn’t loyalty, it’s self-serving manipulation.”

“Drake, I know you’re concerned but please trust that I know my husband slightly better than you do.” I say, “Bastien is the least selfish person I’ve ever met.”

“Fine.” He concedes. “But how long is it going to last this time? How long before he throws you over again? He’s going to stop needing you eventually, especially with the pack pressuring him to do something he already wanted.” The truth of his words hit me like a ton of bricks, and I slide down onto the ground as he continues. “You told me Bastien finding out about the baby is the last thing you want to happen, right?”

“Yes.” I confirm.

“Well by my estimate you’ve only got one more week before he scents it on you.” Drake asserts, “So you need to decide what’s more important: supporting a man who doesn’t love you, or claiming freedom for yourself and your child?”

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Tears burn in my eyes, “Maybe there’s a way to mask the scent.” I’m grasping at straws and I know it. “I’ll go see the doctor tomorrow, maybe he can help.”

I can practically hear Drake shaking his head. “That’s a bandaid at best. What happens when you start showing?”

“That won’t be for another month or so.” I reply, “Because my morning sickness is so bad the doctor actually said I was more likely to lose weight than gain it.”

Frustration is evident in his voice now. “It’s your decision, Selene. And I will help you whatever you choose, but please think about what I’ve said. This is too important to risk.”

“Thank you, Drake.” I exhale, feeling considerably sadder than when I made the call, but slightly less stressed. “I promise I’ll think about it.”

“Good.” He answers warmly. “I only want what’s best for you.”

Bastien’s POV

A knock on the door pulls my attention from the crime reports in my hands, and I call out for Aiden to enter. I don't need to look up to know it's him. I smelled him when he arrived twenty minutes ago and have been listening to his distinct footsteps of him pacing outside my door ever since.

"You going to tell me why you've been hovering outside my office for almost half an hour?" I wonder aloud.

Aiden clears his throat. "We have a problem."

Now I do look up. "What kind of problem?"

His lips tighten to a straight line. "There are rumors going around the city about the Alpha's death. It seems word got out about the secret tunnel."

"How?" I demand. "The only people who knew about that were us and the enforcement investigators."

"Well," Aiden reasons, "The killer knows too."

"So," I speak the words slowly forming in my thoughts. "You think they might've put the information out there so that the enforcers would be able to use it as an indication of guilt in interrogations?"

"Or to undermine you." Aiden theorizes with obvious agitation, "The rumors... it... people are saying it had to be an inside job – because only the Alpha's family knew about the escape passage."

"An inside job." I repeat. "Meaning me – because I stand to gain the most from his death."

My Beta tips his head in confirmation.

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"Why would I need to use an escape tunnel to break into my own house?" I ask through clenched fangs.

"Maybe it wasn't about getting in, maybe it was about not being seen." He suggests. "There are security cameras all over the place."

"Which I could disable if I wanted to commit murder." I growl, "It makes no sense."

"Yes, well we both know truth and logic don't mean a damn when it comes to gossip." He remarks solemnly.

“First I’m unfit because a forged memorial invitation was sent to the Geminis.” I recount, bracing my hands on my desk and fantasizing about sweeping everything on its surface to the ground. “Then I’m unfit because my mate doesn’t have a wolf. And now I’m a murderer?”

“I’m afraid we’re in the middle of a game no one told us we were playing.” Aiden says, agreeing with my unspoken suspicions. “Clearly, your father wasn’t the killer’s only target.

“Alright.” I try to shake the bloodthirsty thoughts from my mind and summon some rationality. “So who are we playing against, and what the hell is their next move going to be?”

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Chapter 27

#Chapter 27 My Husband Has Me Followed

Selene’s POV

“I need to promise me you’ll be careful.” Bastien’s oversized hands are framing my cheeks, his metallic eyes boring into my own.

grasp his wrists, my small hands only stretching halfway around them. “I’m just going to the store, Bastien.”

His brow furrows even deeper than it already was. “Maybe Donavon should go with you, or better yet: we can send one of the maids instead.”

“I’m perfectly capable of buying groceries without a babysitter.” I assure him in my sweetest voice. As I untangle myself from his grasp, I add, “Are you really this concerned about the reward flier?”

“I just want you to be safe,” He deflects. “Things have been crazy around here lately.”

It does not escape my notice that he didn’t actually answer my question. I narrow my eyes, “Did something happen? Did somebody report me to your false tip line?”

“No.” Bastien promises firmly. “I’m just uneasy about everything that’s happened with the pack.”

Whatever comfort I gained from his direct “no,” disappears with the second part of his answer. There’s nothing suspicious about

it per se, something simply feels off deep in my bones. “What aren’t you telling me?”

If I needed confirmation he’s hiding something, his immediate “nothing!” provides it.

“Okay, then explain to me why you were okay with me going to the park alone three days ago, but now I can’t set foot out of the house?” I inquire.

“Of course you can set foot out of the house.” He sighs, “It’s simply that the store is crowded this time of day and I don’t want you to be harassed about the hearing.”

In truth I would be worried about it to – if I was actually going to the store. “I’ll be okay.” I insist. “Sticks and stones, remember?”

Bastien is still grumbling under his breath when I leave and once more, the strangest sensation overcomes me as I round the corner. It feels like a strange tingling in my belly, like my body is trying to tell me something my brain can’t sense. Is this what shifters mean when they talk about instincts and gut feelings?

On the off chance it is, I tip toe over to the vent further along the corridor. I learned early on that this air duct connects to Bastien’s office. If you stand in precisely the right place, you can hear people speaking inside as if they are standing next to you.

My tack pays off when Bastien’s low voice carries to me a moment later. “Don, Selene’s about to leave for the store. I want you to follow her.” He must be on the phone. There’s a pause, then he continues, “Yes, I want guards on her 24/7 if she’s not in this house.”

Getting to the hospital undetected is not easy. Donavon, as it turns out, is quite a skilled stalker. I have to circle two parking garages and run a red light to ditch him. Luckily I also remembered to turn off my phone, as well as the tracking built into the car.

I’m going to be in trouble when I get home, but not as much trouble as Bastien. After I ditched Donavon and the sheer inconvenience of his order waned, the outrage rose up to take its place. Though I’m not sure what’s going on, it’s clear Bastien lied to my face about whatever threat I face, and further saw fit to invade my privacy by having me followed without my consent.

More concerning still, Bastien having a constant guard on me is extremely inconvenient when I am trying to hide such a large secret. What happens if Drake is correct and I decide leaving was the right plan after all? How in the Goddess’s name will get away?

By the time I arrive at Dr. Kane’s office, I’m so worked up that my blood pressure is through the roof and the nurse makes me sit and do breathing exercises for ten minutes before retaking it.

When doctor Kane enters the exam room with a wide smile and begins putting on surgical gloves, I stop him. "I'm not here for an exam."

He pauses his movements, looking at me curiously. "Oh?"

"You were really helpful when I was here before." I begin earnestly, praying he'll take pity on me, "So I was hoping you might be willing to help me again now."

Though he seems curious, he doesn't seem cold or annoyed, "What is it you need, Mrs. Durand?"

"I want to know if there is anything you can prescribe me to..." I trail off, unable to find the words.

"To what?" He prompts. "It's okay. Everything we say in here is confidential and I promise there's nothing you can ask that I haven't heard before."

to know. So they can't

"Is there a drug that can mask the scent of my pregnancy hormones." I blurt, "If I don't want people smell it on me?"

Dr. Kane purses his lips, taking a seat next to the exam bed. "Mrs. Durand, I'm going to ask you something and I need you to be honest with me."

"Alright." I agree nervously,

"I'm obligated by law to report cases of abuse if I suspect it, and after your visit last time and now this.. it's clear something is not right in your marriage. Now, I understand your husband is the Alpha," He pauses, looking guilty for a moment, "I should have said earlier, I'm very sorry for your recent loss."

I barely get in a "thank you" before he goes on.

"So I realize reporting it isn't really an option. But if you aren't safe, we can find another way to get you help." He concludes "Now. Selene, are you unsafe -physically or mentally – in your home?"

"No!" I exclaim. "Bastien wouldn't ever hurt me, not in a million years." I vow. "I have my own reasons for wanting to hide the pregnancy – one's I'd prefer to keep private if that's okay."

"Of course." Dr Kane says, relaxing. "I apologize, but I had to ask."

"Not at all, it's good you ask. It shows you care for your patients."

“Thank you.” He smiles widely, “Now to answer your question, yes there is something I can give you to mask the scent of the hormones. But it’s not exactly available on the open market, if you know what I mean.”

I frown. “Is it legal?”

“Perfectly, it’s just not something for which there’s a commercial market – so it doesn’t get produced as a pill or shot.” He explains, “It’s a tea, a fairly unpleasant one. And you’ll have to drink it every day.”

“That should go well with my morning sickness.” I mutter sardonically.

“Now that I can prescribe something for.” Dr Kane offers with a twinkle in his eye.

For the first time all day I feel like smiling. “Dr. Kane, you’re a lifesaver!”

When I get home I sneak up the back stairs to the apartment, a few grocery bags in my hands to maintain my cover story. I slip inside as silently as I can, sweeping my eyes through the cozy rooms to confirm I’m alone. Sighing with relief, I deposit the groceries on the kitchen counter and begin unpacking.

I have less than 30 seconds of peace before a guttural voice sounds behind me. “First lesson in sneaking around, Little Wolf.” I spin around to find Bastien emerging from behind the front door. “Always clear your corners.”

My jaw drops, and my mind struggles to decide whether to focus on his presence or the oddity of his hiding spot. “Were you waiting there the whole time I was gone?”

“Sweetheart,” He says in a tone that implies anything but sweetness, “I heard you the moment you drove up.”

I cross my arms over my chest, “Then I presume you came up here to apologize.”

His claws shoot out so quickly I almost miss it in a blink. Whoops. “Me apologize?” He snaps.

I shift from foot to foot, my heart beginning to pound uncomfortably hard. “You lied to me and then you had your men stalk me.”

“I had my men guard you,” Bastien rumbles thunderously, “and you ran away from them and deliberately put yourself in danger!”

“What danger, Bastien?” I challenge, “I know you’re not having me followed “24/7” because of petty women’s harassment.”

He prowls forward with a lethal glare. "Take your pick Selene: Two weeks ago my father was murdered in this house and we have no idea who did it or why." He lists off his fingers, "The pack is against you and Goddess knows what lengths those "petty women" might do to get you out of the way. Oh, and there's a psychopath looking for you so he can drain and drink your blood like you're a human juice box!"

Images of Garrick shouting and raging at me burst across my vision, and I cower away from Bastien, stumbling over my own two feet. He catches me before I fall, but I flinch at his touch, whimpering in fear.

Swearing under his breath, Bastien sweeps my body into his arms, "I'm sorry." He breathes, snuggling me close. "I'm sorry, Little Wolf, I didn't mean to yell." Bastien coos, shushing me gently. "You just scared me."

I relax into his arms, my fear receding as quickly as it came. Yet a kernel of doubt remains in my heart. Bastien has never raised his voice at me like this before, he knows shouting and loud noises trigger me and no matter what has happened in the past, he's always kept his temper in check. Always.

What's more, he doesn't seem to think he did anything wrong, and I don't think I can make him understand that his behavior wasn't okay. As far as he's concerned, my safety gives him permission to use any means and go to any lengths to protect me, no matter how I feel or what I want.

Even as I accept his pets and kisses, embracing the affection and comfort, I can't help but feel something was broken between us today. And I don't think it can be fixed.

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Chapter 28

#Chapter 28 The Equinox Disaster

Bastien's POV

The Autumn Equinox has always been my favorite holiday. Above All Souls Night, the Summer Solstice and Yuletide, the Equinox is the best day of the year. Every September Elysium is overtaken by a sprawling festival celebrating the event, combining centuries-old rites and traditions with modern revelry and entertainment.

The changing of the seasons has always been sacred to shifters. Our power is always strongest on the nights the Goddess turns the wheel of the world, summoning so much magic it overflows into all of creation.

More than any year of my life so far, this Autumn's celebration must go well. It's my first year as Alpha and even though my father oversaw most of the planning, the actual event is happening on my watch. With everything that has happened in the last few weeks I desperately need some good PR with the pack, and a superb Equinox would go a long way to achieving that.

On the other hand, if something goes wrong, it will be a literal disaster. The pack won't consider a botched festival a bad party, they will consider it an affront to our most cherished heritage and hallowed customs. That cannot happen. There are already murderers and saboteurs running around my city wreaking havoc, the last thing I need is to offend the Goddess on top of it.

However things are already off to a less than ideal start. Major partners my father contracted to sponsor the festival have pulled out at the last minute, and it seems like everywhere I look, some new crisis pops up.

I know event planning is chaotic at times, but things are falling apart too suddenly, frequently and majorly. Every last step is a challenge, and I'm certain the same person who has been making my life so difficult lately is responsible.

Despite everything, we've managed to make it to festival night without any catastrophes, and I plan to enjoy it with my family small as it may be.

"This was always your father's favorite night too." My mother sniffled, straightening my already straight tie. We're waiting for Selene in the foyer, ready to depart for the event kick-off. Convincing Mom to come wasn't easy, but I encouraged her to look at it as a chance to honor Dad by celebrating something he loved.

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Honestly it was a reminder I needed myself. I've been so focused on my own difficulties and need for personal success that I feel extremely guilty for not thinking of him sooner.

"I know." I squeeze her shoulders and drop a kiss to her hair. "Tonight's for him."

I sense movement at the top of the stairs and look up, expecting to see Selene. Instead one of the sentries emerges, striding swiftly down the stairs and coming to a stop in front of us. "Selene says to go on without her, she's not feeling well."

I force myself to take a few deep breaths. It seems ever since I yelled at her, Selene has been unwell more often than not. I wish I could take back my words that day more

than anything – I've never felt more shame than the moment I realized my mate was afraid of me.

At the same time, I have to wonder whether she's punishing me for having her followed – or perhaps for keeping her married to me. I don't believe it's intentional, Selene doesn't have a cruel or passive aggressive bone in her body, but the subconscious is another matter.

Concern paints my mother's features. "You should go check on her."

I shake my head, sighing again. "This is the third time this week she's been too unwell to keep our plans. Trust me, me checking on her is the very last thing she wants."

"Oh darling," She answers, squeezing my hand. "Was your fight really that bad?"

I haven't told Mom about the threats we face. In fact, because she doesn't know the secret of Selene's blood, my wife actually knows more of the truth than my mother. Neither woman leaves the Pack House often enough to have heard the rumors spreading like wildfire, and I won't worry them with the increasing evidence of ongoing foul play. I'm not sure my mother's broken heart could take the stress, and I refuse to make my mate live in any more fear than she already must.

Thus, all mom really knows about our argument is that we disagreed about Selene's safety, and I was an asshole.

"Yes." I finally reply, "it was."

Selene's POV

I've discovered that lying on the bathroom floor for hours isn't nearly as pleasant when you're not delusional with fever. Impossible as it seems given how miserable I was at the time, being completely lucid and dressed to the nines while endlessly vomiting is far more unpleasant.

As Dr. Kane predicted, my nausea doesn't seem to be going anywhere anytime soon. Even with his medicine, I still haven't put on any weight, and I'm becoming increasingly worried for my baby. How can it possibly grow when I can't give it any nutrients?

I'm also terrified Bastien is going to figure it out. If I could fake good health I would, but there's no chance for any normalcy when I can't move from the bathroom. How many more times can I cancel our plans before he suspects why I'm sick so often?

The horrible thing is that I want nothing more than to be near him, especially now – nothing soothes me more than my mate. Even if he can't make the sickness go away, his presence alone helps get me through.

Instead I'm stuck in a cage of my own making. The closeness we rebuilt after his father's death has been slowly fading, especially after our fight. Nothing has been quite the same since that day, and the more distant Bastien is, the more I think he may ask to reschedule the rejection soon.

No matter how much I need Bastien's support, I won't risk telling him about the baby if there's a chance he's going to toss me to the curb in another month. I know he would be happier without me, and there's no doubt the pack would be happier with Arabella in my place.

the most of our last days together, and instead I'm stuck here on the floor.

It all seems terribly unfair, but at least Bastien will be having a good time at the festival – after all, one of us should have some fun.

Bastien's POV

It took months to plan, and minutes to destroy.

Everything was fine at first. People sang and danced and ate; bonfires were lit, fireworks set off, and floating lanterns released into the sky, children and adults played games and embarked on runs through the forest; entertainers rotated across the main stage delighting audiences with everything from circus acts to traditional cultural dances.

Everything was fine – until it wasn't.

Mom and I were stationed at one of the bonfires drinking hot spiked cider with Aiden and Donavon when screams sounded in the distance. Aiden and I took off at a full sprint, leaving Donavon to get my mother home and guard the house.

Though stalls and attractions are spread out through the city, the main stage is built in the middle of one of Elysium's largest parks – though now it might be more accurate to say it's built in the middle of what used to be a park. Now it is only a deep reservoir of sludge, a combination of water, mud, trash, bodily fluids and who knows what else.

At first when the waterline running beneath the meadow burst, it wasn't clear what happened. Water began slowly seeping up through the ground, until eventually the people seated on the lawn noticed the ground going muddy beneath their feet. By the time the people in the bleachers caught up to things, the field was under two feet of water and any hopes of an orderly evacuation went out the window.

The bleachers and stage sank into the quickly forming bog, while pack members and tourists scrambled to escape the quicksand like mire. The fallout spread through the city as the people trampled each other trying to escape and the muck overflowed into the streets like molasses.

By the time Aiden and I got there, it was far too late. We shut off the water to the entire city, but an ocean had already laid siege to Elysium. The only blessing is that there were no deaths. The injuries were too many to count, but shifters are difficult to kill and heal fast. The long term damages will be to the city itself, to people's mental health, and undoubtedly to me.

So far it doesn't seem like anyone is blaming me for the burst pipe, after all how could they? The reality is actually far worse. The handful of council members I spoke with shared that the pack was viewing this as a bad omen from the Goddess, a condemnation of my leadership and in the worst cases – possibly a punishment for my supposed crimes.

I was afraid of a disaster, instead I got armageddon.

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Chapter 29

#Chapter 29 Arabella's Offer

Selene's POV

Ever since I got pregnant I've been sleeping through the night (and in fact, much of the day) without any problem; but tonight! wake closer to dawn than dusk, feeling nothing out of order beyond a heavy weight pressing down the mattress near my hip. I blink and rub my eyes, surprised to discover I can actually see Bastien through the pitch black night.

He's sitting by my side, his elbows braced on his knees and his head in his hands. He's stripped off everything but his boxers, every hard ridge and valley of his powerful form exposed to my view. I sit up slowly, unease fluttering in my belly.

"Bastien?" I reach for his shoulder, settling my hand firmly on his warm skin and beginning the tender caresses I already know he needs. "What's wrong?"

His head turns my way, an oddly hollow look in his usually soulful eyes. "I'm glad you weren't there tonight." Bastien tells me roughly, "If this is what it's going to be like, the more time we spend apart the better."

I retract my hand abruptly, feeling as if he punched me in the gut rather than speaking. I pull my knees up to my chest, unsure whether I should stay or leave. Bastien doesn't

seem to notice I'm no longer touching him, though I'm not sure he realized I was touching him to begin with.

"I'm not sure how much more of this I can take." He announces. "This isn't it wasn't supposed to be this way."

As ever, my eyes betray me, flooding with tears large enough that my husband can smell the salt. He reaches for my hand, his mouth twitches in a grimace, "I'm sorry I put you through this."

"I'm sorry too." I sniffle, feeling as if my lungs have collapsed in my chest. "More than you know."

Bastien's POV

"What are you thinking so hard about?" Arabella is standing in my doorway, her bleached blonde hair piled on top of her head in a complicated twist. At first I'm confused to see her in the Pack House so late, then my mind jumps to the worst.

"What's wrong?" I jolt to my feet, "who's hurt? What's on fire?"

Arabella greets my cynical panic with a tinkling laugh, "Honestly Bastien, you should write greeting cards." She teases. "Nothing's wrong. I came to check on you."

"Oh." I breathe, slowly lowering back into my chair and glancing at the clock. "At midnight?"

She flashes her gleaming white teeth. "I was on my way home from the bar and saw your light on." As quickly as she smiled, she switches to a pout. "You've had a really rough few weeks."

"Yeah," I agree. "It's been rough without Dad. I'm sorry I haven't checked in with you more. How are you doing?"

Arabella has been putting on a strong front since the murder, like she always does, but my father raised her from the time she was a child. I know how much pain she must be in. She shrugs, "I'm keeping my head up."

"Bella, you know I'm here if you ever want to talk. Right?" We've only connected a few times since the funeral. For the most part she's kept her distance, but she's always preferred to grieve alone. It was the same with Flynn. Even so, I have to wonder whether she has anyone to truly confide in.

"I know, Bastien." She murmurs, "And you know that goes both ways right?"

“I don’t think you have enough time for that.” I joke.

“Try me,” Arabella offers.

“Well you know most of it.” I grumble. “The pack hates me. Mom’s barely hanging on. The investigation is going nowhere. I was too selfish after Dad died to let Selene go and now I’ve subjected her to the pack’s derision and put her in danger from whoever is so determined to bring down the family.” The words pour out of my mouth in a rapid stream. “And I’ve probably undone all my father’s hard work in less than a month of being Alpha.”

“What is happening with the investigation?” Arabella prods.

“Not much.” My voice sounds strange to my own ears, too devoid of the emotion eating me alive on the inside. “The enforcers know how the murderer got in, they know a male wolf was responsible, but beyond that?” I shrug, “another couple of weeks and they’ll label it a cold case.”

Arabella sits up indignantly, “So fast?”

“It’s not about the time that’s passed since the crime, it’s the time that’s passed since they had a lead, and they’ve never gotten

anything beyond the initial crime scene.”

“That’s unbelievable.” Arabella complains with an odd note in her voice. “He was the Alpha, he deserves better.”

“I agree.” I state, absentmindedly shuffling the papers on my desk. “But hanging onto cold cases too long prevents them from investigating more recent crimes with stronger leads, and that cannot be allowed.”

“You’re so good,” Arabella praises me warmly.

I snort, “You’re just about the only person that thinks so.”

“That’s not true.” She insists, sidling around to me and perching on the armrest of my chair. “You have more support than you think.” Her graceful hands land on my shoulders, massaging my tight muscles. “In fact, if you need help – with anything at all – I want you to call me. I’m serious, I want you to put me to use, it’s the least I can do.”

I can’t explain it, but something feels off about her stroking hands, as if the movements are just a bit too slow, a bit too languid to be innocent. Before I met Selene, I always planned on making an offer or marriage to Arabella and she knew it. However after finding my mate I vowed to provide for Arabella financially rather than wedding her.

Now I'm beginning to wonder if she might believe things will go back to the way they once were after Selene leaves. I shrug off her hands. I don't want anyone other than my mate. I would rather be alone my whole life, than choose another.

"I appreciate that, Bella." I try to smile, but only half succeed. "Actually the most help you could be, might be to my mother. She's really having a hard time. Bizarrely, things going so badly for me seem to have given her a little motivation to carry on-like me needing her has provided some of the purpose she lost. If you could help make her feel needed I would be eternally grateful."

"Of course." Arabella promises, "Like I said, whatever I can do. And I love Odette."

"Thank you, sister." I say pointedly, hammering home my intentions.

"Anytime." She purrs throatily, "Alpha."

Selene's POV

For the second time in as many days, I wake in the middle of the night.

However this time, Bastien hasn't entered our room and I have no idea what roused me from sleep. I scan the room and then check in with my body, staring at my belly curiously to see if nausea or the increasingly frequent need to pee is going to set in.

Used

Neither happens, but I'm so awake now I don't think I'll be able to go back to sleep. Instead I slide out from the silky sheets and grab my robe from the hook on the door, exiting into the main apartment.

Nothing. Not a sight or sound.

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I glance at the clock. It's almost 1:00 AM. Bastien must still be in his office working – that or he's passed out over the keyboard. With a sleepy groan I shove my feet into a pair of slippers and head down the stairs to the main house, hoping Bastien won't be angry with me for interrupting or waking him.

After everything he said after the festival, I feel like I'm walking on eggshells around him – which isn't a great way to feel in one's own house. Granted I probably won't be here much longer based on his words.

As I near the second floor landing one of the sentries pokes his head around the corner, "Is everything okay?" He asks,

“Yes,” I whisper, conscious of Odette’s bedroom door standing only a few feet away. “Is Bastien still working?”

“I think so.” The sentry answers, “Ms. Winters arrived a little while ago and has been in with him since.”

I freeze momentarily, gradually finding the will to respond, “Thank you.”

I don’t know why I continue down the stairs. I know I’m not going to find anything I want to see. If anything, I’m going to find only heartbreak. It’s not a surprise exactly, not after the jewelry store, but I never imagined they were carrying on the affair inside my own house.

My heart sinks as I approach Bastien’s study, the unmistakable sounds of voices audible within. Just before I enter the office corridor I hear the door click open. I halt immediately, peering around the corner just in time to see Arabella planting a kiss on Bastien’s cheek as she departs.

If I thought I couldn’t hurt worse than I already did, I was wrong. Seeing them so happy together, sneaking around even while the world seems to be crumbling around this family.. it’s too much to bear.

Bastien’s POV

I barely recognize my mother. Her once glowing skin is pallid and gray, her usually bright eyes are dull and glassy, and even her hair seems to be losing its color. She’s barely left her room since my father died, staying in bed all day and hugging his pillow as she cries.

As distant as Selene has been lately, she seems equally concerned about my mother’s health, now hovering beside me outside the master bedroom and peeking worriedly through the gap in the door.

“You have to talk to her. She urges.

“And say what? I counter helplessly.

Selene’s two toned eyes cut to me. “She needs a reason to go on without Gabriel.” She proclaims. “To be reminded of how much she still has to live for.”

My head shakes back and forth. “She’s lost everything.”

“Not everything. My wife says pointedly. “If there’s one force on this earth stronger than love for a mate, it’s love for a child.” She nudges me toward the door, “If her purpose as a mother can’t pull her through, nothing will.

Utterly dejected, I drag my hand over my face. "But she doesn't want to pull through."

Selene cocks her head to the side, waves of long, dark hair streaming over her shoulder. "You're the one who's always saying being an Alpha is about giving people what they need, even and especially when they don't want it." She emphasizes. "Odette isn't in any state of mind to know what she wants right now."

Everything she says makes sense, but none of her logic or encouraging words can budge the tangle of guilt lodged in my chest. It shackles me as completely as any irons. "It feels selfish to keep her here when she wants to be with him." I admit, the irony of our situation taunting me mercilessly. It used to be that there was only one woman I was forcing to stay with me. Now she herself is campaigning for me to do the same to another.

"And what would your father have to say about it?" Selene inquires, a hard edge in her sweet voice. "Do you think he would want you to stand by and let her waste away? Do you think letting her suffer and die is somehow more humane than helping her live, or that he would forgive you for letting her go when you still need her so badly?"

The truth of her words shines through clear as day: my father would never forgive me if I let mom throw her life away for him. He would probably haunt me to the edge of madness, then greet me with more punishments when I join him in the otherworld.

Without another word, I carefully push the door open and quietly approach the bed. "How are you feeling today, Mom?"

She doesn't answer, instead burying her face deeper in the pillow to breathe in my father's lingering scent. She frowns when I open the drawn curtains and sunlight pours into the dark room, but she does not speak.

My mother has always been a force of nature strong and composed, intimidating and poised in equal measure. Seeing her brought so low is painful, and I wish I'd inherited more of her traits than my father's. She always knows exactly what to say, even in the worst of times,

"I was hoping I might persuade you to come have dinner with Selene and me." I propose gently. When she only gives me a blank look in response, I press. "There are some things I'd like to talk about, I need your help, Mom."

A flicker of concern filters through the hollow well of pain in her eyes, though still she does not speak.

"I don't know what to do about the Pack." I breathe, feeling a slight weight lift from my shoulders by virtue of simply speaking the words aloud, "I always thought Dad would be here to guide me when I took over. He prepared me for war, for crises and natural disasters, but he never prepared me to face it all alone."

My throat tightens. “Everything feels like it’s falling apart.” I confess “Every time I think I’ve got a handle on a problem, something else comes along and sweeps the rug out from under me.

And the pain is only going to keep coming, Axel growls. Do you really think you can survive losing Selene on top of everything else?

Not now I bite back, in no mood for my wolf’s continued pressure to claim my mate before she can reject me.

Pregnant and Rejected by My Alpha Mate Chapter 30

Pregnant and Rejected by My Alpha Mate

Chapter 30

#Chapter 30 Kidnapping

Mom is sitting up now, leaning against my side with comforting warmth – though I’m not sure if this was her intention, or if she’s simply too weak to hold herself upright. “You helped dad lead the pack for 30 years,” My hand dwarfs hers as I squeeze her bony fingers. “You have experience and insight I don’t. Please say you’ll help me.”

The limp hand beneath mine twitches, then slowly turns over to return my squeeze. “I know what you’re doing.” She scolds without conviction. Smiling tremulously, she adds, “What kind of mother would I be if I refused you?”

“A very, very bad one.” I tease.

A noise somewhere between a hiccup and a sob escapes her lips, “Of course I’ll help you.”

It seems no matter how small the victory, none can stand in this horrible new world order. No sooner had I eased my immediate concerns for my mother’s state of mind, than a new disaster unfolded. I was on my way back to my office from mom’s bedroom, when Aiden’s voice burst to life in my head. We have a problem.

Stopping in my tracks, I braced myself for the inevitable. Tell me.

A patrolling enforcer found Arabella’s car abandoned down by the lake. He relayed. The scene appears to indicate foul play. All her belongings were still there, the doors open and signs of a struggle blood on the seat.

What?! I thunder internally, my heart struggling to beat.

You need to get down here – now. Aiden answers. By the marina. We're not going to be able to keep this quiet for long.

I'm on my way.

From there I stormed back to the top-floor apartment, gathering up a very confused Selene and sequestering her and mom in a secure room with four of my most trusted guards. The emergency plan has been in place since the morning after my father died. I was prepared for another attack on the family, especially one targeting my wife and mother, but I never even considered Arabella.

I can't believe how stupid I was. Of anyone, Arabella is the easiest target to reach: she doesn't live at the pack house and doesn't have a standing guard, and everyone knows how important she is to me.

If she dies I'll only have myself to blame. As if it wasn't bad enough that I killed my best friend, now I'm going to have his baby sister's murder on my conscience too.

Goddess, I hope I'm not too late.

If I go the rest of my life without walking into another crime scene, it won't be soon enough. The sight of yellow caution tape and evidence markers is becoming so familiar to me they're beginning to lose their shock value.

Unlike her car, which looked like the site of a bar room brawl, Arabella's apartment seems completely untouched. Her furniture is upright and her belongings tidy, all surfaces clear and clean. If it weren't for the dishes in the sink, it would almost look un-lived in.

"Anything look out of place?" One of the investigators is asking.

I rub my jaw, "I haven't been here in a long time, I don't think I would be able to tell if it was."

The enforcer's eyebrows raise, but he doesn't share his thoughts. Not having any patience for withholding, I infuse pure dominance into my tone, "You doubt my honesty?"

"No Alpha!" He insists instantly, shrinking in on himself.

"Then what?" I demand.

If he were in wolf form his tail would be between his legs. "It's just that the word around the pack is that Ms. Winters is your mistress."

“Excuse me?” I snarl, my fangs elongating.

“We all thought that’s why you’re rejecting Mrs. Durand.” The man’s partner speaks up, redirecting some of my ire onto himself.

It’s no surprise that the pack gossips, and knowing our history, the theory even makes sense. However the idea that such vicious lies have been circulating around my mate makes my blood run cold. I’d like to find the person who came up with the story and rip them apart – very slowly

“I assure you, you’ve been misinformed.” I growl.

The lead investigator clears his throat, “Then this may be difficult to explain.” He says, holding out a piece of stationary

I snatch the paper from his hand, my eyes flying over the page with increasing disbelief. There, clearly scrawled in Selene’s handwriting, is the message:

This is your final warning. If you want to live, stay the hell away from my husband. I will know if you see him, and you will pay.

– Selene