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“I need to see my mom,” Thea said after they left the Alpha’s office.

“Of course,” Alaric said.

“Hey, Mom, where are you?” Thea mind linked her.

“I’m making rounds with Luna Ada, visiting pack members. Is everything okay?”

“I got my memory back. I wanted to see you. I miss you.”

“Oh, Thea, thank goddess.”

“When will you be done?”

“I can come now.”

“No, finish your work. I know I have to share you with the pack. I have some stuff to get done anyway. Find me when you finish?”

“Of course.”

Thea and the triplets got lunch and took care of some business. Eventually, Thea’s mom found her, and the triplets reluctantly let her go.

Thea followed her mom to her parents’ room for privacy. They sat down on the couch, and Naomi put

her arm around her daughter.

“How have you been, Thea?”

“It’s been a difficult few months,” Thea said.

“I can’t imagine.”

“Everything I thought I knew has been turned on its head, then turned several more times,” Thea said. “It’s been a roller coaster. I have these new powers. I got my wolf, and it feels amazing. Maybe I’m petty or selfish, but I’m so glad I shifted. Something would have been missing if I didn’t. I would have become bitter. I know it. That makes me feel guilty.”

“No, honey,” Naomi said. “You’re a wolf. You should want to have your wolf. There’s nothing wrong with that.”

Thea nodded. “There’s been so much confusion. I was so afraid without a wolf. I knew I had to do something for the people being hurt, but I knew I didn’t have the strength to back it up as just a human.”

“And you did it anyway,” Naomi said. Her turquoise eyes held pride.

“It was probably foolhardy,” Thea said.

“It was brave. You’re a leader. Your pack will follow you anywhere. I’ve felt a significant change in our pack since we left and came back. Our pack members

are proud of you. They're happy you saved all those people. We're more vibrant now. More alive."

Thea nodded.

"Tell me everything that's happened," Naomi said.

Thea told her all the things that happened while she was away. Most she already knew, but it was important for Thea to voice it all.

Thea gasped. "I yelled at Liam when I had amnesia. I used my Alpha tone on him. I need to apologize."

"There will be time for all that. What about you? Spend a moment on you."

Thea thought for a moment. "I'm not sure how to put this in words," Thea said. "When I had amnesia, obviously, I didn't remember anything. I didn't know anything about the werewolf world, who I was, or who anyone was. I would have felt alone, but I had the triplets, the matebond, and Zoe. Everything I learned was a shock. Werewolves. Magic. Mates and matebonds. Witches. Vampires. My gift. Feeling Xavier's canines being ripped out. Shock after shock. Then I learn that I'm the future leader of the pack. I had promised to help all these people who were being abused. I have a strikeforce. I felt utterly unprepared and incapable of being what anyone needed me to be."

"I can't imagine how difficult that must have been,"

Naomi said. "How much pressure you must have felt."

"It was a lot," Thea said. "I kept expecting the old Thea to have all this knowledge that would make me able to handle everything. If I could just remember, everything would be okay. Now that I have my memories back, amnesia Thea is not impressed. I still feel inadequate to fulfill all these responsibilities. I remember not thinking about that before. I saw a need, and I acted. I didn't consider whether I was equipped to deal with it."

"You don't have to be equipped to deal with every little thing. A good leader delegates. You can't be everything to everyone."

"Right. That makes sense," Thea said. "Maybe I could delegate all the decision-making."

"What do you mean?" Naomi said.

"I know the basics of werewolf etiquette, what customs we have, but I still don't know what to do. There isn't a playbook for everything that's going on."

"How did you get through when you didn't have your memory? How did you make decisions?"

"I didn't," Thea said. "I let Kai tell me what I should do all week."

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“Not all week. There were still times when you had to make choices. Times when you acted without Kai telling you what to do. Like when the girls were coming on to your mates. How did you choose what to do then?”

“I didn’t really choose then either,” Thea said. “It was instinct. I just acted. They weren’t just coming on to my mates. Honestly, that wasn’t even a big deal because the triplets were clearly not interested. The girls threatened the pack. They wanted to be Luna, and I know they would have abused the pack members. I couldn’t let that happen.”

Naomi smiled. “And on the rescue mission, when you left the group and saved those girls. What made you decide to act?”

“People were in trouble. I could help. That’s what I was there to do, so I did.”

“Instinct,” Naomi said. “That’s the key. You are a good person. You’re strong, and you’re driven to protect others. All you need to do is follow your instincts.”

“But both of those incidents have consequences,” Thea said. “Crescent Moon will want its oracles back,

and they may hurt us or our allies. Dealing with Lumia and Molly could have sparked a war. Following my instincts used to mean buying sewing equipment for someone. Now it's killing people. My instincts could hurt others.”

“Would you let those three girls go back to the situation they were in?” Naomi said.

“No.”

“Would you let Lumia or Molly hurt our pack?”

“No.”

“Every decision anyone makes will have consequences,” Naomi said. “That’s unavoidable. Your decisions have the potential to affect lots of people. That’s the burden of leadership.”

“What if it’s too big a burden?” Thea bit the inside of her lip to keep it from trembling.

“You’ll share it with your mates.”

Thea breathed in deeply to soothe herself. “I just want everyone to be safe. I don’t want anyone getting hurt, especially not because of me.”

“You’ll find a way to keep everyone safe.”

“I hope so.” She sighed. “I’m glad you’re back,” Thea said after a moment.

“Me too,” Naomi said. “You’ve always been strong. You never complained. Every time we had to leave, I worried that you wouldn’t feel loved or safe, but we couldn’t take you away from the triplets. I hope they gave you enough comfort in our absence.”

“I missed you and Dad whenever you left, but I never felt lonely or unloved. You guys taught me sacrifices were part of the job. I knew you loved me and missed me, and the triplets never let me be alone,” Thea said.

“No, they wouldn’t.” Naomi laughed.

“Mom, when I thought I wouldn’t be able to have pups, it was the worst feeling. Worse than not having my wolf. I know I’m being reactionary, but I want to have as many pups as I can right away. I don’t want to lose my chance.”

“I can’t tell you the future,” Naomi said. “Your life will always be more complicated than the average person’s. Your instincts are always good. If you want to get pregnant, I’m sure there’s nothing wrong with that.”

“I know there’s so much to do, though,” Thea said. “The newcomers, keeping everyone safe from retaliation, leading the pack, preparing for the big bad. Will I have time to take care of any children?”

“Luna Ada and I will help you. That’s what

grandmothers are for. The entire pack will help raise your pups. Do you remember when you were a pup? Everyone wanted to hold you and play with you. You will have people begging to be your pups' full-time nannies. They will be surrounded by people who love them all the time."

Thea nodded.

Naomi's eyes glazed over.

"Need to go?" Thea said.

Naomi nodded. "Your judgment is impeccable, your instincts are endorsed by the goddess herself. She told you to follow your instincts. Don't doubt yourself. The rest will sort itself out."

"Thanks, Mom," Thea said.

"I love you."

"Love you too." Naomi left Thea sitting on the couch.

"Lizzy? What are you up to?" Thea mind linked her.

"Thinking about going into the city to find someone to scratch the itch," Lizzy mind linked her back. "What's up?"

"Before you go, could we have a little girl time?"

"Yeah, come to my room."

