

Epilogue 2: Birthday

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One Year Later

Quirin

"Come on, Quirin! You can punch harder than that," Henry, my best friend and closest thing that I have to a brother, says to me.

"It's your birthday, Henry. I don't want to make you cry before we celebrate your big day," I taunt.

Where Henry is a shining star of happiness, I'm a black cloud of anger. Being around him helps to keep the darkness at bay, but no one can remove the darkness that has consumed me since the day that I watched my father die.

I had planned my revenge on Alpha Warren for years, had intended to take everything that he loved from him. But all that changed a year ago when his mate saved my life. Not only had she saved my life, she'd insisted that I live. She, like Henry, had a bright golden light that shines around her. She'd taken my face in her hands and told me that I wasn't allowed to die. I had been ready to die, ready to give up the grief that I've held so deep in my heart, but she wouldn't allow it. How that woman saved my life is beyond me.

She had cared for me while I was in her hospital and while I hate her mate, I can understand why my father wanted Luna Yara as a mate. He would have fallen in love with her. I know he would have because a part of me did as well.

Epilogue 2: Birthday

After months of Alpha Harold asking me to let Alpha Warren tell me what really happened and why he'd killed my father, I'd sat quietly and listened to what the man had to say. Nothing that he said changed my feelings toward him though. It was Luna Yara that made the difference in me with her gentle kindness and loving soul.

While I call Henry brother, I never could bring myself to call Alpha Harold father or dad. However, once my mother died, basically giving up on life because she could no longer be a Luna, I found myself drawn to Luna Farrah. She, like me, has suffered loss. She understands the darkness inside me more than Alpha Harold. They've both been wonderful role models for me and while my father was a very different kind of leader than Alpha Harold, Harold has taught me a lot about what it takes to run a pack.

Before I turned eighteen, he'd pulled me aside and told me that he'd put the deed to my father's pack lands in his safe. He'd kept it there for me and when I'd turned eighteen, I'd returned to the place where my father had raised me. Henry had insisted on coming with me, wanting to make sure that I wasn't alone and probably to make sure that I didn't walk out of his life never to return. I might have, except I really like the warm glow he brings to my life. And if I'm honest, I do love him like a brother. It's why I was willing to give my life to save his. That bear, the one that almost killed me, was going after him. I couldn't let that bear or anyone else snuff out the light inside him. He's a good person, too good to die so young. But I'm not. I'm full of anger and hate, destined to live my life alone.

When we'd walked into the packhouse, it was like déjà vu. All of my memories of growing up here had flooded back to me. I'd walked to

Epilogue 2: Birthday

my father's office and sat in the chair that was dusty and creaky from years of sitting idle.

Henry had helped me to go through everything and the biggest shock of all, was my father's finances. He'd made sure that I would be set for life. The pack was wealthy before he died, but since his death, even with no one managing the account, the money had multiplied. It was enough for me to begin cleaning up the packhouse and the pack lands. For what, I wasn't sure at the time, but I just knew that an Alpha needs a place to have his pack.

So, for the last year, minus the time that I was recovering, I've been cleaning out the packhouse and pack lands. That's when the rogues started to approach me. Moms with young pups needed a place to live. They were desperate and willing to do just about anything to have a secure place for themselves and their pups. There weren't a lot of them, but over the last year, my pack of one has grown to a pack of twenty-five. It's a start.

"Are you even trying Quirin?" Henry goads me. He's a good fighter, but I'm better. The difference is, I don't mind hurting people, he does. However, I don't want to hurt him. There are very few people in this world that I care about, and Henry is at the top of that very short list.

Sometimes I feel like I'm much older than he is, like the darkness in me has aged me somehow. And, since it is his birthday, I give him the gift of defeating me.

"YES!" he says, dancing around like a prize fighter where I'm lying on the ground.

"You're utterly ridiculous," I say, sitting up. "Come on. I need to

Epilogue 2: Birthday

shower before your party."

He puts his hand out and helps me up. As we walk in, Luna Farrah puts her hand on my arm. When Henry is a few steps away, she looks at me. "I saw what you did."

I shrug. "It's his birthday."

"Mhmm," she says knowingly. I'm not sure how it is that this woman knows me better than my own mother did, but she does.

She turns and falls into step beside me. "How's the pack coming along?"

"It's getting there," I tell her.

"Am I ever going to get an invite to come visit?" she asks.

"I thought you knew you had an open invitation," I say, making her smile.

"Good to know. I'm going to take you up on that," she says and I know she will.

The room I lived in for the five years I'd been in this pack was left untouched. Luna Farrah said it was because she wanted me to know that I was always welcome to return and always had a place to stay if I needed it. This room feels more like home to me than my room in my own packhouse. Of course, that was my father's bedroom when he was alive. I moved my things into that room when I took over as Alpha.

When I finish getting ready, Henry's birthday party has already

Epilogue 2: Birthday

started. I take another look in the mirror, reminding myself that I can't kill Alpha Warren. Not only is he in an alliance with Alpha Harold and after tomorrow night, I'm sure he'll renew that with Henry, but I can't hurt Luna Yara that way, not after what she did for me.

I head downstairs, saying my hellos to Alpha Warren, Luna Yara, and the rest of their brood. The woman is pregnant again and she's huge. I'm beginning to wonder if Alpha Warren is planning to breed her to death.

They have two boys who look just like their father and three girls. The two older ones look like Luna Yara and the youngest looks like her father.

"Alpha Quirin, how are you doing?" Luna Yara asks me.

"I'm well, Luna, thank you," I say, warmly.

"How's the pack coming along?" Alpha Warren asks.

"It's good, thanks," I say, with much more ice in my tone. "If you'll excuse me."

Without waiting for a response, I go find Henry who is surrounded by friends. Unlike me, he has an abundance of them. I get a drink and stand with him, laughing at stupid jokes and smiling when it's appropriate. I'm bored out of my mind, but this is my brother's eighteenth birthday party, so I force myself to be nice and play along.

"So, you haven't smelled your mate yet, Alpha?" someone asks him.

"Nah. I guess she's not in this pack. Maybe Alpha Warren's pack, or

Epilogue 2: Birthday

who knows, maybe she's in Alpha Quirin's pack," he says, clinking his glass with mine.

"I doubt it," I say. I don't have any young females in my pack that don't have pups already.

The others turn to me, asking me about my pack. My short, cold answers quickly drive the conversation back to Henry where it belongs.

When the cake comes out, everyone gathers around and sings happy birthday. I take the opportunity to duck outside, grabbing another drink before going to sit by myself.

I smell her before I see her. I'm not sure why her scent calls to me, maybe because of who her mother is, but either way, I know it's her.

"What are you doing out here by yourself, little pup? You should be inside having cake with your family."

"I wanted to check on you, Alpha Quirin," Kennedy says, stepping out of the shadows.

"Check on me?" I ask, raising an eyebrow at her. I take a sip of my drink and watch her over the rim of the glass.

"Mhmm. I've been watching you all night."

"Have you? And what did you see?" I ask. I'm not sure why I care, but I'm curious to know what this little girl thinks she saw.

She comes to sit down beside me. I take a deep breath of her citrus and mint scent. For such a young pup, her scent is very appealing.

Epilogue 2: Birthday

"I saw you standing alone in a group of people. I saw you laughing, but the laughter didn't reach your eyes. I saw your jaw tighten or your fists clench when anyone directed a question at you," she says, making me pause. I'm unused to anyone noticing this much about me. Luna Farrah is the only one who has come close to seeing me like this young pup has seen me. I don't like it. It makes me feel exposed, which is probably why my response is much harsher than it should be.

"You don't know what you're talking about."

"I know you don't like my father," she says.

"You're right about that. He killed my father, so no, I'll never like your father. Be glad you look like your mother or I might hate you too."

"Everyone says my mother is beautiful. If you think that I look like her, then you must think that I'm beautiful too," she says, smiling up at me. Damn, she is beautiful, maybe even more so than her mother.

"She's okay. I wouldn't call her beautiful," I say spitefully.

"Oh," Kennedy says, and I can tell I've hurt her feelings. Normally, I wouldn't care, but for some reason, I don't like hurting this little pup's feelings.

"You're prettier than your mother," I say quietly, and her face lights up. She's got that same glow about her, the one that Henry and Luna Yara have, the warm glow that I'm drawn to like a moth to a flame.

"Kennedy! There you are!" Luna Yara says, walking out. "Oh, Alpha

Epilogue 2: Birthday

Quirin. I hope Kennedy wasn't bothering you."

"She's fine," I say, watching as Kennedy goes to her mother and takes her hand.

"Kennedy, you shouldn't wander off like that. Your father and I didn't know where you were," Luna Yara says.

"I was safe with Alpha Quirin," she says confidently. Oh, little pup. You were definitely NOT safe with me.

"You should stay away from men like me, Kennedy. Men like me are no good for little pups like you," I tell her.

Instead of heeding my words, she pulls away from her mother and comes over to hug me.

"I'm not afraid of you," she whispers in my ear.

I reach my arm around her, taking a deep breath of her scent. "You should be," I say quietly to her.

She pulls away and goes back to her mother.

"It was good seeing you, Alpha Quirin. If you need any medical assistance in your pack, please let me know. I'd be happy to come help you," she says.

"Looks like you're going to have your hands even more full than they are now, pretty soon."

"Mommy's having twins again," Kennedy says, excitedly.

Epilogue 2: Birthday

Yara smiles down at her daughter. "That is true, but the offer still stands. I know our pack is closer to yours than Alpha Harold's, so anytime you need anything..."

"Thank you, Luna," I say, cutting her off. There's no way I'm asking a woman on the verge of having her second set of twins to come help me with anything.

"Well, we'll let you return to your peace and quiet. Come on, Kennedy," she says, leading her daughter away.

I watch and I'm pleasantly surprised when Kennedy turns and waves goodbye to me. I'm even more surprised when I feel the need to raise my hand and wave back.

****This story will continue in The Pack's Nemesis (Quirin's Story)**



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