

Chapter 26 – The Regret

"If only. Those must be the two saddest words in the world." — Mercedes Lackey

Kiya

Before long, the men showed up at our apartment with bags full of Chinese takeout. The wafting smell of chicken dumplings and shrimp chow mein made me drool instantly. Settling on the couches, we all dug in as Darien flipped through the channels for something good to watch.

"How have things been back home?" Sapphire asked, eating a crab rangoon.

"Hectic, but it's quieting down," Darien replied. The seriousness of his voice did not match the pleasurable expression on his face as he took a bite out of his orange chicken. "More of our best warriors are deployed to help packs affected by the recent rogue attacks."

"What's the damage this time around?"

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"A smaller pack in Utah is completely decimated. The warriors sent there are doing damage control and giving supplies to the families affected."

My heart wept for the families displaced by the violence, especially the children. Rogue attacks have been increasing at an alarming rate, last I heard. They've been getting stronger too. Many of the attacks were situated around our cluster of states, including Nevada, Utah, and northern New Mexico. Oregon's packs got hit hard too.

"Alpha Anthony is doing a good job at delegating who goes where and distributing supplies and aid. Some warriors returned earlier this morning. But I'm afraid more packs have already fallen. We might expect an influx of refugees within the week."

I ponder deep in thought, a dumpling hanging in my mouth. Our pack would increase in size, for sure, but this shouldn't be happening. The spontaneous rising of rogues in our states is concerning, especially since rogue attacks haven't happened near Garnet Moon in a few years. However, with the sudden increase, every

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Alpha in the Tri-state area should be on edge, especially my big brother.

“Sorry to put a damper on the mood.” Galen chuckled nervously. He slurped his noodles, involuntarily making the rest of us cringe like we ate lemons. “But the Alpha and Luna are awaiting your returns.”

“Hasn’t been the same with one of our best Deltas missing,” Darien smirked, looking at me. “Are you sure you want to miss training for boring classes every year?”

“I may have missed four months’ worth of training, but I could still kick your ass.” I narrow my eyes at his blue, a smirk rising on my face. “Want a demonstration, my friend?”

Darien’s eyes widened a bit before he snorted. “Eager to get back to training, huh?”

“You, sir, are avoiding the question. But if you must ask, yes. I’m ready to get back into the training regime.” I kicked a leg up over the armrest. “College is fun and all, but I miss my family more.”

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"You didn't miss us?" Galen mustered the biggest and cutest puppy dog eyes. It is his way of getting me to surrender into his adorableness. He had such a cute baby face, but it won't deter me!

"I did, but not in the way you think." I shot a wink and the man instantly deflated. We girls burst into a fit of laughter. Deep down, I miss the shenanigans with my fellow Deltas. Darien and Galen have been best friends since diapers, and yet, they couldn't be any more different from each other. Galen is laid back, funny, and nonchalant while Darien is cordial, serious, and stoic.

Goddess, I couldn't wait to get back home!

After lunch, the four of us piled into Darien's Toyota Highlander. We pack the back like a sardine could with the colorful miscellany of suitcases and bags threatening to burst. Bidding farewell to the apartment I called home for the fall and spring semesters, we drove down the long road back to Garnet Moon territory.

Buildings and people blurred into

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indistinguishable colors and blurs, but the music Galen blasted through the car is very distinguishable. The entire city could hear us by the sheer volume alone, and that he was a huge fan of Blackpink. It's not right to not sing along to such amazing songs, and so, much to Darien's dismay, the three of us sang along to the playlist.

But we did more screeching than singing.

Neron

The pungent scent of rotting earth and decay drifted across my nose, a vicious insult to my sense of smell. The scent of death itself.

The smell of rogues never ceases to trigger the urge to vomit the breakfast the Omegas have made for me. The uninjured soldiers dragged out mangled corpses of dead wolves off my territory, leaving a row of rotting blood to mark their exit. My eyes darted to the pack of medics either bandaging up soldiers or carrying the critical ones to our hospital.

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It had become a sight that I was forced to grow accustomed to.

The rogues weren't the only lives lost today. The pain-laced wails of mates losing their other half locked my heart in a vice grip, squeezing painfully. Children begging to see their fathers and mothers, ignorant to the fact they're no longer on this earth. It's a heartbreaking scene I prayed to the Moon Goddess to never witness in my lifetime as Alpha, but my prayers go unheard, as usual.

"How many casualties this time around?" I asked Valerian, my faithful Beta. His sigh alone from behind me is enough to tell me how exhausted he is, or how he wishes not to be the bearer of terrible news.

"Soldiers? We lost about ten. Pack members? Luck is on our side this time, none."

"I wouldn't call it luck." I retorted, my voice coming out harsher than expected. "Honorable wolves still died. And for what? A bunch of dirty mongrels looking to cause havoc."

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Rogue attacks have been increasing over the past several years on Zircon Moon territory. I wish I could say we were victorious in every battle, but I would be lying. We lose lives in each encounter, and the rogues grow smarter and stronger with each appearance. Death is a failure, and that failure is on me and me alone. I am the Alpha, and yet, my people continuously die for nothing. My soldiers died protecting the pack they love, but I wish the price paid for victory isn't their lives.

"Alpha, it may be wise to consider asking for help," Valerian suggested. Asking nearby territories for help with the rogue problem had been dancing on my mind for several months now, for we weren't the only ones hit by this disaster. Several packs have fallen in complete disarray after the attacks, and I cannot let that happen with mine.

As much as I hate leaning on others for support, a good Alpha knows when to ask for help. I cannot stomach more families losing their loved ones. My words of support would fall on deaf ears if more of my men and women continuously die, and I do nothing to improve our

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circumstances.

"Perhaps," I sigh, turning my head to my friend.

"What's the latest on Kwame's reports?"

"He is still working on it. Tracking down rogues is difficult, especially with how abnormally strategic these mutts have become. It is as if they are being trained by someone, and Kwame is having a tough challenge tracking the bastard responsible." He huffs out a sigh. "He sends his best trackers and they walk into a dead-end every time."

The exhaustion is clear on his face. Unlike me, Valerian had twice as much to worry about. These rogue attacks had always put him on edge. The threats become more real when you have a family to protect. I clench his shoulder gently, his eyes on mine.

"Go to your wife," I ordered. "Your son needs you. I will handle things from here."

"But..."

"It is not a request." I hated using my Alpha

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voice on Val, but he needs this. He needs to unwind and relax, knowing his wife and son were all right. To know that they were safe and ready to deliver him the love he needs. He bowed his head, eyes casting to inspect something interesting on our shoes.

“Yes, Alpha.” He replied, turning back to the packhouse. As much as I appreciate both Valerian and Raina’s help in improving this rogue situation, their family comes first. Little Adonis needed both his parents, a rogue attack is terrifying to pups, especially a five-year-old boy.

The situation is under control in the front yard. Injured soldiers were being taken care of and funeral preparations were underway for our fallen comrades. Our cemetery is growing, and it displeases me.

On my way back to the office, a hand gripped my bicep. It’s a hand that had long lost its warm touch, unable to stir my heart like it used to. I felt nothing. No burst of warmth nor sparks. Odessa smiles up at me, her hand gliding on my skin seductively.

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“Babe.” She whispered, her arousal tickling my nose. “You’re so stressed out! Why don’t you come with me while I help you take an edge off it a little?”

I knew what she is suggesting. Sex. Werewolves were primal animals with high sex drives, and I don’t deny that I enjoy having Odessa warm my bed.

She’s a passionate and amazing lover. However, that sinking feeling in my heart hasn’t gone away. I long for something, something different. It stays stuck in its place for years, unmoving and unforgiving. Cradling her cheek, I give the woman a soft kiss on the forehead.

“I have some work to take care of,” I answered, walking away before she could respond. While it’s true I have work, a part of me didn’t feel the need to have her in my presence. She offers nothing to help the situation, and it’s repugnant to act on my desires while families were in mourning.

An Alpha and Luna were the fiercest warriors in the pack, unafraid to go out into the battlefield

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and protect what is theirs. They feed off one another and give strength to one another. They were a complete pair, and a formidable force when out on the battlefield together.

But Odessa had shown, time and time again, that she is unfit to be Luna. She does not take part in training, refuses to get “down and dirty” with others despite being a child of late warriors, and when rogue attacks happen, she hides in one of the safe rooms with the families and children.

I want her safe, but a pack needed to see their Luna fighting for them too.

It was part of the reason I couldn't mark her as mine to inherit the Luna title officially. The pack's distaste for Odessa in power grows each day, but she is ignorant of it. I fear she relishes the attention. But there is another reason I couldn't mark her as mine. I cannot, nor do I want to.

Onyx and I must both take part in the marking process, for we both had to agree to take what is ours. But Onyx and I were not on the best of terms. Our relationship is nonexistent. He only

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appears to help battle and protect the pack, but mostly he was despondent and unresponsive. I have only myself to blame for it. For everything.

A slightly tattered manilla folder catches my eye, indents of my fingertips permanent in the flaccid material. It's the folder that haunts me day in and day out, the folder I don't dare to seal away with the others.

Do I keep it out as some sort of self-punishment? Maybe.

What I knew is that this folder holds the responsibility I refused to take. It holds all my sins. A ruthless reminder of how blind and corrupt I am before and how I tarnished the legacies of Alphas before me.

It's the folder that held Halima's file and her exoneration. It was the file that proved she was innocent. Always had been.

And I didn't realize it until after her suicide.

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Book Lover

She was a little child. If they
needed proof to believe she w...



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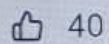
Book Lover

That's what he gets. She's a
horrible person AND not his m...




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