

## Alpha's Redemption: My Luna Has A Son by Jessica Hall

### Chapter Fifty-One

Kalen

"What did he say?" I ask Marcus as he hangs up the phone. I start unfolding the new map we bought from the gas station on the hood of the car.

"He's sending scouts and is on his way," Marcus tells me as we shine the flashlight on the map—we're trying to find any sort of trail. Though her signal is weak and keeps blinking out, we know roughly where she is, but the forest is so dense that navigating through unfamiliar terrain, even for us, could end up with us becoming lost or walking straight past her without seeing her.

John is walking along the forest edge, trying to pick up any tracks or scents, but we are at a standstill for now. We need help.

No doubt my son is furious with us. We had hoped to have found and brought her back before he found out, yet the hours ticked by, the day turned to night, and we found nothing. We had to ask for help.

Macey's life is the priority, and we don't want to take unnecessary risks more than we already have. This area is known as forsaken territory, yet we have yet to come across any.

"What about this track? It leads toward the river?" I ask, finding a tourist trail.

"Too small for access by car—hiking trail?" Marcus suggests. It cuts off before it gets to the river, but it is the only trail we have found.

"Over here," John calls out, and I look down along the road, the wind whipping my face as I turn in his direction. I can just make out his head and arm waving for us to come to him. It is bloody freezing out here. And the grass is ridiculously high along this road.

"Wait here," I tell Marcus, and he nods, putting his head down to go over the maps again with his flashlight as I walk toward John. One is a tourist map—though why anyone would take a tour out here is beyond me—the other is just an ordinary road map.

I stop beside John, but he immediately starts walking toward the truck stop about a quarter of a mile down the road; we had passed it on the way here, but it was empty.

“What is it?” I ask him, jogging to catch up with him when he turns on his heel.

“I think I found Carter's car,” John tells me, and I pick up my pace to follow him. We walk to the far back of the truck stop, but all I see are a bathroom and some dumpsters; the place is entirely empty. Then John disappears into the long grass, which is angled wrong—bent toward the forest slightly. I follow him. Barely a couple of yards off the road, covered by branches and obscured by the grass, is a car.

“That's definitely his car,” I tell John while trying to peer in the windows, but the tint is too dark, and with the lack of light, I can't make anything out.

The breeze picks up from the brewing storm—we will be racing the storm once the scouts and Valen arrive on the scene. Lightning has been streaking the sky for the past half hour, and the thunder is growing louder as it gets closer. The trees sway, bending in the wind whipping through the mountains, making it howl and whistle like something possessed.

“He can't be too far, surely. That's dense forest,” John mutters, his eyes scanning the area.

“Yes. Unless Macey was knocked out, he would struggle to drag her through it; she would have fought.”

“Not necessarily. Macey is smart. She would bide her time and wait, knowing we would search for her,” John says, turning and staring at the ground and looking for tracks.

“What do you want to do?” I ask. He glances back toward the road.

“Valen will be hours away,” John mutters, peering back into the forest's darkness.

“Not with the way my son drives,” I tell him, knowing Valen doesn't seem to understand speed limits or how to abide by them. My son seems to have a lead foot. Even so, it would take him time to get here.

“I'm going in and taking a look around,” John says, walking around the car.

“Wait, let me tell Marcus. And I will come with you. Marcus can hang back for Valen and the others to arrive,” I tell him before walking out of the long grass and back to the road.

I make my way back to Marcus and let him know, and he fiddles with my phone, linking it to his. Walking around the back of my car, I pop the trunk and grab some flashlights before returning to John, who is stripping his clothes off.

“You're shifting?” I ask, and he nods.

“One of us should. Besides, I didn't bring my glasses, and my eyesight is better shifted,” he laughs. I nod. Best to be a little prepared. Goddess knows what we will run into out there.

“You got the app open?” he asks, and I nod, holding up my phone to see her name blinking on and off. It will not give us a direct location though—it just flashes in general on the screen, but not in one spot, as if the signal is being blown around and bounced off things.

John sets his clothes on the car's roof and then shifts, and I turn the flashlight on before stepping into the forest after him. The darkness under the canopy of trees swallows us instantly. The place is silent, all noise dying out when it senses John, a predator, stalking through with his nose to the ground, tracking. Not even the crickets chirp. We move a little deeper, and after ten minutes or so, John starts sniffing a large fern under a tree.

“What have you found?” I ask him.

‘Blood,’ John mind-links back, and I shine the flashlight on the fern he was sniffing to see speckles of blood on the stalks. It has dried, and I pluck a leaf off and sniff it.

“Macey's,” I tell John, and he nods, peering into the darkness. A soft growl escapes him and he lowers his head, moving through the trees silently, with me following behind

Macey

“You’re right, it is inevitable. But that doesn’t mean it has to be unpleasant, right?” I ask before climbing between his legs. His eyes weigh heavily on me as I reach for the waistband of his pants.

My fingers tremble as I grip them and slide them down his legs, only for him to grab my shoulders and haul me up his body. He crushes me against his body, and rolls on top of me, his hips sliding between my legs and pressing against me as he purrs.

His hands reach for the thin slip dress and he bunches it before slipping it over my head. Tossing it aside, his lips go to my chest. My skin buzzes and comes alive at his touch, tingles spreading everywhere as he captures my nipple in his mouth.

After a moment, his lips trail down my ribs, nipping and grazing my flesh with his teeth. I swallow, trying to ignore our bond that’s telling me to give myself to him; despite not wanting his hands pawing over me or his lips tasting me, the sensations are overwhelming. At least down there, he’ll be distracted.

He nips at my hip, shoving my legs apart, and I feel beneath my pillow to the edge of the bed just before his mouth is suddenly on me; I cry out at the pleasurable sensation as his tongue sweeps over me even as my fingers search for the piece of the antler I broke off.

The chain on my ankle seems to annoy him when he shoves my leg higher and spreads me wider for him. I need to move closer to my side of the bed, knowing the antler is at the very edge of the mattress by the headboard, but the moment he sucks my clit, an involuntary moan escapes my lips and my hand fists the sheet. I hate that he can play my body like a damn instrument, thanks to the bond we share.

“You seem distracted,” Carter murmurs against my lower lips, and my hand freezes in its search. I glance down at him to find him watching me, and his eyes flicker to that of his wolf side. It’s eerie staring into them and seeing my face reflected back at me.

“No, I’m just worried about Taylor,” I tell him, which isn’t a lie. I’m terrified for her. I don’t want Nixon anywhere near her, and if I don’t tell him the truth, he would feel it through the bond and know I’m up to something. Carter sits up on

his elbows and kisses my knee before he looks at me, his eyes scrutinizing my face.

“You will be reunited with your daughter soon enough, but for now, we complete the bond, Macey,” he says, dipping his head and running his tongue along my thigh. He grips my hips, his hands going beneath my ass so he can lift me to his mouth. His hot lips cover me, and I squirm, using the movement to wiggle closer to the side I need.

While he’s distracted, I slowly move my arm above my head again, placing my other hand on his head and fisting his hair while my fingertips search the edge of the bed. Carter growls against my clit, the vibration sending shock waves through me before I brush the edge of the antler.

I gently pull it out, knowing it isn't a hundred percent straight, and if it bangs on the wood, he'll be alerted; I leave it beneath my pillow within easy reach before tugging on his hair and moving my hips. He growls at me, trying to hold me still when I jerk his head back by his hair; he lifts his face in surprise, then crawls up my body, settling his weight between my legs. I wrap my arms around his neck, hugging him closer to kiss him.

My tongue delves between his lips and he kisses me back hungrily when I feel his erection pressing against me. I wrap my legs around his waist, rolling my hips against him, and arousal floods me. It helps me keep my plan concealed, yet also clouds my mind as my body decides it wants to overtake all rational thought. Carter groans against my lips, his tongue tangling with mine as he tastes every inch of my mouth.

Tears spring to my eyes at what I’m about to do.

I’m about to kill the one person whose soul should be linked to mine, my twin flame. I’m about to extinguish the fire and replace it with his blood—and death, including my own.

He’s my mate. Carter is willing to love me despite me not being able to give him kids, despite me being rogue. It saddens me that the one person who actually wants me is toxic. I can't have him.

Though I hate the man, I still want him, just like I want Tatum, yet the bond pulls me to Carter so strongly. Some rational part of me knows it's just the bond making me feel this way but it's hard to focus on that part. If only Carter hadn't done what he had, no doubt I could have loved him. But I also love Tatum, and that love is pure, not tainted by death and anguish.

Carter rocks his hips against me, his hand going between our bodies as he positions himself at my entrance as his lips travel down to my mark on my right side. He sucks on it, nipping at my flesh, and I run my fingers through his hair.

My throat suddenly develops a lump as I choke back emotion, and I kiss his cheek before he thrusts himself inside me. He groans, and I roll my hips against him while he buries his face in my neck and breathes against my skin.

My hand leaves his side, slipping beneath the pillow beside me. I can't get his heart from this angle, yet still, I wrap my hand around the piece of antler.

His tongue traces over my mark. I'll miss that feeling. Tears stream down my face as he moves slowly, rocking his hips against me. I twine my fingers through his hair, getting a good hold and locking my legs around his waist. His hand grips my thigh.

Before I can stop it, sob tears from my lips as I plunge the antler into his neck.

He stills and gasps, startled, and I can feel the pain through the bond, the betrayal he feels at what I just did. The sobs grow harder and my heart aches with agony.

I grip him harder when he tries to push off the mattress, and I jerk the antler out, only to plunge it back in. Blood spurts across my face and gushes out of him, and his hand tries to pry free my hand holding the antler in my fist.

"Macey," he gasps, and I choke at the sound. Even so, I twist it, causing more blood to pour out. I feel it give as it goes through his windpipe, and I hear him gurgle.

"I could have loved you, and I would have loved you!" I cry as I clutch him. "But you hurt my sister," I breathe.

Carter gurgles, trying to lift up, but my legs are wrapped around his waist, my feet locked behind him at the ankles, keeping him trapped, keeping him inside me. I hold on to him as he struggles to breathe.

“No mate bond is stronger than the bond I have with my sisters,” I tell him as he chokes on his own blood. It spews out of his mouth and coats my shoulder, face, and neck with its warmth.

His last breath beside my ear will always haunt me.

As will the pain that slices through my chest as sharp as a razor edge; it cuts right through my heart and makes my soul bleed as a coldness settles over me—so cold, it feels like death.

His.

And mine.

I feel the part of me that was connected to him die along with him. The bond tether snaps and agony tears through me, and I hiccup a sob.

Kalen said killing your own mate would have consequences, and it feels like I’m rotting from the inside out. I feel blood trickle from my nose instantly.

I snuffle, feeling his dead weight crushing me as his body goes limp, and it takes every ounce of strength I have left to crawl out from under him.

I’m drenched in his blood, and I look at his body, face down on the bed, before my shaky hands tuck the blanket up, as if I can somehow pretend I’m tucking him in instead of being unable to look at what I did. As I do, my legs crumple from under me, and I fall heavily beside the bed.

I killed him.

I killed my mate.

And knowing that only kills me even more. Chapter Fifty-Three

Valen

We’re all the way on the other side of the mountain from where we’re meeting with my father. We’re still about an hour away because the storm is making visibility a real bitch.

Dion and a few other men are traveling in the cars behind us as we try to get to my father. When the mind-link opens up, Marcus comes through. Stupidly, I open it, allowing Tatum in on the link, not expecting the news we get.

'How far away are you?' Marcus asks.

'About an hour away still, this storm is fucking terrible,' I tell him. My windscreen wipers are going a hundred miles an hour, and the road is barely visible, even to my enhanced eyesight. We're going to have a hell of a time finding anything out there if it doesn't blow over soon.

'Your father and John have headed in,' Marcus tells us.

'They were supposed to wait for us,' I growl, annoyed they would be so reckless and enter forsaken territory without backup. My father, at least, should know better. I know John isn't in the right headspace at the moment because of Claire, but even he should know better than to be this foolish.

'Yeah, well, your father found Carter's car and apparently some dried blood not far from it and decided he was sick of waiting,' Marcus says. 'That was the last contact I had with him via the mind-link. I can feel them through the tether, but it's as if they're both ignoring me now.'

"Pull over," Tatum snarls. I glance at him out of the corner of my eyes, ignoring him.

'Okay, have they got their phones?' I ask Marcus.

'Yep, but there's some sort of interference. After ten minutes, I lost them on the app,' Marcus says.

"Valen, pull over!" Tatum snarls, punching my dash when I continue to ignore him. We're still an hour away. What use would pulling over be right now?

"Settle down. We're nearly there," I tell Tatum, shoving him out of the mind-link, so I can focus on what Marcus is trying to say to me. I know Tatum is scared for Macey, but I would never have expected his next reaction when I don't do as he asks.

"Let me out! It's quicker to go over the damn mountain than around it. PULL THE CAR OVER, VALEN!" Tatum yells at me.



‘Send—’ My words are cut off when Tatum throws his door open beside me, and I jam both feet on the brake. The car locks up, and I grit my teeth, trying to hang onto the steering wheel as he tosses himself out of the car.

Horror washes over me at the speed I was going. I had barely slowed down much before he threw himself out. The screeching of the tires on the wet road is loud as I try not to slide out and into a ditch. My eyes go to the rear vision mirror to see those behind us slamming on their brakes while Tatum's body skids and rolls across the road. One of them has to swerve to miss him, and for a few heartbeats, I think he's a goner.

My heart races in my chest as the car comes to a stop and I toss my door open. Climbing out, I hear him groan as he gets to his hands and knees.

“Tatum!” I yell, running toward him. All I can smell is burned rubber from my tires.

My warriors pull over when he stands and staggers toward the opposite side of the road. Blood drenches him from where he all but skinned himself alive, as his clothes were torn from his body. He snarls, and my eyes widened in horror when I see he's about to try to shift.

If he manages it, it will either help him heal or kill him, I'm not sure, but his leg!

“Tatum!” I yell, about to Command him, but I suddenly hear his bones snapping and he screams. Each pop and crunch of bone is loud even over the raging storm, and my men start jumping out of their cars to try to stop him.

His skin is replaced with bloody fur, and his hands turn to claws as he tries to change, only to collapse to his knees. He forced the shift. It won't work properly.

I feel bile rise in my throat when he roars in furious anger as his body tries to refuse him, his bad leg not cooperating. His claws rake across the wet road as he drops his head and snarls.

His leg is dragging; it's the oddest, most gruesome thing I've ever seen in my life. He's going to rip off his own leg if he doesn't stop! Every part of him shifts slowly, except for his leg.

Moments pass, which feels like hours, before I see his knee bend the wrong way. His shin pops and fur runs along his busted leg. The scream of agony that tears from him makes me want to throw up when his femur finally snaps and his leg twists and shifts with him just as Dion and I reach him.

We reach him at the same time and I start to tackle him, but instead, I hit the cold, wet ground with a thud when he takes off running for the forest surrounding the mountain. Dion grabs my arm, yanking me up, and I curse, looking at the forest to see Tatum disappear into the long grass and trees.

“Shit!”

“What do you wanna do, Alpha?” Dion asks.

“Get back in your cars. I won't risk anyone else,” I tell him. I hate it, but Tatum is on his own out there. This place is full of forsaken, and I have to look out for my men. Marcus said the other side had been scoped out pretty well and they hadn't seen any forsaken. On this side, however, we have no idea what's out there.

We race back to our cars, and I shake my head, cursing myself for being so stupid and allowing him into the mind-link. Yet, I never expected him to jump from a moving car!

Chapter Fifty-Four  
Macey

I stare at Carter's body for Goddess knows how long before I come back to my senses. I glance around the room, and it suddenly looks a lot different. It was depressing before, but now it's as cold and dead as I feel inside.

My nose still hasn't stopped bleeding, and vertigo washes over me as I stand up. I stagger, moving toward the bag Carter had brought back with him. Undoing the zip, I rummage through it, looking for the key to the padlock before remembering it's around his neck, and I glance at his body, tucked in bed as if he were sleeping.

Hesitantly, I move toward him and pull the blanket back. My hand shakes as I reach forward, grab the chain around his neck, and yank it. The gold links snap, and I quickly shove the blanket back up to cover him. Tears spill over, and I blink and wipe my eyes, trying to clear them before my vision turns red. I rub at them furiously, only to vaguely manage to see my hands come back bloody, making me

gape at them. I knew it would be harmful to kill a mate, yet I didn't consider myself dying beside him.

I don't want to die here! I want to see my little girl one last time—to at least tell her I love her, to see her face one more time. However, looking at my hands, I don't want her to remember me this way.

Something feels like it's decaying me from the inside out; as if my soul is rotting as quickly as my body. I feel sickly, and I know this is the consequence of me killing my mate.

I choke back a sob and undo the chain around my ankle as a crack of thunder makes the world seem like it's ending. The cabin rattles and the floor shakes with its violent tremor. It's pouring with rain now, and I know I'll be walking blindly out there, especially since I'm not sure I can shift.

But I have to try.

I may not be able to go home and see Taylor, but I need to get somewhere my body can be found. I don't want her to grow up not knowing if I abandoned her or if I'm dead. No, I will at least give her a body to bury.

Glancing at Carter, so much anger suddenly boils within me.

"I HATE YOU!" I scream at him before collapsing to the floor.

I punch the ground, my fist slamming into the shitty wood as I scream my anguish, frustration, and pain. My knuckles bleed as they split, and I clutch my hair, ripping at it. I want to hurt something, anything—myself—for feeling so weak.

I hate him. Hate him. The man took everything from me. Everything and everyone he touched was destroyed. He destroyed Zoe. He destroyed me.

But more than anything else, I hate him for destroying my baby, because she will have to grow up without the one person who loves her most.

I know Everly and Zoe will look after her, and I know they won't stop looking until they find what's left of me. I won't be able to raise her—they will for me.

But no one could ever love her the way I do.

I choke on a sob, cursing at how fucked up this is. How cruel life is that I not only lost a mate but my daughter too.

That saying, 'you don't know what you have until you lose it,' seems to laugh at me, because I never pictured finding my mate and losing him. Never pictured having my daughter and not being able to raise her. Never thought I would die without watching her become the woman she is destined to be. I would have been content to be mateless as long as I served my purpose—to see her through to adulthood when she didn't need me anymore.

That was my life's purpose, to raise my baby, and now the only part of that purpose I have left is to get to a road so my body can be found, so she has something to bury. I can't die peacefully knowing she'll always wonder if I left her, abandoned her.

When I'm done destroying myself, I look at the handfuls of hair and my bloody fists. Numbness spreads over me, cold and uncaring, as I inhale a shaky breath. The air thickens with the storm as it pelts the tin roof.

All my fight is gone. It's empty. And I'm as dead inside as the bond I shared with him.

Deep down, I know I have to move, I need to get up.

Dragging myself to my feet, I stare at the door, swallowing down my sadness as I take a step toward it just as it bursts open, making me jump.

I stare at the darkness outside before a low, deep growl vibrates throughout the cabin as an enormous wolf I recognize, not only by scent but by his fur, to be John. His paws make the floorboards creak as he steps inside.

My legs give out from under me, realizing I won't have to die alone. More footsteps on the stairs outside reach my ears when John spots me.

"He's dead," I whisper. His body relaxes, and Kalen steps in behind him, pushing the door open more as John shifts back. I turn my gaze away, knowing he's naked. John moves toward the bed and I hear the blanket get yanked back.

"That he is," John states. I look at Kalen, who nods at John's words.

"Good. Now, what are you doing on the floor?" Kalen asks, and I blink at him.

“Dying!” I laugh, rolling my eyes at him. Great, now I’m numb—I can joke about my own death.

“Nonsense, that's what death looks like,” Kalen says as he points to Carter.

“Is that an antler?” John asks curiously, holding up the bloody piece of bone. Kalen shakes his head at John before turning his attention back to me.

“Well, time to clean this mess up,” he says, moving toward me, and I snort. He crouches in front of me.

“I killed my mate,” I tell him.

“So did I,” Kalen whispers, but I shake my head.

“Maybe not the same way, but I killed my Val. You know it, and I know it. What you did was brave. What I did was cowardly,” Kalen tells me, gripping my face in his hands. “Now get up. You have a little girl to get home to, and I got grandbabies to meet.”

“I can't go back like this. I won't force Taylor to watch me die. She will not remember me this way,” I tell him.

“No. Taylor won't have to remember you, Macey because you are not dying. Now get up!” John says, and I look over at him to see he’s stolen a pair of Carter's shorts from the bag and slipped them on.

“What about him? Even if I miraculously survive, I killed someone in cold blood. He was no threat to me,” I tell them.

“Sadly, Carter won't be missed,” Kalen says, and to me, that truly is sad, because despite everything, I know he was just broken and twisted. He wasn’t a complete monster—I saw parts of him that proved that.

“Yeah, but the courts and council won't see it that way,” I tell them before coughing.

“If that's the case, you never killed him. Just like you didn't kill Preston—I did,” Kalen states, and I look at him before I heave.

Blood splatters the floor and covers Kalen's already drenched shirt. John steps forward as I choke on my blood. When I finally stop coughing, my throat feels

extremely itchy. I know it's pointless to worry, because I'll be dead long before I get home.

"Suppose it doesn't matter," I tell them, holding up my hand, drenched in my blood. Kalen looks at John, who nods. Kalen's eyes turn glassy and he clears his throat before shaking his head and John stalks toward me almost angrily as he hauls me to my feet.

"You are not dying on us! So choose. Me or Kalen? Choose. Because I am not going home without you!" John growls.

I look between them as Kalen grabs a makeshift chair and John shoves me down in it.

"You will choose, Macey. Neither one of us wants the job of telling your daughter their mother is dead when we could have saved you," Kalen says.

I swallow, glancing between them and saying nothing. If I choose one, either way, I would be Valen's new stepmother or Everly's. That thought disgusts me. I love these two old fossils, but not in that sense, and after feeling the bond with Carter, I know what marking one of them would make me feel towards them. It was inevitable and so gross!

Yet, I also have no choice. This is my chance to go home to my baby.

"Fine, rock, paper, scissors?" Kalen says, turning to John.

"You won't choose, we'll choose for you," John adds.

I look at my dead mate on the bed, his body cold, and the two men who are old enough to be my damn father. I know Valen or Everly would forgive me for marking one of their dads, yet it feels wrong. The one person I want as a mate, I can't have, and my true mate is dead because I killed him.

Panic courses through me as I watch them repeatedly tie, both of them becoming frustrated as they shake their fists and both go scissors.

"This is ridiculous," I mutter at the stupid situation I'm stuck in. Of course, not only did the Moon Goddess give me a shitty mate, she had to make two old guys be the ones to find me and is now forcing me to choose between them to save my life.

Kalen curses when they both choose paper this time.

“You're just going to have to choose, Macey. John or me? Which one is marking you?” Kalen says as they look at me expectantly. My lips part as I glance between them.

“So, who's it going to be?” John asks.

“Me!” comes a voice I never thought I would hear again. Kalen and John turn toward the door where the voice came from and so do I, to see Tatum walk up to the door. He's drenched and naked, and I have no idea how he got here, but there he is and I'm in disbelief.

“And you better say yes because neither of their dusty old lips are touching my mate!” Tatum says, stepping into the cabin.

Emotion chokes me and makes me speechless, and my body is moving toward him long before my brain comprehends it. I crash into him and my arms wrap around his neck as my legs circle his waist. Tatum stumbles back, clinging to me, his fingers tangling in my hair as he grips me like I'm his life jacket.

“I'm here now. I'm so sorry,” Tatum whispers, kissing my face before tugging my head back, but I can't even form words, stunned he's here.

“I choose you, Macey. You are far more than I deserve, but I won't let them mark you,” Tatum whispers, his eyes going to my neck and Carter's mark on it. He glances at the bed where Carter's body lies, then swallows and turns back to face me.

Tatum sweeps my hair over my shoulder that's caked in blood and Goddess knows what else before he snarls and sinks his teeth into my neck. Pain ripples through me as his teeth slice through my flesh, tearing Carter's mark to pieces and forcing Tatum's in its place.

The tingles start out slow as I feel the bond start sewing its way through me, ridding me of Carter's essence and replacing it with his. It burns like acid, but the pain is excruciating bliss as he sinks deeper before his canines hit bone. I feel his saliva move through my veins, feel his soul binding itself to mine and forcing mine to stay.

A sob escapes me and tears slip down my face as I turn my face into his neck. His bond strengthens me, allowing my canines to extend. Not an ounce of hesitation runs through me as I sink them into his neck, and fireworks explode in my head. Tingles make my skin vibrate as our souls entwine and bleed into each other when the bond snaps into place.

Tatum gasps, pulling his teeth from my neck. Gently, he runs his tongue along his mark, sealing it just as I pull my teeth from his. He presses his forehead against mine.

“Let's go home,” he whispers, and I nod. Immense relief slivers through every atom in my body.

I can go home.

And I can go home to Taylor with the man I love as my mate. Chapter Fifty-Five

Everly

Hours Later

All night I panicked. I felt useless, sick with worry and guilt that I was just sitting here waiting for them to return. I knew I would have just gotten in the way or become a constant worry for Valen and sometimes, you need to sit back and allow someone else to take over.

But for me, that's easier said than done. However, Valen had proven to me that he could be relied on. Even when we didn't see eye to eye, he still showed up and still kept his promises.

And this time was no different. Valen said he would bring Macey home, and he did. Earlier in the night, not long after Valen left, Zoe couldn't bear being home alone and Ava felt unsafe at home with just Zoe; or maybe it was her guilt about what happened to Zoe that she struggled to be alone with her, I don't know; I was just relieved to have them here.

So my room in the maternity ward had turned into a drop-in center. We sought comfort from each other's presence. Zoe had some warriors bring in blow-up mattresses for the kids to sleep on and the nurses had also found two extra beds and brought them in.



Macey had caused quite a fuss when she got here. She refused to be checked over until she saw Taylor.

Valen, Tatum, and Marcus almost immediately went off to deal with pack dramas, council members, and officials, and Ava had gone home with Dad and Kalen. After they all left, I felt wired and overly emotional.

Maybe it's because of everything that's gone on recently, or perhaps it's my fluctuating hormones from having the girls, but as I look around the room, I'm brought back to the day I met these two women—two women who became my sisters.

Macey lies beside me in the hospital bed, an IV in her hand, while she holds one of my girls with Taylor tucked against her side, asleep. Zoe sits by my feet, holding my other daughter, while I breastfeed the third one in my arms.

Zoe, feeling my gaze on her, looks over at me, placing my daughter over her shoulder to burp her.

"Don't you start. You cry, we all freaking cry," she chuckles with a snuffle. Shaking her head, she glances at Casey and Valarian asleep on the blow-up mattress in the room's corner.

She turns back to me and smiles sadly, then stares off at Macey, who's watching us. Zoe's guilt is clear on her face; she feels terrible Macey killed her mate for her—for all of us.

"Man, this is like a dose of *déjà vu*," Macey mutters, and it's clear she's thinking the same thing as me.

"Only thing missing is our rumbling bellies and the rude nurses and midwives," Zoe chuckles darkly.

"And the sneers and mutters, let's not forget those," Macey says, and I swallow.

"This hospital is a little nicer, too," I snicker, peering down at my daughter attached to my breast.

"It feels like a lifetime ago," Zoe mutters, and I nod, looking around at our kids, at my sisters.

“That's because none of us are those girls anymore,” I tell them, and it's true. All of us came from nothing and built ourselves up in our own images. We raised our children together, and we did it through blood, sweat, and tears. We did it despite not believing we could at the start, until we showed ourselves what we were capable of—showed ourselves we didn't need anyone because we had each other.

“We aren't alone this time. It's not the same. We aren't scared little rogue women with no names, no identities, and no chance. It's different because we are. It's different because we know our worth; back then, we didn't,” I tell them.

Macey nods, wiping a stray tear that escapes, and Zoe, I see, bites her lip to stop it from trembling.

“I know, it's just, I hate maternity wards,” Macey says, and I understand that fear; understand what it's like seeing families gushing excitedly while we're tucked away, not to be seen; understood the trauma that's left behind from that experience. I know the feeling of walking out the hospital doors with a newborn in your arms and not knowing what you're doing or whom to turn to; not knowing how to provide for the baby in your arms when you can't provide for yourself.

“We'll get through this,” Zoe says, pursing her lips, a faraway look in her eyes, and I brush her lower back with my feet through the blanket, bringing her back from where her mind took her.

We all know that feeling of being so low we thought we would drown in our despair and fear—it's what brought us together. It's also what drove us to prove everyone wrong. We would be heard, seen, and prove to them and ourselves that we didn't need anyone. And we did just that. So I know Zoe is right—this is just another obstacle we'll get through.

Because despite everything going wrong and finding ourselves back where we started, in a sense, it's not the same. We're far from that place, facing new challenges, but now we have the knowledge and drive backing us to overcome them. And most of all, we have each other and the village we built—the village we watched get destroyed and then rebuilt again.

Brick by bloody brick, we will rebuild the fractured parts of us. We won't bleed anymore. We'll patch those walls, repaint, readjust, adapt, and rebuild ourselves.

We will morph into the next phase of life because life will continue, and we will continue showing it we aren't to be beaten.

We will show life that all our flaws and scars, the peeling paint and cracked crumbling pieces, don't mean we're broken or condemned. No, those broken pieces, once put together again, restore and strengthen us, and just add character. They show the rough edges, but still, it comes together beautifully, just like I know we will again. Only this time, we have our mates behind us to help.

For so long, we relied only on each other and the routines we had built. We lived and breathed each other, leaned on each other or ourselves so much that it feels good to let go of some of that weight on our shoulders and breathe without restraint. And by the looks on the girl's faces as our mates walk in, they feel the same.

Gone is the fear of loneliness, burden, and responsibility, because we now have others willing to share it. And not out of obligation or expectation, but because they want to.

"Did you sort everything out?" I ask Valen as he comes over to me. He leans down, kissing my forehead and brushing baby's cheek. Marcus is trying to steal the baby from Zoe's arms, while Tatum watches Macey hold Baby C, resting his head on her shoulder as he sits on her other side.

"Yes," Valen whispers.

"What about Carter?" Macey whispers, her glistening eyes flicking to Zoe and then Tatum. He pecks her cheek.

"I'll help you organize the funeral," Zoe says, and Macey chokes.

"I'm sorry. I know—"

"He was your mate," Zoe says simply, glancing at Tatum.

"And as much as I wish I was your fated mate, I understand you need to put this behind you," Tatum whispers to her.

"I doubt anyone will go, but it didn't feel right leaving him there to rot," Macey states, looking down at my daughter.

"You don't have to explain yourself, Macey. You know this," Zoe tells her.

"I know it's just—"

"It's because you're not a monster like he was. And I don't expect you to pretend not to care, Macey, just because of what happened. We will be standing right beside you," Zoe tells her with finality in her voice.

"That leads to another question I have for you, Zoe?" Valen says beside me. Marcus growls, the sound threatening, and Valen presses his lips in a line.

Zoe looks at Valen questioningly before sighing loudly.

"Let's hear it, then," she states. I see her walls go up as if she's about to take a blow. I had hoped Valen would hold off, but I supposed it needs to be taken care of.

"Amber handed over the location her new mate was hiding out at. Derrick has him in the cells. He's the last one; we found out Carter killed the other. But—"

"Amber and he marked each other when she left Micah," Zoe finishes for him, and Valen nods his head.

"We want to know what you want to do? The council supports any decision you make. Well, what's left of the council," Valen tells her, and she sucks in a breath.

"Amber?"

"She wasn't in on the plans, but she was made rogue. And obviously, she was the motivator for her father."

Zoe nods her head at his words.

"I let you kill him, and Amber dies." She sighs.

"It's your decision," Valen tells her, but what Marcus wants her to say is clear.

"There's been enough death. Please ensure he isn't jailed in the city," Zoe answers.

"Zoe?" Marcus says.

"No, it's my decision, and I won't kill her because of what he did. She can live with it just like he will have to live with his mistake, the same way I have to live with the memory of it," she says.

Marcus nods to Valen, his free arm slipping around her waist as he pulls her to his side.

“What about Nixon's pack?” I ask.

“It will be dismantled. Those pack members still alive can decide where they go, or remain and live as a rogue,” Valen states, and I nod.

“We still have no idea of Nixon's whereabouts. His mate is being questioned, but the werewolf council is trying to find something to charge her with. Besides her trying to get us arrested, we don't really have any charges against her,” Valen tells us.

“And if they can't charge her with anything?”

“She'll be made rogue and watched until she slips up,” Valen states.

Well, it's better than nothing. I don't like the idea of her being in the city, but she can only be charged with what we can prove.

Valen holds his hands out, wanting to take baby A, and I hand her over to him, my arms suddenly feeling empty.

“She'll need burping,” I tell him, and he nods, placing her over his shoulder while I tuck my boob away.

“Thought of any names yet?” Macey asks.

“Yeah, I wanted to ask about that actually,” Valen states. I'm glad he has names because I have nothing.

“So let's hear them,” Macey says.

“I'm still stuck on one. And if it's okay with you, I was wondering if I could pick the names?”

“You want to name all three?” I ask him worriedly. What if he names them something strange, or all their names start with V?

“I promise I won't fill out the paperwork until you agree,” he states. I chew my lip but sigh.

“I swear if you name them after a car or something strange that they won't be able to pronounce, I will kick your ass. And don't name any Everly!” I tell him.

“Promise. But you have to wait until tomorrow. Dion is engraving their bracelets.”

“Wait, you already went ahead?” I chuckle.

“I knew you would say yes. He's just waiting for the final name,” he shrugs.

“What if I'd said no?”

“You could have named the last one, but we would need to make it match my chosen middle name. That's what I'm having trouble with—a name to go with the middle name,” Valen tells me, and I narrow my eyes at him accusingly.

“You'll like the names, I promise,” he says, smiling slyly. Chapter Fifty-Six

Valen

We're finally going home, and I'm beside myself with panic. I think this is the slowest I've ever driven in my life. Cars are honking their horns behind me and I glare at the driver in my mirror. Does he not see the 'baby on board' sticker?

“Valen 45 miles per hour is already too slow for this strip. You're doing 20 under,” Everly hisses at me as cars overtake me.

“We have fragile cargo in the car. What if their little heads wobble?” Just saying that has me reducing my speed more. It isn't worth the risk!

“We're more likely to get hit with you going this slow,” Everly scolds, and I sigh.

“I'm serious, Valen. Speed up or let me drive. They're more durable than you think.”

“They're newborns!” I catch Everly rolling her eyes.

“I get this is your first newborn and you want to wrap them in cotton wool, but seriously, they're durable, geez. Valarian fell off the bed once, screamed his damn head off, but he's perfectly fine,”

“You dropped him off the bed?” I ask, horrified.

“No! Of course not! He rolled off. Damn near had a heart attack.” She laughs.

“Why are you laughing?” I ask, outraged. She’s not holding them if she’s going to drop them.

“Nothing. Just something your mother said when she raced to our room because I was screaming like a banshee thinking I killed him.”

“What did she say?” I asked, curious.

“I told her what happened, and her reply was ‘He’s screaming, he’s fine. It’s when they don’t make noise that you worry’.”

I raise an eyebrow at her. “How old was he?”

“Six months old. Don’t even get me started on how many times I smacked the kid’s head on the door frame lifting him into his car seat. He turned out perfectly fine,” she states, while all I can think is how the heck my son is still alive? He should have brain damage with all these bumps to the head.

“Perfectly fine? The kid has OCD. See what dropping him did?”

Everly sighs and shakes her head. “I wonder where he gets that from. I bet the entire house is baby proofed,” she taunts.

“OCD is not genetic,” I tell her.

“I would debate otherwise,” she retorts.

“And I don’t have OCD,” I argue.

“So you didn’t babyproof the entire place?” she scoffs, and I swallow.

“Of course not!” I tell her, opening the mind-link. She shakes her head and peers out the window.

‘What’s up?’ Marcus asks. He’s watching Valarian for me since I couldn’t fit everyone in the car.

‘All the baby proofing stuff—hide it. Undo it. I need to prove to Everly I don’t have OCD. She thinks I’m OCD,’ I scoff.

‘Ah, but you do have OCD,’ Marcus replies and I bite back the urge to growl at him.

‘No, I don’t! Just do as I ask, damn it. I’m five minutes out.’

'On it,' Marcus says, and I cut the link.

"So, are you going to tell me the names you picked?" Everly asks, leaning over to check the babies, then hisses, clutching her stomach as she turns back to face the front.

"You'll find out tomorrow when I pick up the bracelets," I tell her. "And sit still before you hurt yourself."

"I'm fine," she says as I pull into the parking garage. "That was the slowest damn drive of my life. Next time, I'm driving!" she states, shoving the door open.

Now, to master these carseat carriers. They were a real bitch to get in. I had to get my father to show me, who was just as useless, and he then enlisted John to help, but he was no help either. So we all gave up and let Zoe and Macey handle it.

Everly plucks the first carrier out, then the middle one, while I'm still struggling to undo the one I'm in charge of.

"Squeeze the handle, the red button on the side, and lift!"

"I am squeezing and pressing. It's faulty," I tell her, becoming flustered. Everly clicks her tongue and walks around to my side, one carrier in each hand. She sets them down and pushes me out of the way with her hip. I glare at her when it takes her two seconds to do it. Now she's just showing off!

"You'll get the hang of it," she says, walking toward the elevator while I grab the baby bags. Man, these tiny creatures own some shit. I feel like a mule carting it all up. When the elevator doors open, Marcus opens the mind-link as I step inside.

'How do I get the toilet things off? I can't even open the lid,' Marcus tells me.

'What? How am I supposed to know? I didn't install them. Maintenance did just before you got there.'

'Not even Valarian can open it. I had to piss off your balcony earlier because of this contraption,' he growls. 'Valarian is pulling down the gates. I don't get it. Why do you have gates up when they can't even lift their own heads, let alone walk?'

Everly presses the button impatiently, crossing her legs.

"Are you okay?" I ask her.



“Yeah, I need to pee,” she says, and I blink.

‘Get the damn toilet thing off! Break it for all I care!’ I scream at Marcus through the link.

‘I’m trying! What do you think I’m doing?’ Marcus snarls as the door opens up.

Everly waddles like a duck to the door and shoves the key in the lock. She twists frantically and growls before the door opens and she rushes inside. I trail behind her to see her set the babies down next to the couch before darting off up the hall. Then I hear a crash.

“Valen!” she groans. I set baby C down and rush up the hall to find she’s tripped over a safety gate. She hauls herself up to run to the bathroom. Marcus rushes out just before she enters, slamming the door behind her. I look at Marcus, who shakes his head. The next minute, I hear her scream.

“Valen!” she snarls as she tries to undo the toilet trap. I cringe and wait for the door to open.

“Not OCD, huh?” she mutters when she steps out.

I smile awkwardly as she folds her arms across her chest, her overfull boobs giving me a delicious sight; those puppies are huge, and I can't wait to touch them.

“Eyes are up here!” Everly says, while I lick my lips, imagining them jiggling above me as she rides my cock.

“And now you get to clean the bathtub because I just had to pee in it,” she growls, pushing past me.

Damn it!

\* \* \*

Everly

Watching Valen is rather amusing. He treats those girls like they’re made of glass.

“Should she be crying like that?” he asks, watching baby C scream her head off. She’s struggling to latch on this side so I switch boobs and Valen passes me Baby A. I’m getting better at tandem feeding.

“She is fine,” I tell him, though I’m getting sick of calling them the baby alphabet. I want to know the names he chose, but he’s remaining tight-lipped. Baby B is asleep. Or was until a few minutes into the feeding.

“Can you grab her?” I ask him, although he’s already walking to her bassinet. He leans over, cooing and pulling faces at her and I watch him lift her. He subtly sniffs the air before holding her at arm's length, his fingers behind her little head as she stretches and farts.

“You need to change her,” Valen demands, and I raise an eyebrow at him.

“Please!” he offers.

“No, you need to change her. I’m feeding these two,” I tell him with a smirk. I know he can change a diaper. I’ve seen him change wet ones; now he gets to change a shitty one.

Valen purses his lips, determined. I try not to smile and laugh as he sets her down on the end of the bed, gathering what he needs just as Valarian walks in.

“Ew, what's that smell?”

“That would be dynamite-butt,” Valen says, pointing to her squirming on the bed. He takes her onesie off, undoes the diaper, and heaves instantly. “Nope!” he says.

“Yep! You have to get used to it,” I tell him. He heaves again, which makes Valarian heave while I watch, amused. I’m not helping. He needs to get used to it. I am not being in charge of diaper duty for all three babies!

“I'll swap ya?” he pleads, giving me puppy dog eyes.

“Oh, you figured out how to breastfeed?” I ask and he mutters something, tugging his shirt over half his face.

“Why is it black like tar?” he chokes out. He cleans and wipes, heaving the entire time, his face turning red. When he’s finally done, he dresses her.

“Run this to the garbage for me,” he tells Valarian, dumping the diaper in his little hand. Valarian stares at it, horrified and I watch as he pales just as Valen picks up the baby.

“Valarian?” I ask a little too late because he throws up all over Valen's pants. I watch Valen's eyes widen, and he blinks a few times before quickly glancing down at his pant leg.

“Sorry, Dad,” Valarian says, gripping his father's shirt to wipe his mouth on. I press my lips in a line, trying to stifle my laugh as Valen sets the baby down before he gags, runs for the toilet, and throws up himself. I sigh.

Yep, this will be interesting, I think to myself. Chapter Fifty-Seven

Valen

“You need to take the batteries out. Why doesn't she stop crying?” I whine, hearing baby C scream for the hundredth time since we got her home. Either that one's faulty, or she needs to be placed back on demo mode, I think as I roll over with my sandpaper eyes to retrieve her from her bassinet.

“Babies cry,” is all Everly offers as she shuffles up the bed and yawns. I peer at the clock. She wasn't even asleep for forty-five minutes this time. It's 2:20 a.m.!

“You need to get that one checked. Something's wrong with her,” I tell Everly as I hand her over. Everly flops out a boob while the baby opens her mouth like a fish, enjoying my fun bags. And Everly won't let me touch them either! I eye the baby with jealousy.

My balls are so blue they ache, and I know I'm never getting laid again at this rate, and here Everly is, flopping those big, juicy titties out in front of me every two seconds. Does she not know how full my balls are? They need emptying. Everly's eyes go to me for a second. I wonder if she knows what I'm thinking.

I lie back down and just shut my eyes when another starts screaming. Oh, how I took sleep for granted! It's our first night at home, and I'm already exhausted. No way I can survive this for... Wait, how many years do babies cry for?

I groan, and Everly snickers, and I swear if she says one more time, ‘you'll get the hang of it’, I will... I will... I will do absolutely nothing because I can't!

“Go to sleep, please! I need sleep,” I whine, pulling the pillow over my head. Everly nudges me with her knee and I sigh, rolling back out of bed to retrieve baby A this time.

I hand her over, and Everly tries to get her to latch. I watch my fun bags deflate as the baby gulps down the goodness.

“You may need to make a bottle. My supply isn't very good,” Everly tells me, and I nod while walking toward the door.

“Can you make me a cup of tea too, please?”

I yawn, and plod to the kitchen. My eyes are so blurry I have to squint at the formula can, checking the scoops and ounces before fixing a bottle. Just as I'm about to walk out of the kitchen, Baby B wakes with a loud scream. Then I remember I still haven't made the tea.

Torn, I look between the kettle and the hallway when Everly calls out. “She's fine. It won't hurt her to cry for a minute or so.”

I'm halfway through making the tea when the crying stops. A sigh of relief leaves me. This is my life now; it will be filled with bottles and diapers, and the smell of dirty diapers in the air is getting on my nerves. It's torture. Blissful torture, but still, torture.

By the time I get back into the room, Baby B has fallen back asleep in the bassinet, Baby A and C have fallen asleep in her arms, and Everly has her head back, resting on the headboard, also asleep.

“Looks like I made myself tea,” I whisper, walking into the room. I place the mug down, propping more pillows under her arms so they don't slip out. Everly has become a baby pacifier, and I'm not waking any of them.

Lying down, I close my eyes, but paranoia has me opening them every two seconds and flicking the lamp on, worried one will slip out of her arms. Giving up, I drink the tea and watch them sleep, sticking my finger under Baby B's nose every two seconds to check she's still breathing.

Again I try to sleep, yet that nagging voice in my head has me flicking the lamp on and I decide to try to detach them from her. I unlatch one, only for Everly's eyes to fly open.

“Did you make my tea?” she asks, glancing around before spotting the empty mug.

\* \* \*

Midday

Marcus is on his way to come to get me. I finally figured out the name to go with the middle name I chose. I just hope Everly likes the names I picked. When he texts to tell me he's here, I climb off the couch, passing Baby C to Everly and kissing her and the baby's head.

"Everyone should be here soon for the baby's name reveal. I'm hoping to get back before they get here," I tell her, and she nods.

Everything seems to come so naturally to Everly, and despite the chaos our lives have been of late, she holds it together well.

We have so much to do and to get ready. The hotel is opening up soon. Everly has the council meeting next week, and she's officially changing the laws on the rogues. Court cases and investigations are still ongoing, and I spent half the morning on the phone or checking emails. Until Nixon is caught, I don't want to be away unless necessary, so John came over early this morning to sit with her.

Everly and I discussed briefly this morning the need for a bigger place, so Dad is getting the packhouse ready. Everly wants an extra room so our fathers and Ava can remain with us to help with the kids, and I'm not saying no to any help. One night has taught me this is going to be exhausting.

I press the elevator button, and lean against the wall as soon as the doors shut, closing my eyes. I'm nodding off when the doors open up to the underground garage. Marcus is leaning against the hood, waiting for me. He wasn't happy about not being able to kill the other one responsible for hurting Zoe, yet he understands it's her choice. I don't know if I would have made the same decision as her, though; I would have wanted revenge.

But it shows what sort of person she is. Despite hurting herself, she didn't want to hurt another or kill Amber, though death, I believe, is too kind even for that girl.

"You look like shit," Marcus comments as I open the car door and slide into the passenger seat. He moves to the driver's side and hops in.

“Thanks for taking me. I didn't trust myself to drive.” I yawn while covering my mouth. He nods, starting the car and driving toward Dion's jeweler's.

“Derrick had Clarke removed from the city, and the other scumbag, Deacon, is also under investigation for corruption within the council,” Marcus tells me.

“Good. I spoke with Alpha Daxon earlier. He doesn't want Nixon's land, so we decided to leave it as neutral territory,” I told him.

“More housing for the rogues, then,” Marcus says while navigating a roundabout.

“How is Zoe?” I ask him.

“She says she's okay,” Marcus says with a sigh.

“Nightmares?” I ask.

“No, guilt. She feels bad for Macey having to kill Carter. Even though Macey told her it wasn't just because of her, I think Zoe knows it was,” Marcus tells me.

“Macey loves Tatum, and they're good together,” I tell him, but yeah, I could not imagine being in her shoes and killing my mate; that would be torture.

“Think it's just knowing Macey did it for her. Anyway, hopefully today will take her mind off it. I have to pick them up after I drop you back, home” Marcus tells me.

We pull up along the sidewalk and climb out. I'm excited to see the bracelets engraved though I'm nervous about the names. Marcus knows two of the names and even tried to help me pick a name suited to the middle name I was stumped on. It's not usually a middle name, and nothing seemed to go with it until I finally found something perfect.

The bell rings as we step inside, and Dion looks up.

“Just waiting on that last name. The other two are done,” he tells me, getting to his feet and pushing his glasses up his nose.

“Summer,” I tell him, and he nods, walking out the back to do the last engraving.

“Summer?” Marcus asks.

“Everly's mother's maiden name. It's also the name she used to go by before I found her. It seemed to go with the other,” I tell him, and Marcus smiles.

“I can't wait to see her face when she hears them,” Marcus chokes up. He knows the meaning behind each name. Each one has a link to someone special to us, inspired by the strongest women I have ever met or wish I could meet, names from women I find inspiring. Each holds a special meaning not only I will hold dear, but Everly, too.

Dion takes about twenty minutes before he returns, using the polishing cloth on the last one. He sets them in little boxes and bags them for me after I check them. Satisfied, we leave and head back home, yet the trip is taking way too damn long. I'm excited to show Everly, but these damn roundabouts!

“Seriously, why do they have so many roundabouts along this straight? Someone needs to complain to the council,” I growl.

Marcus raises an eyebrow at me. “You designed this road to stop the street racers and hooligans. You are the damn council; complain to yourself,” Marcus laughs, and I roll my eyes.

\* \* \*

Everly

I anxiously wait for Valen to return while going over bridal magazines with Ava. Dad is making me coffee while I sit and ponder what names he chose. Valarian's on the floor, watching his sisters squirm in their swings. Every noise they make has him jumping to give them their pacifiers or soothing them. All morning he's been passing diapers and following me around, wanting to help, wanting to cuddle, and wanting to touch them. They're his prized possessions—until the diaper changes. Then, he's nowhere to be seen.

Dad has just set my coffee down on the coffee table when the door opens and Valen walks in. I eagerly look over the back of the couch toward the entry.

“Evie,” Valen says, leaning over the couch. He pecks my lips, looking down at the magazine sitting open in my lap.

“Finally going to start planning?” he asks, and I nod.

“Show me,” I tell him, reaching for the bag in his hands. He shakes his head.

“Grab the girls and bring them into the room first, then you can see,” he tells me, and I pout before hauling my ass off the couch and over to the baby swings. I grab baby A, and Ava passes me Baby B while Valen grabs Baby C.

I’m just glad to be rid of the baby alphabet and can't care less what he names them at this point, as long as they have names. Real names.

I follow Valen into the room, and he places the baby on the bed. I place the other two beside her, peering over his shoulder as he rummages through the jewelry bag.

“Away. You will see in a minute,” he says, shooing me.

I growl at him and sit near the head of the bed, watching as he clasps each one in place. When he’s done, he glances at me nervously.

“Come on, they can't be that bad. Now let me look,” I whine at him. Valen moves aside and motions to them. I hop up, going over to examine the tiny gold bracelets on their wrists. My lip quivers as I pick up the first one's little wrist. I blink back tears, moving to the next. And the last one damn near breaks me.

“You like them?” Valen asks nervously, and I gaze up at him.

“Love them,” I whisper, and he smiles, stepping closer and wrapping his arms around me. I squeeze him tight, resting my head against his chest. “Their names are perfect,” I tell him, looking up at him. He kisses my nose.

Hearing the door moments later, I smile as voices come echoing throughout the place. Macey, Tatum, and Taylor have arrived, along with Zoe, Marcus, Casey, and Kalen. Scooping the girls up, Valen takes two while I grab baby C.

“I think her name is fitting. She is definitely a troublemaker with all her crying,” Valen comments as he walks out to greet everyone. They all chat excitedly while Dad makes himself handy in the kitchen.

“Dad!” I call to him, and he looks over at me. “Come sit,” I tell him. He stops what he’s doing and goes to sit with Kalen on the ottoman.

“No, next to Macey,” I tell him. Valen moves across to where Zoey is sitting with Marcus and hands her one baby.



“Can I look?” she asks all excitedly, clapping her hands before taking her from Valen.

“You can look,” Valen confirms. Zoe does and falls quiet for a second, then nods, choking a little before looking up with tears in her eyes.

“Well, what does it say?” Macey asks impatiently while trying to peer over my father's shoulder.

“Summer Zoey Solace,” Zoey chokes as I hand the next baby to Kalen. He smiles as he looks at her bracelet.

“Now, I said I wouldn't name her after you, but I added a spin on it,” Valen whispers to me.

“Everlyn Valarie Solace,” Kalen states before leaning down and kissing the top of her little head.

Valen turns to my father before passing her over, while Dad shakes his head, tears streaming down his face. He already knows before even looking.

“Your mate sacrificed herself for her grandchildren, and none of them would exist if she didn't,” Valen tells him.

Macey peers down at the bracelet, softly brushing her thumb over the back of the tiny hand.

“Five remarkable women, and I couldn't think of any better way to honor them,” Valen tells them.

“Well?” Zoe asks, and Macey sniffles.

“Claire Macey Solace,” she stammers, and Tatum grips her shoulders.

“Our village,” I tell them.

“Our family,” Valen adds. Chapter Fifty-Eight

Everly

6 Weeks Later

The two of us have pretty much settled into a routine by this point. Everything seems to be going smoothly. We finally moved into the packhouse, and the extra

room is very welcome. Dad and Ava are currently living with us to help with the girls, though he and Kalen are quite busy during the day; they're now the heads of the council, and as a result, the laws against rogues have been removed completely.

Clarke, along with the others, pleaded guilty to their charges and are now rotting away in prison cells. We still have no idea where Nixon is, and though they're watching his wife, she almost never leaves the house; when she does, she never leaves her old pack territory.

Unfortunately, the hotel had a plumbing hiccup and still isn't open. Dad and Kalen are stuck helping Valen deal with that today while I'm at my dress fitting. Valen is meeting me afterward so we can go grocery shopping.

"Valarian, can you pass Evelyn her pacifier?" I ask him while the lady finishes pinning my dress. Zoe and Macey were supposed to come to the fitting with me and help me pick out my dress with Ava, but all of them are busy today. It was quite the mission to haul all the kids in the car by myself, so I brought Valarian along instead of sending him to school.

The three of them chose violet bridesmaid dresses, and I chose an off-white dress. I'm still dropping weight, and now my boobs have gone back to normal, the dress needs taking in even more. I have one more fitting after this one to retake my measurements.

The dress fitting feels like it takes forever, and I'm looking forward to getting home. I'm exhausted, and the girls are sick of sitting in the stroller, which barely fits in the back of my car. Slipping the dress off, I quickly get changed and decide to call Valen to find out how far away he is.

I kind of hoped he would volunteer to do the grocery shopping himself. Though I know he wants me to come with him so that I can go to the reserve and finally shift on the way home.

I still haven't. Time is always against me, or I'm far too tired, and knowing how it usually exhausts me, I'm not all that tempted to shift.

Valen answers the phone on the second ring, and I can tell he's in the car by the echo.

“Where are you?” I ask, coming back out of the dressing room. I thank the ladies that work here and kick off the brakes on the stroller.

“About fifteen minutes away,” Valen tells me.

“Okay, I’ll start getting the kids in the car,” I tell him, pushing the stroller out the door as Valarian holds it open for me.

“Yep, I’ll follow you home. Dad is meeting us there. He said he would watch the kids for us while we go grocery shopping and out for a run,” he tells me. I sigh but say nothing. We hardly spend any alone time together, and I know he’s craving that. I can tolerate being exhausted if it makes him happy.

“Okay, see you in a few minutes,” I tell him, stepping into the hot sun and squinting at the brightness.

“That you will. I love you.”

“Love you too,” I tell him before hanging up.

It’s scorching hot today, the sun high in the sky. Valarian and I make our way across the parking lot and I hit the fob, unlocking the doors as we approach. Valarian climbs into the back and sits on the center console so he can help do up the seatbelts. He’s my little helper and loves being able to assist in any way he can; he adores his sisters. And we worried he would be upset about not having a brother! But he seems to have all but forgotten that now.

I place Claire in the middle seat, and Valarian starts entertaining her while I get the next one out. We clip all three of them in and I ask him to play with them while I fold the stroller down. His car seat is in the front, which isn't ideal, but Valen is getting a van next week for me. We’re just waiting for it to arrive.

As I’m trying to collapse the stroller, movement near the bakery down from the bridal store catches my eye and I see Amber walking out looking terrible. It’s the first time I’ve seen her. She glances at me before dropping her head and rushing toward her car. I sigh, going back to my task.

After finally getting the stroller down, I pop the trunk and jam all the crap in it. I definitely need that bigger car; I push all my weight on the trunk just to close it. I can see Valarian shaking the rattle for the girls excitedly and I smile, watching him

for a second. He waves to me, and I wave back when a strange expression crosses his face. My brows furrow when he suddenly shouts.

“Mom, behind you!” he cries with the most blood-curdling scream, it sends instant chills through my whole body. Almost instantly, I feel someone grab my hair and hear the sound of my head smashing into the trunk before everything goes black.

The sun shining behind my eyelids confuses me and my head is pounding. I sit up, wondering why I’m on the ground. My keys that were clutched in my hands are now gone.

“Unlock the door, you little shit!” I hear a woman snarl. I blink when I hear my kids screaming and sit up with a groan.

“Stop that!” she yells as I hear my car doors unlocking and locking.

Clutching the trunk, I pull myself to my feet and my eyes widen when I see Nixon’s wife hit the fob. The doors unlock and she yanks the door open before Valarian can push the lock back down. The girls are crying and Valarian screams for me, petrified.

My heart races when I see her go to get in the driver's seat; all I can think is she’s trying to take my babies. I run at her, tackling her, and we both smash into the open driver's side door. I hear a snarl somewhere behind me but I’m focusing on her when she drops the keys, and we both scramble to get them just as I hear Valarian slam the door shut.

We wrestle for the keys while I scream for help; when fingers grip my hair again, yanking my head back, I toss my elbow back, connecting with someone behind me before diving back onto Nixon’s wife as her outstretched hand reaches for the keys. I land on top of her, snatching them before she can and hitting the lock button just as I’m hauled off.

“Get the damn keys, you useless woman,” I hear Nixon's voice growl as I’m ripped off his wife. My blood runs cold and I do the first thing I can think of—I toss the keys toward the store's roof as hard as I can. They hit their mark and stay.

Valarian is screaming his head off inside the car, while I kick at Nixon's wife as she tries to get close to me.

“Just take her. Hurry!” she screams at Nixon. I twist in his grip, my hair ripping out painfully before punching him in the balls from my bent position. He lets go with a grunt just as she punches me in the chest. Ribs break and I gasp for air before she knees me in the head.

Once again, I see black momentarily as I hit the ground, coming around to Valen's voice screaming in my head and asking what's happening just as Nixon punches the window.

The snarl that leaves me is more of a roar as I shift, my body smashing his against the car and denting the door before I'm dragged off by claws sinking into my rump. I twist, swiping at Nixon's wife, who has shifted into a murky brown wolf. My claws slash down her face as Nixon's teeth sink into the back of my neck.

‘Valen!’ I scream through the mind-link as the woman in the store, hearing the commotion, races out, only to pause as I square off with the Alpha while trying to keep my eyes on his wife.

The car is off and it's stinking hot—it has to be heating up like a damn oven inside. Nixon lunges at me, and I duck, sinking my teeth into his hind leg, as his wife grabs my tail, ripping me backward. The screeching of tires in the distance tells me Valen is close; I just need to hold them off a little longer.

I can see the woman from the store finally on the phone to the police—I will slap her for standing there if I survive long enough.

“Why are you just standing there!” I hear a voice snarl at the woman on the phone.

Nixon's jaws grab my front leg and he shakes his head, which leaves his neck wide open, and I chomp down on the back of it. My spine feels like it's breaking as his wife yanks on my tail, trying to get me off him, but I'm not letting go. They aren't taking my babies—they'll have to kill me first.

That's when something unexpected happens. One minute, I'm being ripped apart by them, the next Amber attacks Nixon, her malt colored wolf latching its jaws around his back leg and shaking viciously. I thought she left. Then I realize it was her voice I heard yelling at the shop assistant. With Nixon distracted, I turn on his wife. Chapter Fifty-Nine

Everly

My instincts are running feral. She shouldn't have tried to touch my babies! Nixon's wife backs up, almost tripping over her own tail as she tries to get away from my teeth. Pouncing on her, I rip into her neck and my claws sink into her sides. She wails loudly while thrashing.

I start tearing at her neck, rending the flesh from her bones, spraying her blood everywhere and drenching myself. When I hear a whimper behind me, I know I only have moments before Nixon is on me.

His wife bucks wildly, trying to throw me off as her skin peels back. I let go before chomping down again, only this time on the side of her neck, curling my claws under her ribs and shaking my head. My vision turns red with her blood gets in my eyes. As she rears up on her hind legs, my claws slash down her sides when I'm thrown back.

I hit the ground on my side, my chin hitting the concrete, and I spit out the chunk of fur and skin in my jaws, trying to keep her blood from molesting my taste buds too much. Getting to my feet, I turn to attack her again when I'm slammed into the car. The thud is loud and the windows smash at the impact. My children's screams ring out loudly behind me as Nixon's teeth rip into my chest.

He manages to latch onto my front paw and flings me to the side. As I get up, I'm smashed by his wife again. Amber's naked form, bruised and bloody, lies a few feet away. Before I can really process that, I hear claws on metal and see Nixon trying to get to my kids. I thrash, kicking his wife off before wrapping my jaws around her neck. The sickening crack as her neck breaks in my jaws when I lift her and slam her down makes my teeth ache.

I turn to charge at Nixon, but before I reach him, I'm forced to skid across the ground as Valen appears in front of me. He grabs the scruff of Nixon's neck in his bare hands and rips him back. Nixon goes flying before Valen turns on him again, preparing to shift

My focus turns to checking on my kids. My paws hit the side of the car and the broken glass cuts into me as I peer in to find them okay, though Valarian has a scratch on his hand—it looks like he tried to shove Nixon's head out of the car.

“Dad!” he screams, looking past me, and I turn to find Valen and Nixon fighting. Valen hasn't shifted, not having the chance when Nixon lunged at him. But watching him, I find he doesn't need to—he dodges him easily, landing blows against the enormous wolf.

Despite Valen's impressive skill, my heart nearly stops as I watch Nixon's wolf launch across the air straight at him. I suck in a gasp, about to help when they collide, Nixon's jaws snapping at his face as Valen is thrown backward. The move would have worked, except that Valen pivoted at the last second, grabbed Nixon's fur, and Nixon was pulled under him. His arms wrap around Nixon's neck as they hit the ground.

Nixon is no match for Valen—he's stronger and faster. My mate wraps his legs around the beast's torso and Nixon's ribs crack under the pressure. As his arms wrap around the wolf's neck, Valen squeezes his legs. Nixon thrashes, his jaws snapping wildly, close to Valen's face, then suddenly shrieks.

One minute, he's writhing under Valen's grip, the next, Valen has grabbed Nixon's bottom jaw with one hand and the top with the other. My stomach heaves when he pries Nixon's jaw wide, snapping it. Blood sprays everywhere and the beast's bottom jaw hangs limply. Yet still, Valen doesn't let him go, even as Nixon's screaming howls cut out.

The Blood Alpha's canines slip out in his rage as Nixon loses the fight, his body moving slower as he bleeds out. Valen's claws slip free before he thrusts his hand straight down Nixon's throat, and I can hear his insides being torn to pieces by my mate's powerful, razor-sharp claws. Blood gushes and spews out of Nixon's mouth as Valen forces his arm down his throat to the elbow before ripping it out along with Nixon's heart.

He drops it and stands. His entire body is drenched from head to toe in Nixon's blood and his eyes move to Amber, who's trying to sit up. It's at that moment I realize he's going to kill her, thinking she was involved.

‘Valen! She tried to help!’ I scream through the mind-link as his hand reaches for her. He stops, glancing over his shoulder just as police cars scream toward us with their sirens blaring loudly. The moment he stands up, relief floods me. Amber

drops her head, but she looks terrible. He turns to face me, and suddenly, I feel woozy.

\* \* \*

Valen

I'm furious. They tried to attack my kids! My mate!

'Valen! She tried to help!' Everly screams through the link as I'm reaching for Amber. My hand pauses before I grab her and I peer over my shoulder at Everly. When I got here, all I saw was my mate fighting for her life and our kids, but now, turning to face her, I'm slapped with shock.

Her wolf is magnificent, strong, and rivals my own in size. Her gunmetal gray fur is covered in blood and she sways on her feet. I can feel poison spreading through my system and my lips part in dismay when I see she's covered in bites; I have no doubt that the poison running through my veins is forsaken venom. Looking at Amber, I can tell she's feeling its effects too.

"Everly?" I stammer as cop cars flood the parking lot. She sways again before running at me. I catch her wolf as she pounces and her tongue licks every inch of my face as I land on my ass.

Relief floods me when I feel through the bond to find the venom not affecting her. My DNA in her veins must be enough to give her some immunity, and though I can tell she still feels a little queasy, her relief upon seeing me and the adrenaline override the effects.

"You're beautiful," I tell her, pulling her furry head back and stopping her mauling tongue. I look past her at the car to see Valarian talking to his sisters as the police start pulling them from their seats.

I suck in a breath. Seeing them thrashing and screaming in the officer's arms, I know they're alright. I've never been so terrified as when I saw Nixon's wolf's head inside the window.

Everly shifts in my arms, and I rip my shirt off as she does, yanking it over her head to cover her nude body before she's even fully shifted back. The moment she is, she rushes toward our kids, but I tug her back.



“I can feel the forsaken venom. Can't you feel it?” I ask her, and she whimpers, wanting to go to the kids. But we can't risk them getting the blood on them; we have no idea if it will affect them.

I wrap my arms around her waist, knowing I'm the only thing keeping her from snatching them out of the officer's arm just as ambulances finally get on the scene. Amber is rushed off in an ambulance and disappears while Valarian is checked over by an EMT. Nixon only appears to have scratched his arm, not actually bitten him.

“It's over, love. It's finally over,” I whisper to her, and she inhales deeply, watching our kids being fussed over.

My car had run into another parked car—I hadn't turned it off when I slammed on the brakes and jumped out the moment I pulled in. However, I can't care less about the damage; the main thing is my family is okay. Guilt gnaws at me. What if I didn't get here in time? What if they had succeeded in taking them or killed them all?

Despite all those rampant thoughts, I feel an immense relief flood the bond. I know this was something that had been an endless worry for her. Not knowing where Nixon was had the entire city on edge. And now we know. Dead at our feet.

Now, hopefully, we can finally move on with our lives. Chapter Sixty

Everly

Another Four weeks later.

“Keep your eyes closed,” Valen says as I walk blindly with my hands out in front of me.

“Is that Zoe and Macey?” I gasp when I hear their voices and try to lift Valen's blindfold off my eyes. He slaps my hand away, and I reach out again, accidentally slapping someone.

“Ouch! That you, Everly?” Macey asks. “Valen blindfolded me before we left and refused to tell me where he was taking me.”

“Oops, sorry,” I tell her. “Wait, are you blindfolded too?” I ask her.

“Yeah, and Tatum sucks with directions. I tripped over the gutter back there,” Macey growls. “My knee is killing,” she growls.

“Kids, slow down and away from the paint; it's still wet!” Marcus screeches just as the sound of their voices reaches my ears. A hand grips my arm.

“Glad I'm not the only blind one around. I was becoming paranoid he's walking me off a cliff,” Zoe says. Her hand on my arm slides down to grip my hand and give me a squeeze just as my hand finds Macey's.

“Those pricks conspired against us!” Macey hisses.

With them here, I have a good idea of where I am, which is surprising. Valen said the hotel wouldn't be ready. He had used every excuse to keep us away from this place, from gas leaks to plumbing issues to electrical faults.

“I swear, if they have ruined our hotel,” Zoe hisses, and I chuckle, knowing there would definitely be blood.

“Maybe the cliff was a better idea,” Marcus mutters, and Valen laughs behind me.

“Okay, can we take these off? We figured out where we are,” Macey says.

“One second; you have to lift your legs and step up onto the wall,” Valen says.

“Wall?” I ask, shuffling my feet, not wanting to trip.

“Shouldn't be an issue for you, Macey. You're good at lifting your legs around your ears,” Tatum snickers, and she growls.

“Language, you brute! Or I will jam your legs behind your head and test your flexibility,” she growls at him.

My feet hits something—obviously the wall Valen mentioned.

“You couldn't have walked around the wall?”

“Nah, too much entertainment watching you all trying to lift your legs high enough,” Marcus laughs. The other two join in the laughter behind us, earning growls from us.

Valen grips my hips and places me on the little wall. It isn't very high, though I still wobbled before I caught my balance. I felt the girls wobbling on their feet too.

“Now stay there. And don't fall or you'll ruin the garden bed beneath you,” Valen says. I sigh impatiently, wanting to take the blindfold off.

“Okay, you can all remove them now,” Marcus calls, and I rip mine off at the same time the girls do. I untangle my hair from it before looking up.

We all gasp simultaneously at the sight before us. Our hotel has been restored to its former glory, but that isn't what made me gasp; I knew what the plans looked like. No, I was shocked that the old fountain that sat in the center of the driveway is gone. In its place is a huge statue.

Zoe cups her hands over her mouth in awe, and Macey squeezes my hand as we look up at...

...ourselves!

The statue is amazing. They must have used an old photo I have of Valarie. She's standing up at the top, but instead of the banner she held in that photo, she's holding the sign for our new hotel:

'Village Retreat'

Beneath her is a statue of Macey, Me, and Zoe, all standing at the bottom on a pile of tools and rubble and all three of us have a baby cradled in our arms. I know they represent Taylor, Valarian, and Casey, and our struggles to get this place up and running.

“This is amazing,” Macey whispers, her arm sliding around my waist as she rests her head on my shoulder. Zoe does the same.

“It's perfect,” Zoe whispers as I stare up at the woman who inspired us all. Valarie would have loved it, and I know she's watching, I know we made her proud, because I'm proud of what we built. We had built something. Something extraordinary. Something that made all our hardships so worth it.

Zoe snorts, choking on a sob, and I rub her back, looking at her when she points toward the massive statue.

“Look at the shirts,” she says, pointing at our uniforms. The detail is magnificent. No wonder Valen was putting it off for so long; it would have taken ages to have commissioned. Even the little features like our name tags on our shirts are

included, and I read the tiny details on them. Instead of our names, they have something else.

'Watch me'

"We watched," Tatum says.

"We saw," Marcus adds.

"And we loved you all more," Valen finishes.

Macey snickers, and Zoe and I laughed at them.

"Shall we go inside?" Marcus asks, and we all nod eagerly.

Walking into the restaurant, we find all our old staff waiting, dressed in their uniforms, the place decorated, and food on all the tables.

"Welcome home," Valen whispers behind me, and I see Ava walk across the restaurant with the girls in the stroller, a huge grin on her face.

"Wait, who's having a baby?" Macey asks, pointing toward the back of the room, where a baby bunting hangs along the wall. Cakes and candy decorate the tables in that corner

"We decided to kill two birds with one stone, the grand reopening, and..." Valen says, and I gape, looking at my sister, but she shakes her head.

"You said we would wait," Zoey hisses at Marcus.

My eyes widen, and so do Macey's. Zoe glances at her nervously, and I know she must have been worried about telling her from the look on her face. She blushes as Macey's mouth opens and closes like a fish in her shock.

"You're pregnant?" she whispers before rushing over and cupping Zoe's non-existent belly.

"Yes, I was trying to hold off telling everyone until I was showing," she mumbles.

"You're pregnant!" Macey gushes excitedly before the smile falls off her face completely.

"Wait, you're pregnant, and they knew before us?" she says in outrage, pointing to Tatum and Valen.

“Marcus wasn't supposed to tell,” Zoe growls at him, and he smirks.

“Oh, I bet it's gonna be—” Macey starts to predict when Marcus clamps a hand over her mouth.

“You be quiet with your witchy voodoo. It will be one baby. One!” Marcus says before shrieking and ripping his hand away from her mouth.

“Ew, you licked me!” he complains, wiping his hand on his jeans. Zoe and I laugh.

“Oh, let me help you open all your presents,” Macey gushes excitedly, steering Zoe toward the table at the back.

I watch them wander off when an arm drops across my shoulders. Looking up, I see it's my father.

“Your mother would have loved this,” he whispers as I rest my head on his shoulder.

“Mothers; you were as much Val's as Valen is,” Kalen says, gripping my shoulder and leaning down to peck my head. I nod, wiping a stray tear at their words.

“Yes, they would have,” I whisper, then curse. “Damn dust.”

“Terrible isn't it?” Kalen mutters, passing me a handkerchief.

“Pop, Pop!” Valarian screeches, wanting Kalen's attention.

“I have been summoned,” he says, wandering off.

Dad snuffles and I look up to find his nose all red and his eyes puffy as he looks around the place. I offer him the handkerchief and he dabs his eyes before clearing his throat.

“You really showed them, bub; showed me,” he says, and I nod, unable to form words.

“I'm proud of you—proud of what you built and the Alpha you have become. Most of all, I am proud that you're my daughter,” he says, pressing his lips to the side of my head and wrapping his arms around my shoulders.

“I love you, kiddo.”

“I love you too,” I tell him, squeezing him back. We stand there for a bit, watching everyone.

“So, what's next?” Dad asks. I look up at him, resting my chin on his chest. This man was once my hero, then my rival, but now he’s just my dad.

“What's next is you walk me down the aisle,” I tell him and he chokes, nodding his head and crushing me against him.

“I'd be honored,” he whispers, squeezing me tight.