



Chapter 23



Kieran positions himself between my wolf and Lia's bleeding form. The lighter brown wolf—Lysander—circles to my other side, ready to intervene if I lunge again.

The school parking lot erupts in chaos behind us. Security guards shouting into radios. Someone screaming about calling 911. My children frozen in terror, watching their mother as a massive white wolf with blood on her muzzle.

Kieran's still human, still naked, standing in full view of witnesses who are about to call the police and expose everything.

"Forest." His voice cuts through my rage with Alpha command that makes my wolf's legs move before thought catches up. "NOW."

My jaws close tighter around Lia's throat. She whimpers, goes limp. I drag her toward the tree line behind the school, away from the humans, away from the witnesses who can't see what we are.

Behind me, Kieran stays in human form. His voice rises, carrying across the parking lot with authority that demands attention. "Everyone stop. Listen to me."

I'm already at the tree line, pulling Lia through underbrush, but I hear him working the crowd.

"That was a vicious dog. Attacked this woman unprovoked. Animal control is handling it now. You saw a large dog—german shepherd mix, maybe. Nothing else. Just a dangerous animal that's been dealt with."

His voice is absolute certainty, giving them an explanation their minds

can accept.

"Someone get these children inside. Keep them calm. Their mother will handle this."

Teachers move to usher the triplets back toward the building, away from the chaos.

He's controlling the narrative, giving them a story that makes sense, using his authority and certainty to override their panic.

I drag Lia deeper into the forest. Trees close in around us. Shadows swallow the parking lot chaos. Here there are no witnesses. Here I can finish what maternal rage started.

I release her throat to slam her against the forest floor. She's sobbing, bleeding from shoulder and throat, hands raised in useless defense.

"Please—Thalia—I'm sorry—"

Sorry means nothing. She tried to take my children.

My jaws close around her throat again, ready to end this.

Paws thunder through underbrush. Two wolves burst into the clearing—Kieran and Lysander both shifted now, both moving with lethal purpose.

The lighter brown wolf circles wide, trying to get close enough to intervene. But Kieran shifts mid-stride—bones cracking, reforming, until he's human and moving toward me with careful deliberation.

"Look at me." His voice is gentle but firm. "Not her. Me."

I snarl around Lia's throat.

"The kids are with their teachers. They're safe inside." He moves closer, hands up. "You need to shift back."

My wolf's attention snaps to him and something happens.

A pull. Not physical but more real than anything I've ever felt. Like gravity suddenly decided to exist only between us. Like every cell in my body is straining toward him, recognizing something fundamental and undeniable.

I've never felt pack bonds before. Never understood what wolves describe when they talk about feeling their Alpha, their pack, their place in the hierarchy.

But this is different. Singular. Absolute. Not pack bond—something more.

The protective rage ebbs. Not gone, but manageable. Pushed back by this new sensation that demands my attention.

My jaws release Lia's throat. She crawls away, sobbing.

The shift back hits without warning. Bones breaking, reforming, agony tearing through me in waves that make me scream. Worse than the first shift—like being ripped apart and poorly reassembled. Fur recedes. Limbs crack back to human shape.

I'm gasping on the forest floor, human and naked, body shaking from pain and adrenaline crash.

Kieran's already moving. Shrugs out of his jacket—he'd grabbed it before shifting—and wraps it around my shoulders. Pulls me against his chest while I shake apart.

But I'm not crying from pain or fear. I'm staring at him with something like devastation.

"I can feel it." My voice breaks on the words. "The bond. It's pulling me toward you like gravity, like I can't breathe when you're not close, like—"

I turn my head. Lysander's shifted back to human, standing ten feet away. Watching us with something broken in his expression.

I reach for that same pull, that same gravity. Searching for the bond with him.

Nothing. Just empty space where connection should be.

"What about him?" The question comes out desperate.

Lysander meets my eyes. His face shows pain and acceptance. "You don't feel it with me, do you?"

"No." The word is barely a whisper. "There's nothing. Just—empty."

The truth screams through me. Mate bonds don't split. Don't share. Don't choose multiple partners. Every wolf knows this. The bond picks one mate, singular and absolute.

"No." I'm shaking now, tears streaming down my face. "It can't be you. It can't just decide for me. I need to choose, I need—"

"Thalia." Kieran's hands frame my face, forcing me to look at him. "Do you feel it? Tell me you feel it."

"Yes." The word is agony. "I feel everything. The bond, the pull, the certainty that you're—" My voice drops to a whisper. "Which means you're their father. All three. The bond wouldn't choose you if they weren't yours."

Kieran's expression cracks open. Awe and terror and desperate joy warring across his face. "All three."

"All three," I confirm, and watch him shatter.

His forehead presses to mine. His breath comes in ragged gasps. "I have three children. You gave me three children and I didn't even know they

existed."

Lysander's voice cuts through. "You're mates."

Not a question. A surrender.

I turn to look at him. He's watching the bond snap into place between me and Kieran, watching the connection that completely excludes him. Watching the moment he loses me.

"I wanted to choose." My voice breaks. "I needed it to be my choice, not biology, not destiny—"

"It is your choice." Kieran's voice is rough, urgent. "The bond doesn't force love. It just shows you who's yours. But choosing to accept it? Choosing to build a life together? That's all you."

The mate bond sings between us. I feel it in my chest, in my bones, in every cell. Ancient, absolute, undeniable.

Lysander takes a step back. Then another. His face shows pain but something like relief underneath.

"Lysander—" I start.

"Don't." He holds up a hand. "The bond chose. You didn't get a say. Neither did I." His voice softens. "But I need some distance to process this."

He's watching the bond snap into place between me and Kieran, watching the connection that completely excludes him. Watching the moment he loses me, truly loses me, to his brother and fate.

"I wanted to choose." My voice breaks, turning back to Kieran. "I needed it to be my choice, not biology, not destiny—"

"It is your choice." Kieran's voice is rough, hands still framing my face.

"The bond doesn't force love. It just shows you who's yours. But choosing to accept it? That's all you."

His thumb traces my cheekbone, and the mate bond flares at the touch. Not just emotional—physical. I feel it like electricity, like fire, like every nerve ending suddenly connected to his.

The realization crashes through me. "That night. During my heat. That's why you both—"

"The bond was trying to complete itself." His hands slide into my hair. "Your wolf was dormant but the mate pull was there, calling to mine. That's why I couldn't stay away, why touching you felt like everything I'd ever wanted."

I think about Lysander's gentle touches, his steady presence. How it felt safe but never like this—never like standing too close to the sun.

"And Lysander?" The question hurts.

"Felt the heat pull. The Alpha instinct to claim. But not the mate bond." Kieran's voice gentles. "That's singular. Exclusive. Undeniable."

The mate bond sings between us—ancient, absolute, showing me exactly who I belong to whether I wanted the choice or not.

Lysander stands apart, watching us with devastation written across his face. The moment he loses her completely to biology and fate.

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The Chapter

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