

# Alpha's Regret: Begging For My Luna Back – Chapter 171

The tension and the air crackled between us because at the end of the day I was staring at the woman who caused my child's death.

Ovelia stood there, her eyes narrowed and she had a cruel smirk playing on her lips. I have been dreading this moment and yet, in a strange way, I was waiting for it.

I didn't expect my first day back to be this crazy but I knew that the person to cause problems for me will be Ovelia and to be honest the feeling was mutual.

She purred, her voice dripping with fake sweetness that made my skin crawl. "Look what the cat dragged in. The runaway Luna." She was enjoying second of it.

My fists clenched at my as I tried to calm my wolf down because I'm not the same person who left this pack and my wolf is stronger than ever before. "I didn't run away, Ovelia. I left." Saying that I ran away is crazy because I said goodbye to everybody.

I know it to some people it may have come as me abandoning this pack but she of all people has to understand.

She laughed, a sharp, unpleasant sound that grated on my nerves. "Oh, is that what you call it? Packing up your bags and vanishing into thin air every time things get a little tough? That's not what a Luna does, Faith. This pack... they don't deserve a Luna who just packs up and leaves every time things don't go her way. you did it 6 years ago and you did it again now so it doesn't come as a surprise to anybody anymore."

Her words were like daggers, each one aimed right. My breath hitched.

"You know why I left." I shot back, my voice trembling despite my best efforts to keep it steady but talking about my miscarriage is a sour point.

Ovelia just crossed her arms with a smug of confidence.

"Oh, I think I have a pretty good idea. You're weak. You couldn't handle the pressure. I honestly get that she's my mate's mother and most importantly she is my children's grandmother but she is a terrible person"

"I left because of you! Because I lost my baby! Because of what you did"

The smirk vanished from her face, replaced by a flicker of something I couldn't quite name.

Guilt? No, it was too quick. It was replaced by a cold, hard glare.

“Your baby? You think that’s all there is to it? You think you’re the only one who’s suffered, Faith?”

She took a step closer, her voice dropping to a menacing whisper.

“I lost my mate, Faith. My mate. Because of you and your pathetic brother. So, you lost a baby? I lost the other half of my soul. We’re even, wouldn’t you say?”

The air was sucked out of my lungs. Her words hit me with the force of a physical blow. Even? How could she say that? How could she compare our losses and the truth of the matter is that I had nothing to do with Sander’s death.

I feel sorry for Astor because he lost his father but I wish it was her because she is the worst.

But before I could even form a coherent thought, she started to laugh. It wasn’t a gentle laugh, or even a mocking one. It was a chilling, triumphant cackle that echoed in the silent space between us.

“And you know what the best part is, Faith?” she practically crowed, her eyes gleaming with malicious glee. “That little position you thought you had? It’s no longer there. Because now... now even Astor can see you for what you really are. A quitter. Someone who runs away whenever she feels like it.”

My blood ran cold. Astor. My Astor. The way she said it, the venom in her voice... it was a cruel twist of the knife. I wanted to scream at her, to deny it with every fiber of my being. I wanted to tell her she was a liar, that Astor would never think that of me.

But my heart... my heart broke because after the conversation Astor and I just had it was quite clear. He did think that. He thought I had abandoned him, abandoned the pack. He thought I was a coward.

When I left I thought that he understood my reasons and when I talked to him on the phone he seemed like he was looking forward to us being reunited but all alone he felt betrayed.

A fresh wave of pain, sharper than anything before, washed over me. But this time, it was mixed with a burning, hot rage. Ovelia.

She has been feeding him lies. Poisoning his mind against me, twisting my pain into a weakness, turning him against me.

“You venomous snake.” I hissed, my voice low and dangerous. “You’ve been whispering in his ear, haven’t you? Filling his head with your twisted version of the truth.”

She just smiled, a self-satisfied smirk. “He’s my son, Faith. He listens to his mother.” That is highly unlikely and I feel like there’s more to the way he is behaving than she says and I will find out before I help him get back to normal.

I don't think anybody accept somebody in my shoes would understand why took the decision to leave and I thought explained as best as I could but it's still not enough.

"I'm back, Ovelia. And nobody. Nobody will come between me and Astor. Not you. Not anyone."

Her smirk didnt drop and she looked confident about something I didn't know but I still warned her.

"You better start watching your back. Because I am the Luna of this pack. And everything... everything will go exactly how I want it to go. I'm not the Old faith and you mess with me I promise you, you will not like what you see.

I don't like you and if it were up to me then you would have lost your life a lot quicker but I felt sorry for you because you are my mate's mother so stay in your lane or you will face the consequences."

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I made my way to the kitchen but the smell hit me first. Not the warm, comforting scent of fresh bread or the rich aroma of simmering broth I remembered being cooked at this time but something heavier, almost a chaotic mix of too many things cooking at once.

My feet echoed a little on the floor as I stepped into the Parkhouse kitchen. It was bustling with activities. Ten women or maybe more, were scattered around, chopping vegetables and stirring large pots.

Then I saw her. A small figure, her back to me, stirring a large pot. My heart leaped happily. It was Ma.

"Ma?" I breathed, the word a soft whisper, but it cut through the clatter of pots and pans.

She spun around, her eyes widening, and a gasp escaped her lips. "Faith!"

And then she was running. Her apron flapped around her as she darted across the kitchen, her arms outstretched. I met her halfway, bending down as she launched herself into my embrace. Her arms wrapped around my neck, tight, desperate. I buried my face in her soft, familiar hair, inhaling the scent of her a mix of spices, woodsmoke, and just... Ma.

“Oh, my sweet girl! I’ve missed you so, so much!” she sobbed into my shoulder, her voice thick with emotion.

My own eyes welled up. “Ma, I missed you too! So much!” Six months. Six long, agonizing months. It felt like an eternity. Since my Ma and Pa are just human, they’ve always been so scared to travel through different packs. They worried about the dangers, about not fitting in, about being out of place. That’s why I hadn’t seen them face-to-face in so long. But we talked, almost every day, on the phone.

She pulled back, her hands cupping my face, her eyes shining with tears and a joy that mirrored my own. “Look at you, my beautiful girl. You’re even more radiant.” She squeezed my hands.

I don’t know how I feel about her being here in the kitchen cooking but I also know that she’s happy here more than she’s ever been because they’ve even built a house here.

I smiled, a genuine, heartfelt smile, and then gently disentangled myself from Ma’s embrace. “I’m so glad, Ma. Truly.” I turned to the other women in the kitchen, who had paused their work and were now watching us, their expressions unreadable. “Good afternoon, ladies,” I said, my voice clear and strong, asserting my presence, my authority.

Immediately, their heads bowed, a ripple of respect passing through the group. “Luna,” they murmured in unison, their voices low. It was a familiar gesture, a reminder of my position, my power.

But as my gaze swept over the bustling kitchen again, something still felt wrong. The sheer amount of food, the intensity of the cooking... and the time. “Is there an event today?” I asked, my brow furrowing. “A feast, perhaps? A celebration?”

In the back of my mind, a hopeful thought sparked. Maybe... maybe they were planning a welcome-home dinner for me? A special surprise after my long absence, a way to show they cared?

A woman, stout and stern-faced, stepped forward slightly. “No, Luna,” she said, her voice flat, devoid of warmth. “This is usually the time we start dinner.”

My hopeful thought vanished, replaced by a prickle of annoyance, a cold knot forming in my stomach. “Three o’clock?” I asked, my voice sharper than I intended, the question laced with disbelief. “Since when? When I left, I made sure everyone knew that dinner cooking starts at four-thirty. Earlier than that, everyone is still busy with their duties, with their training, with their families.

And nobody likes to eat cold food. I wanted to avoid that kind of waste, that kind of disrespect for their efforts.”

The woman exchanged a glance with another, a slight smirk playing on her lips, a flicker of something defiant in her eyes. “Well, Luna,” she said, drawing out the words, a deliberate slowness in her tone, “for the past few months, this has been our routine.”

The way she said it. The subtle emphasis on “past few months.” It wasn’t an answer. It was a taunt. An insult, thinly veiled beneath a veneer of obedience. It was a jab, a clear sign that my rules, my decisions, my authority, had been disregarded, tossed aside the moment my back was turned. My blood began to simmer, a slow, dangerous burn. I was the Luna. I was not one to be walked all over by members of my own pack, especially not in my own home, in my own kitchen.

My eyes narrowed, scanning, their faces, each woman now avoiding my gaze. “Who,” I said, my voice dropping to a dangerous low, each word a hammer blow in the sudden, suffocating silence, ‘told you to do such a thing?’ The air in the kitchen grew thick, heavy with unspoken tension. Pots stopped clattering. The women froze, their eyes darting nervously, like trapped mice.

Then, from the very back of the kitchen, a voice, smooth and laced with an infuriating confidence, cut through the silence. “Me.”

I spun around, my heart pounding, a cold dread washing over me, replacing the anger with a chilling shock. Standing there, leaning against a counter with a triumphant, almost smug look on her face, was a woman I hadn’t seen in more than 9 years. Her red hair was pulled back in a messy bun, her eyes, so like my own, held a glint of something I couldn’t quite place, a mixture of challenge and something darker.

No. It couldn’t be.

Annabella. My cousin from my mother’s side of the family and most importantly my bully.

My mind reeled, struggling to process the image before me. What was she doing here? Why was she in my kitchen, acting as if she owned the place?

And most importantly, why did she think she had any right to decide anything in my pack?

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I blinked my eyes hard and I thought that maybe I was seeing things because I was so tired. But she was real. She was standing there with her fiery red hair falling loose around her shoulders. She looked just like I remembered her, but also different.

She looked older and more confident. It felt like a ghost from my past had suddenly appeared right in front of me.

“Annabella?” I asked. My voice was just a whisper. I was in total shock. “What are you doing here?”

She shrugged her shoulders like it was no big deal that she had just popped up out of nowhere. A small, smirk played on her lips. It was a smile that said she knew something I didn’t.

“I’ve been here for a couple of months,” she said casually. She picked up an apple from a bowl and tossed it in her hand. “Dad thought it was safer for me here. You know, since the Shadow Moon Pack was one of the packs that Kyle attacked.”

She took a bite of the apple and chewed slowly, watching my face.

It’s crazy how the hate I felt for her when I first met her still lived and breathed even to this day.

“The attack was bad,” she continued. “There was a lot of damage. Dad figured it was better for me to be away while they were rebuilding everything. He didn’t want me around the mess and the danger.”

Her eyes sparkled with mischief. She looked like a cat that had just caught a mouse. I could tell she was enjoying my confusion.

She always had the same look in her eyes every time she wanted me about not being good enough for my parents and that my parents preferred Alice over me.

She is my cousin but she made the first few months after I got to the eclipse pack hell because I unfortunately arrived while she was there.

I felt a rush of anger after I came to terms with what she said, she has been here for months? In my territory? And nobody told me.

“Why didn’t you tell me you were staying at my pack?” I asked her and I tried to keep my voice steady, but it was hard. “I am the Luna here. I should know who is living under my roof.”

Annabella laughed. It wasn’t a nice laugh. It was taunting.

“Oh, come on, Faith. I didn’t know this was your pack!” she shot back. Her tone was light, but her words were sharp. “The last thing I heard, you took over The Crescent Pack. You were busy with them.”

She took another step closer to me, her green eyes bright.

“So, naturally, I figured you were no longer the Luna of this pack,” she said. “You know how it is in our world. No real Luna leaves their pack to go somewhere else. Once you leave, you usually don’t come back as the leader. I thought you had moved on.”

Her words hit me hard. She was trying to get under my skin. She was calling me out for leaving, implying that I wasn’t a good Luna.

For a moment, I just stared at her. Then, a laugh escaped my lips. It was a dry laugh. The tension in my shoulders eased just a little bit.

“You are still the same smart–ass little girl I remember,” I said, shaking my head. “Always have something clever to say, don’t you?”

But then, I remembered who I was. I was not just her old friend or someone she could taunt. I was the Luna. I had to show her that things were different now.

I leaned in closer to her. I invaded her personal space. I lowered my voice so it was deep and serious.

“But listen to me closely, Annabella,” I said. “Things are very different now. I am not the same person I used to be, and this pack is not a playground.” I looked her straight in the eyes.

“You better watch yourself,” I warned her. “If you step out of line, or if you cause any trouble for me or my pack, I will not hesitate. I will send you back to the Shadow Moon Pack before the sun sets today. You will be in a car and on your way home before your wolf even thinks about making an appearance.”

My voice was hard as stone. I meant every word.

For a split second, her mask slipped. I saw a flicker of real fear in her eyes. She swallowed hard, realizing that I was not joking. My heart softened a tiny bit because I remembered that she was my uncle’s daughter, but I couldn’t let her see that.

She recovered quickly. She stood up straighter and put her hands on her hips, trying to look brave again.

“You wouldn’t dare!” she said, raising her voice. “Astor would never let you do that! My dad is important, and he wants me here.”

I straightened my back. I let my Alpha energy fill the room just a little bit, enough to make the air feel heavy.

“I don’t need permission from anyone,” I said firmly. “Especially not from Astor. I am the Luna of this pack, and I make the decisions.”

I turned away from her and looked around the kitchen. The cooks had stopped working. They were all watching us, their eyes wide. They needed to know who was in charge.

“Listen to me, everyone!” I announced, my voice booming off the walls. “From now on, things will go back to exactly how they were before. This kitchen is mine to control.”

I looked back at Annabelle one last time, then back to everybody.

“If anyone has a problem with that, they can come to me directly,” I said. “I will deal with them. Do you all understand?”

They nodded quickly and went back to work, chopping and stirring faster than before.

I let out a long breath. Snapping at Annabelle didn’t help me because I still have a mate who hates me and doesn’t want to see my face and I just want to go home and forget about this day.

I turned on my heel and walked out of the kitchen. I left the noise, the rejection, the hate, the anger, and Annabella behind me.

My heart was still pounding from my conversation with Astor and I had a bad feeling in my stomach.

I kept walking until I finally reached my house.

But as I got closer, I saw someone waiting for me.

It was Liam.

He was standing by the front door, leaning against the frame. He had his arms crossed over his chest. Even from a distance, I could tell something was wrong. He wasn’t smiling. He didn’t wave when he saw me.

I walked up the steps to the porch. I looked at his face. His expression was very serious. His eyebrows were pulled together, and his eyes looked worried.

“Faith, we need to talk,” he said.

His voice was low and urgent. It wasn’t a casual greeting. It sounded like a warning.

I knew that tone. Whatever he had to say wasn’t going to be good news. I took a deep breath, trying to prepare myself.

“Okay,” I whispered.



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I opened the door wider and stepped aside. “Come in, Liam,” I said softly.

Liam walked into my living room. He didn't sit down on the comfortable sofa. He didn't take off his jacket.

Instead, he started pacing back and forth on the rug. He looked like a caged animal. He ran his hand through his hair, messing it up. He looked stressed and very tired.

“What's going on, Liam?” I asked. “You look like you have seen a ghost.”

He stopped pacing and turned to look at me. His eyes were dark with worry.

“Faith, I have been noticing things,” he began. His voice was low. “Ever since I started coming back to the Eternal Pack to visit, things have felt... wrong. Strange.”

He took a deep breath.

“At first, I couldn't figure it out,” he explained. “I was traveling back and forth between two packs so much so I thought maybe I was just tired.

I thought maybe I was imagining things because I was exhausted from the travel. But this is the reason I decided to stay longer this time. I needed to see if I was crazy, or if something was really happening.”

“And?” I pushed him. “What did you find?”

He walked closer to me. He looked around the room as if he thought someone might be listening in the shadows.

“I have noticed a big change in Alpha Astor,” Liam said.

The way he said Astor's name sent a shiver down my spine.

“What kind of change?” I asked. “Is he sick?”

“No, it's not sickness,” Liam said, shaking his head. “It is something worse. Faith, he looks like a cold man walking, he shows no emotions,” Liam said. He used his hands to explain. “He doesn't get angry. He doesn't get happy. He doesn't smile. He just walks around with a blank face. His eyes... they look empty. There is just something very strange and unnatural about him.” Everything was just starting to make sense in my head because I thought I was losing it too.

“And that’s not the only thing,” Liam continued. “The strangest thing is that the one making most of the decisions these days is Luna—mother Ovelia. She sits in the meetings. She gives the orders. Astor just sits there and nods his head. He does whatever she says without a fight. It is like she is the Alpha, and he is just a puppet.”

My stomach turned but I didn’t say anything because I’m also just trying to digest everything he’s telling me.

“There is more,” Liam said. He looked angry now. “The Alpha King.”

“What about him?” I asked.

“He comes and leaves whenever he wants,” Liam said, clenching his fists. “He walks through the pack lands like he owns the place. He treats the Eternal Pack like it is his own backyard. He doesn’t ask for permission. He just takes what he wants. He acts like he owns the pack now.”

I walked over to the window and looked out.

“I felt it,” I admitted quietly. “Even though I’ve only been here for one day, I noticed it too. There’s a strange energy in the Pack. It feels heavy.”

Liam moved to stand beside me.

“Exactly,” he said. “But Faith, there is one more thing. And this is the part that worries me the most.”

I looked up at him. “Tell me.”

“For some reason, everybody is obsessed with Annabella,” he said.

My eyes widened. “Obsessed?”

“Yes,” Liam said. Everyone likes her. They smile at her. They listen to her. It is almost like she has them under a spell.”

He paused and looked at me with sad eyes.

“Faith, it almost looks like she has been trying to fill your place,” he said gently. “She is acting like the Luna. And the pack... the pack is letting her do it.”

I felt a flash of hot anger in my chest. So, my suspicions in the kitchen were right. Annabella wasn’t just visiting. She was replacing me. She was taking my home, my kitchen, and my people.

My mind started working very fast. If Annabella was here, and if everyone was acting strangely, it meant something big was about to happen.

“Liam,” I said, my voice sharp and commanding. “You need to leave.”

He looked surprised. “What? Leave the house?”

“No,” I said. “You need to leave the Eternal Pack. Right now. Tonight.”

I turned to face him fully.

“You need to go to the Shadow Moon Pack immediately,” I ordered. “You need to start investigating Annabelle and that pack. We need to know why she is really here. We need to know what she was doing before she came here.”

Liam nodded slowly, understanding my plan.

“Now that I’m back that would mean that whatever plans our enemies have, they are moving fast. They are quickening their timeline. We are running out of time.”

“I will leave immediately,” Liam said without hesitating. But then he stopped. He looked at me with worry all over his face. He reached out and touched my arm gently.

“But Faith,” he said, his voice trembling a little. “I can’t just leave you here alone. Not with all these strange things happening. Not when the alpha is almost like a zombie.”

“I will be fine,” I said.

“You need to have somebody over here that you can trust. If I go, you are alone. Everybody seems is loyal to Annabelle and Luna—mother, even Astor himself. If things go wrong, who will watch your back? Who will help you?”

“I don’t need anybody because I’m quite capable of protecting myself Liam and for now the only thing you should worry about is protecting the Eternal pack and whoever is coming for us because I won’t spare anybody.”

I really hope that I can stop all of this before it’s too late and I think I should have come earlier when I noticed that there was something different about Astor because my mate needed me and I wasn’t there.

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After Liam left, the house felt too quiet and too big. The silence was heavy and I wanted my kids back but I could hear the noise outside that the games were continuing and I was probably not going to see them anytime soon.

I needed somebody though, I needed people I could actually trust especially because the one person that should be here is not.

I picked up my phone and made a call.

“Ma? Pa? Can you come over for dinner?”

They were the only two people in the entire pack that I knew were safe. They were humans. If someone was using black magic or mind control to manipulate the pack members, it would not work on them

They were just normal people, and that made them the most important allies I had right now.

Thirty minutes later, there was a loud knock on the door.

I opened it, and before I could even say hello, I was flying in the air.

“Faithy!”

My pa scooped me up in a giant bear hug. He lifted me right off the floor. His laugh boomed through the quiet house, filling up the empty spaces.

“I missed you, Pa!” I squeaked, trying to breathe.

“I missed you very, very much, my little girl,” he said, squeezing me tight one last time before putting me down.

My Ma was standing behind him, smiling. She was holding two large baskets covered with checkered cloths. The smell coming from those baskets was amazing. It smelled like home.

“We knew you wouldn’t have time to cook,” Ma said, walking into the kitchen. “So, we brought the feast to you.”

They were the perfect kind of people. They knew how to cook up a storm. They unpacked the baskets, and suddenly my kitchen table was full. There was roast chicken with crispy skin, mashed potatoes swimming in butter, green beans with bacon, and a fresh apple pie.

“Sit, sit!” Pa ordered. “We eat first. Talk later.”

We sat down and started to eat. For a few minutes and everything felt normal. It felt like the old days before I came back here, before the wars, and before all the heartbreak.

The food was delicious.

“How are you two doing?” I asked between bites. “Is it hard living here? I know a pack full of werewolves can be scary for humans.”

Ma shook her head, her eyes bright.

“Oh, no, Faith,” she said happily. “We have never been happier.”

“Really?” I asked, surprised.

“Really,” Pa agreed. “Here, we have a very big family. In the human world, people are lonely. They stay in their houses and don’t talk to their neighbors. But here? Everyone looks out for each other. We cook for the young wolves, and they help us with the heavy lifting. It is honestly more fun than the human world. We have a purpose here.”

I smiled. I was glad they were safe and happy. But I couldn’t ignore the dark cloud hanging over my head. I put my fork down. I needed to ask the hard questions.

“Pa,” I said quietly. “I need to ask you something important.”

He stopped chewing and looked at me. “What is it?”

“Is there something wrong with Astor?” I asked. “I saw him briefly, and Liam told me some things. But I don’t understand what is going on with him. He seems... different.”

The happy mood in the room vanished instantly. Ma looked down at her plate. Pa sighed a long, heavy sigh. He wiped his mouth with a napkin and leaned back in his chair.

“Everybody has been talking about his behavior,” Pa said seriously. “It is not a secret, Faith.”

“What are they saying?” I asked.

“He looks like a ghost,” Pa said. His voice was sad. “He used to be full of fire. He used to be human

but now? He walks around staring at nothing.

He genuinely seems like he doesn’t like people anymore. He said he prefers being alone. He locks himself in his office or wanders the woods by himself.”

Pa looked me right in the eyes.

“There is something terribly wrong with him, Faith. He is not the man he used to be.

I felt a cold knot in my stomach. Hearing it from my Pa made it real. Liam was right,

“When did all of this begin?” I asked quickly. “I need to know the timeline.”

Ma looked up. “It happened about two months after you left,” she said.

Two months.

My mind raced. That timing was in line with everything because I started to notice the differences with him 2 months after I left.

“And,” Ma added, “that was the exact same week Annabelle came to live in the pack for the first time.”

I slammed my hand on the table. “I knew it!”

It all made sense now. The pieces of the puzzle were coming together. Annabelle arrived, and Astor turned into a ghost. Annabelle arrived, and suddenly everyone was obsessed with her.

“Whatever is happening,” I said, my voice shaking with anger, “she is involved. Annabella is doing something to him. And if she is here, and Astor is acting like a puppet, then his mother, Ovelia, must be involved somehow too since she’s the one making the decisions now.”

I felt a surge of energy. I was ready to fight. I was ready to go to war for my mate.

“I am going to fix everything,” I declared. I looked at my parents with determination. “I am going to expose Annabella and I’m going to break whatever spell he’s under and bring my loving mate back. I will make Astor the man he used to be.”

I expected my parents to cheer. I expected them to tell me, “Go get him, Faith!”

But the room stayed quiet.

“Sit down, Faith,” Pa said. His voice was not loud, but it was very firm.

I looked at him, confused. “Is something wrong?”

“I heard you,” Pa said. “But you need to listen to me now.”

He looked sadder than I had ever seen him.

“Nothing will probably bring your loving mate back,” he said bluntly.

I felt like he had slapped me. “Why would you say that? I mean, Astor—is strong. He is just going through something.”

“He may be going through something,” Pa said. “But you have to look in the mirror, Faith. At the end of the day, you are one of the reasons why he’s in that condition.”

My mouth fell open. Tears stung my eyes. "Me? Pa, how can you say that? I left because I had to!"

"Did you?" Pa asked.

He stood up and walked over to me. He didn't hug me this time.

"I love you very much, Faith," he said. "You are my daughter, and I would die for you. But I have to tell you the truth because nobody else will."

He took a deep breath.

"The truth of the matter is that you are a coward."

The word hung in the air. Coward.

"You ran away," Pa said. "You say it was for duty, but it was also because it was hard. If you really cannot tolerate Astor, if you cannot handle the mate bond, then it's easier to just rip the band-aid off. Just leave that man for good."

"I don't want to leave him for good!" I cried. "I love him!"

"Then stop acting like this!" Pa said, his voice rising. "You cannot constantly leave and come back. Relationships are not a game, Faith. You don't get to press pause and play whenever you want."

He pointed a finger at me.

"Especially when you are parents," he continued. "You have children to think about. You don't just get up and leave and then come back whenever it suits you."

You cannot expect that man to be still standing exactly where you left him."

Tears rolled down my cheeks. His words hurt because a part of me knows that they were partly true.

"He is broken, Faith," Pa said softly now. "Maybe Annabelle is doing something bad. Maybe there is magic involved. But the crack in his heart? The hole that let the darkness in? You made that hole when you walked away."

I sank back into my chair, burying my face in my hands. The dinner was forgotten. The delicious smell of the pie meant nothing now.

"So what do I do?" I whispered through my tears. "Is it too late?"

Pa put a heavy hand on my shoulder.

“I don’t know,” he said honestly. “But you can’t just fix this by fighting a bad guy. You have to fix what you broke between the two of you. And that is going to be much harder than fighting a war.”

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I sat frozen in my chair. My Pa’s words were ringing in my ears like a loud bell.

Coward.

It was the worst thing anyone has ever called me. I wanted to be angry. I wanted to scream at him and tell him he was wrong. I wanted to tell him that I was a warrior, an alpha, a Luna, a leader. But I couldn’t. I couldn’t say anything because, deep down in my heart, I was terrified that he was right.

Tears blurred my vision.

But Pa didn’t stop there. He wasn’t done teaching me this hard lesson. He saw my tears, but he didn’t rush to wipe them away or console me.

“Faith,” he said, his voice dropping to a lower, gentler tone, but still very serious. “You think love is just butterflies and happiness? You think it’s just kisses and sunny days? No. Love is painful. Love is work.

He reached across the table and took Ma’s hand.

“Look at us,” he said, nodding toward Ma. “We have been together for more than three decades

Faith. Do you think every single day was easy? Do you think we never fought or hurt each?”

Ma shook her head slowly, looking at him with soft eyes.

“We made it,” Pa continued. “But it’s not because we’re perfect. There were times when we were so angry, so tired, or so sad that one of us wanted to pack a bag and leave.

There were nights when we slept back-to-back without speaking.”

He leaned forward, his eyes boring into mine.

“But we knew that we couldn’t leave,” he said firmly. “Why? Because we promised each other ‘forever.’ When we stood at the altar, we promised ‘sickness and health. We promised ‘death and afterlife.’ That is a true oath, Faith. It’s not something you just up and leave when things get hard or complicated.”



I wiped a tear from my cheek, sniffing. "I know, Pa."

"Do you?" he challenged me. "Because to my understanding, the mate bond, the thing you feel with Astor is even worse than human love. It's deeper. It's stronger and it ties your souls together."

He let go of Ma's hand and leaned back, crossing his arms. His face looked pained, as if he was remembering something terrible.

"And that's exactly what you put Astor through," he said heavily. "You broke that bond, and we watched him bleed."

Pa took a deep breath.

"The first month after you left was heartbreaking," he began. "That man tried so hard. He tried to put on a strong face in front of everybody. He went to meetings. He trained the warriors. He smiled when he had to."

Pa shook his head. "But it was a mask. We could see through it. He was withering in front of all of us, Faith. It was like watching a strong oak tree dying because it had no water. Inside, he was screaming."

I covered my mouth with my hand to stop a sob from escaping.

"The second month was just terrible on him," Pa continued, his voice rough. "The mask fell off. We could see that he was losing weight. His clothes were hanging off his body. dark circles appeared under his eyes because he was losing sleep. He stopped eating. He stopped laughing."

Pa looked out the window, staring into the darkness.

"And then," he whispered, "he just turned cold. The light went out in his eyes. That's when he became the ghost Liam."

I closed my eyes. I could picture Astor, thin and tired, sitting alone in his office. My heart broke into a million pieces. I talked to him a lot within that first month and I don't understand why he couldn't tell me that he was struggling with the distance. I thought I was our relationship but I was killing my mate.

"I understand," I choked out. "I understand what you are saying, Pa. I hurt him. I broke him."

I opened my eyes and looked at my parents.

"But," I said urgently. "There's something else. Today, when I saw him... there was something up with the way he looks at me. I know he's hurt. I know he might hate me right now. But when I looked into his eyes they looked... empty," I insisted. "It looked unnatural. Even if he's heartbroken, those eyes? They were dead."

“Maybe,” he said. “Maybe there’s something happening to him.”

But then he pointed a finger at me again.

“But before you run off to play detective,” he warned me, “before you try to figure out if something is wrong with Astor, you need to answer one question.”

The room went deadly silent.

“Ask yourself if you are willing to stay with him through everything,” Pa said. His voice was like iron “Through the anger. Through the healing. Through the bad days that will come even after you fix this.”

He waited for a moment to let the words sink in.

“If the answer is no,” he said, “if there is even a tiny part of you that thinks you might leave again, then you need to go now. Now is the perfect time for you to go and leave that man the way he is.”

“Why?” I asked, my voice trembling.

“Because if you leave now, he will never have to suffer your absence again,” Pa said simply. “He is already cold. He is already numb. Don’t wake him up, make him love you again, and then leave him

to die a second time. That would be cruel.”

I looked down at my hands. They were shaking. It wasn’t just about fighting bad guys anymore. It was about promising my life to my mate, no matter what.

I thought about Astor. I thought about his smile, his warmth, and the family we were supposed to have. I realized that my fear didn’t matter. My freedom didn’t matter. Only he mattered.

“I’m staying,” I whispered. Then I said it louder. “I’m not going anywhere. I will fix him, and I will never leave him again.”

Pa watched me for a long time. He was looking for any sign of a lie. Finally, his face softened. The hard lines around his mouth disappeared.

He walked around the table and pulled me into another hug, but this one was different. It was gentle. It was comforting.

“Good,” he said into my hair. “That’s what I needed to hear.”

He pulled back and looked at me with a small smile.

“And you know,” he added, “if you decided to leave, we would have packed our bags tonight.”

I looked at him in surprise. “What? But you said you loved it here.”

“We do,” Pa said. “But you are our daughter. We are a package deal, Faith. Where you go, we will go.”

Fresh tears filled my eyes, but these were happy tears. Even when he was scolding me, even when he was telling me the harsh truth, he was still on my side. He was still my Pa.

“Thank you,” I whispered. “Thank you for telling me where I was wrong. And thank you for never leaving me.”

“We are family,” Ma said, coming over to join the hug. “Family stays.”

## Alpha’s Regret: Begging For My Luna Back – Chapter 177

The morning sun came through the window, but I didn’t feel the warmth.

Before I could even open my eyes, my hand moved across the bed. I reached out to the other side of the mattress, expecting to feel warm skin. I expected to feel Astor’s strong back or his arm.

But my hand touched nothing.

I opened my eyes. The space beside me was empty.

Astor didn’t come home last night.

A sharp pain hit my chest and it felt like someone had punched me in the gut. My wolf let out a low, sad whine in my head. She was heartbroken.

I pulled the cold blanket up to my chin. I felt tears burning my eyes, but I refused to let them fall. I’m not weak and most importantly somethings wrong with him.

I had to believe it was true. If I believed that Astor truly hated me, I would fall apart. And I could not fall apart. I have a pack to save.

Just then, my phone buzzed on the nightstand. The sound was loud in the quiet room.

I picked it up. It was Liam.

I answered it quickly. “Liam? Are you okay? Did you make it to the Shadow Moon Pack?”

“I’m here,” Liam said. His voice sounded strange. He sounded out of breath, like he had been running or hiding.

“What is it?” I asked, gripping the phone tight.

“I started asking questions as soon as I got here,” Liam said. “I went to the borders. I talked to some of the lower-ranked wolves. Faith... there was no attack.”

I frowned. “What do you mean?”

“Annabella said she came to the Eternal Pack because Kyle attacked the Shadow Moon Pack, right?” Liam asked.

“Yes,” I said. “She said her dad sent her away for safety while they rebuilt.”

“It’s a lie,” Liam said firmly. “Kyle never touched this pack. There are no ruined buildings. There are no injured wolves. The pack is perfectly fine. It has been peaceful here for months.”

My blood ran cold.

“She lied,” I whispered. “The only reason she came to this pack was to be near Astor.”

“Exactly,” Liam said. “But this place... it is weird.”

“Weird how?” I asked.

“It is very secretive,” Liam explained. “The guards are nervous. They don’t let anyone get close to the Alpha’s house. There is a strange energy in the air here. It feels heavy and dark, just at our Pack.”

He paused for a second.

“I need to stay here longer,” he said. “I need to find out what they are hiding. I feel like the answer to alpha Astor’s behavior is hidden somewhere in this pack.”

“Stay as long as you need. But be careful, Liam. If they are lying about the attack, they might be dangerous.”

“I’ll watch my back and call you when I know more.”

The line went dead.

I put the phone down. My hands were shaking. Annabelle was a liar. That much was confirmed. But I needed to know more about her family. I needed to know what kind of people I was dealing with.

I picked up the phone again but I hesitated for a moment, then I dialed a number I didn't use very often.

It rang three times. Then, a bright, happy voice answered.

"Faith! My darling!"

It was my biological mother.

I felt a sudden wave of awkwardness.

We haven't talked much since I left I've only probably talked to her about five times. She was trying really hard to be a mom.

"Hi... mom," I said. The word still felt a little strange on my tongue, but it also felt nice.

"I am so happy you called" she said. Her voice was full of genuine joy. "I missed hearing your voice. How are you doing? Are you back home?"

I sat down on the edge of the bed. Her affection was overwhelming, but in a good way.

"I'm okay," I lied. "I missed you too."

"That makes my day," she said warmly. "But I have I question, what is happening at the Shadow Moon Pack?" I know my mom and her brother I don't have the best kind of relationship but I don't know if they've fixed it or not at the end of the day I actually been she's the only person who can help me understand what's going on.

The happy tone in her voice vanished instantly. "Why are you asking about them?"

"Because Annabelle is here," I said. ". She has been living here for two months."

"What?" my mother gasped. "Annabelle is there? With you?"

"Yes," I said. "Why? Is that bad?"

"Faith, listen to me," my mother said. Her voice was suddenly very serious and urgent. "You need to be careful. You need to stay away from that girl."

"Why?" I asked again. "She is just a bratty girl, isn't she?"

"No," my mother said. "She is not just a brat. She is dangerous. And her father... my brother... he's worse."

I held my breath. "How."

“I haven’t talked to my brother in a really long time,” she admitted. “The last time I went to their pack, I suspected that there was something wasn’t right there.”

“Why?”

“There was a strange energy there. It wasn’t like a normal werewolf pack. It felt dark and creepy.”

My heart started to pound. That’s exactly what Liam said and that’s exactly what I feel here.

“Mom,” I said, my voice trembling. “I think they brought that energy here. The Eternal Pack feels the same way. Astor is acting like a zombie. Everyone is acting strange.”

My mother made a scared sound.

“I suspect that my brother is doing much worse than Kyle did but I don’t understand why they chose the Eternal pack.” she said and I’m honestly just as confused because I didn’t think they were issues between Astor and my uncle.

But whatever it is I’m going to stop them. I’ve dealt with my own brother so my uncle is just irrelevant in comparison.

## Alpha’s Regret: Begging For My Luna Back – Chapter 178

Is it ready yet, Mom?” Marco asked, tugging on my shirt.

“Almost,” I said with a smile. “Go wash your hands.”

Making breakfast for the kids was the only normal part of my morning.

I really missed them and the whole month without them was just terrible because they keep me saying by their noise but they seem to not have missed me because they would rather play out the whole day than come home.

My mind was full of thoughts about Annabelle and Astor, but I didn’t let the children see that.

I put on a happy face. I piled their plates high with fluffy pancakes, scrambled eggs, and fruit.

They ate quickly, laughing and talking with their mouths full. They were happy and it honestly takes me back to what pa said because I think it was really troubling for them to have to go from one pack to another.

“Can we go play at the pack house?” Isabella asked, wiping milk off his lip. “All the other kids are there.”

“Yes, you can go,” I said. “But stay together. And don’t go into the woods.”

“Yay!” they cheered. They grabbed their shoes and ran out the door. The house was suddenly quiet again.

I on the other hand needed to find Alice.

I put on my jacket and walked out into the cool morning air. I walked towards the pack house, asking people if they had seen her.

Imagine my shock when I found out that she was at orphanage.

Alice was selfish and scheming. Why would she be at a place full of needy children?

I walked toward the orphanage building and as I got closer, I heard the sound of children laughing.

I didn’t walk in through the front door right away. Instead, I stood by a window and looked inside. I wanted to see what she was doing before she saw me.

What I saw made my jaw drop.

Alice was sitting on a big rug in the middle of the room. She was surrounded by about ten little children. She was holding a colorful storybook in her hands.

“And then,” Alice said, making her voice sound silly and deep, “the big dragon flew over the castle”

The children giggled and clapped their hands. One little girl with messy pigtails was sitting right on Alice’s lap. Alice didn’t push her away. Instead, she fixed the little girl’s hair gently while she kept reading.

I watched Alice’s face. She was smiling. It wasn’t a fake smile. It wasn’t a mean smirk. It was a genuine, soft smile. Her eyes looked kind.

I stood there for a full minute, just watching. She looked... good.

I took a deep breath and opened the door.

The bell above the door chimed. Alice looked up. When she saw me standing there, the smile fell off her face instantly

She looked shocked and afraid. Her hands started to shake, and she almost dropped the book. She looked like a deer caught in headlights.

“Faith?” she whispered.

But before she could say anything else, the children saw me.

“Luna Faith! Luna Faith!”

The kids jumped up and ran toward me. They surrounded me, hugging my legs and grabbing my hands. They were so happy.

“You are back!” a little boy shouted. “We missed you so much!”

I knelt down to their level. My heart felt warm. “I missed you too, sweethearts. I missed all of you.”

“Did you bring us presents?” one girl asked.

“Shh,” another boy said. “Don’t be rude. Luna Faith is busy.”

Then, the little girl with the pigtails looked at me with big, bright eyes.

“Luna Faith,” she said seriously. “Your sister Alice is very good.”

I looked up at Alice, who was still standing by the rug, looking nervous.

“Is she?” I asked the girl.

“Yes!” the girl said. “She reads us stories every day. And she gives us extra food when we are hungry. She even helped me fix my doll when the arm broke.”

“She is the best,” another boy agreed. “We love Alice.”

I listened to them compliment her over and over again. It was surprising. Actually, it was shocking. But it was a good surprise. It seemed that while I was gone, Alice changed.

“Alice,” I said calmly. “Can we talk outside for a moment? She swallowed hard looking terrifyingly pale. She nodded slowly. “Yes, Faith.”

She told the kids to keep looking at the pictures in the book. Then, she walked toward me with her head down. We walked out onto the porch and closed the door.

As soon as we were alone, Alice started to speak fast. Her voice was trembling.



“I know why you are here,” she said and tears started to fill her eyes. “I know you don’t want me here. I know you hate me.”

She took a shaky breath.

“You’re probably here to kick me out of the pack,” she continued. “Or maybe... maybe you are going to have me executed and banished for the things I did in the past. I understand. I deserve it.”

She closed her eyes, waiting for me to yell at her.

I looked at her. She looked small and scared. “Alice, look at me,” I said.

She opened her eyes slowly.

“I don’t want to do that,” I told her.

She looked confused. “You... you don’t?”

“No,” I said. I crossed my arms. “Listen, Alice. What you did in the past was unforgivable. But it’s also the past and I don’t want to think about it.” I said, my voice turning serious. “I need your help. I need to know everything about Annabelle.”

Because Alice was as much as of a bully as Annabelle they spent a lot of time together and she was honestly her favorite cousin.

Alice wiped her tears away and nodded. She tried to compose herself.

Annabelle is after Astor,” Alice said. “She is obsessed with him. She follows

him everywhere. She is always touching his arm, whispering in his ear.” The fact that I didn’t have to ask twice was surprising but the most surprising was how quick she just gave Annabelle away.

“And Astor, there’s something different about him, Faith. He doesn’t push her away. He just stands there. It is like he is sleepwalking.” I guess pa was right when he said that everybody can see it.

I stepped forward and wrapped my arms around Alice. She stiffened in surprise and she didn’t move for a second. It was the first time in years hugged her.

“You have really become a very good and nice” I whispered to her. “I am proud of you.”

I pulled back and held her by the shoulders. I looked her deep in the eyes. My brown eyes flashed for a second, letting my wolf peek through.

“But listen to me closely, Alice,” I warned her. My voice was low and dangerous.

“I am giving you a chance,” I said. “But if I hear that you are planning to cross me, or if I find out you are working with Annabelle to hurt my pack, you will face a side of me that you will not like. I will not be merciful a second time.”

I expected her to be offended. I expected her to get angry.

But she didn’t. Instead, she nodded her head vigorously. She looked determined.

“I understand, Faith,” she said firmly. “I would never cross you again. I am on your side. I promise.”

Good,” I said. “Then wipe your face. We have work to do.”

## Alpha’s Regret: Begging For My Luna Back – Chapter 179

I was in the living room, folding some laundry, when I heard a sound that made my heart stop.

The front door unlocked. The handle turned. “Daddy!”

“My babies” he shouted.

He laughed a real, deep, booming laugh that I missed hearing.

He fell on the rug with the kids all over him.

“You are crushing me!” he groaned playfully. “Help! I am being attacked by tiny wolves!”

I stood by the sofa, holding a folded shirt against my chest. I watched them. My heart ached. Despite everything that was happening between us, despite the coldness and the secrets, Astor was honestly a good dad.

He loved them so much. It was beautiful to see, but it also made me sad because he wasn’t looking at me. He was only looking at them.

“Did you bring us anything?” our son asked.

“I brought myself,” Astor said, tickling him. “Is that not enough?”

“No!” they both screamed, laughing.

They played for an hour. Astor built a castle out of blocks. He wrestled with them on the carpet. For a while, the house felt happy. It felt like the old days.

Then, it was time for dinner.

“Alright, time to eat,” I announced. My voice sounded a little nervous.

We all sat at the table. I had warmed up the leftovers that my parents brought yesterday. The smell of roast chicken filled the room.

The dinner was... strange.

The kids were chatting non-stop.

“Daddy, I drew a picture of a wolf today! Isabella said.

“And I learned how to tie my shoes” Marco added.

Astor listened to every word and he nodded and smiled at them. “That’s amazing, buddy. Good job.”

But whenever he wasn’t looking at the kids, his face went blank. He didn’t look at me once. He stared at his plate. He ate his food quickly, like it was a chore. When I passed him the salt, our fingers brushed for a second and the

sparks returned but he pulled his hand away like I burned him.

It hurt. But I kept eating and kept smiling for the kids.

After dinner, the kids grabbed his hands. “Storytime! Storytime!”

Astor let them drag him to their bedroom. I followed them quietly and stood in the doorway, leaning against the frame.

Astor sat in the rocking chair. He opened a big book about a bear who lost his hat. He didn’t just read the words; he did the voices too. He made a deep voice for the bear and a squeaky voice for the rabbit. The kids were mesmerized. Their eyes were heavy, fighting sleep.

Within ten minutes, they were both fast asleep.

Astor closed the book gently. He stood up and tucked the blankets around them and kissed their foreheads.

He looked at them with so much love it made my chest tight.

Then, he turned around and saw me in the doorway.

The warmth vanished from his eyes and the ice returned. He walked past me without saying a word, his shoulder brushing mine as he went to our bedroom.

I gave him a few minutes. I went to check the on things in the kitchen. Then, I took a deep breath and walked to the master bedroom.

The room was dark. The only light came from the moon shining through the window.

Astor was already in bed. He was lying on his side, facing away from the door. He was perfectly still. His breathing was slow and even.

He was pretending to be asleep just like he has been pretending like his haunted by something because I saw that man with his kids right now and the cold look in His Eyes vanished when he looked at them but when he looks at me it just comes back.

I don't buy it anymore.

I didn't get under the covers yet. I just stood there, looking at his back.

"Astor," I whispered.

He didn't move.

"I know you are awake," I said.

He kept breathing slowly.

"You can try to regulate your breathing all you want," I said, a little louder. "But you forget who I am. I am a White Wolf. I can hear everything. You are not sleeping."

For a moment, there was silence. Then, Astor let out a long, heavy sigh. It was a sound of pure frustration.

He rolled over onto his back and opened his eyes. He stared up at the ceiling, refusing to look at me.

"I just want one night of peace, Faith," he said. His voice was tired and rough.

"Please. I am exhausted."

"I am not going to fight you," I said.

"I know that if we start talking, it will just turn into an argument," he said. "You will ask me questions and I will get angry then we will yell and I don't have the energy for it tonight."

He started to turn away again.

I made a decision. I wasn't going to let him turn away.

I didn't walk around to my side of the bed. Instead, I climbed right onto the mattress from the bottom.

I crawled on my hands and knees until I was right next to him. Then, I flopped down on my stomach, propping my chin on his chest.

He flinched, looking at me with wide, shocked eyes. He wasn't expecting that.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"I told you," I said, smiling down at him. "There will be no argument whatsoever between the two of us tonight."

"Get off," he grumbled, but he didn't push me away. "You are heavy."

"I am not heavy," I argued. "I am light as a feather. You are just weak."

I saw a tiny twitch in his jaw. He was trying not to react.

"Faith, go to sleep," he said sternly. He tried to look cold but I wasn't buying it. I know my mate.

I reached out and poked his nose. He blinked. "Did you just poke me?"

"Maybe," I said. I poked his cheek. "You have a frown line right here. It makes you look like a grumpy old grandpa."

"I am not a grandpa," he snapped, but his voice wasn't as hard as before.

"You are acting like one," I teased. "Grumpy grandpa Astor. I did a terrible impression of an old man voice."

Astor stared at me. He was fighting a battle inside his head. He wanted to stay mad. He wanted to stay cold. But I was right there, in his face, being silly.

I crossed my eyes and stuck out my tongue.

Astor let out a short, sharp snort. He couldn't help it.

"You are ridiculous," he said.

"And you are smiling," I pointed out.

"I am not," he lied.

“Yes, you are,” I said. I poked the corner of his mouth. “Look at that. It is a smile. I found it!”

For a few seconds, the wall came down completely. Astor looked at me, and his eyes were soft. He let out a small chuckle.

“You are annoying,” he whispered. But he didn’t sound angry. He reached up, and for one heartbeat, his hand touched my hair. It was a gentle touch. It was electric.

“I missed you,” I whispered.

Suddenly, Astor froze. The smile vanished. It was like he remembered who he was supposed to be.

He pulled his hand away from my hair. His eyes went flat and cold again.

He gently but firmly pushed me off his chest.

“Go to sleep, Faith,” he said. His voice was like ice again.

He rolled over, turning his back to me. He pulled the blanket up to his shoulder, shutting me out.

I lay there on my side of the bed, staring at his back. My heart hurt, but I also proved my suspicions that something is going on with him but the most important thing is that I’ve just discovered that he is pretending and the question is why.

## Alpha’s Regret: Begging For My Luna Back – Chapter 18o

I woke up and looked at the clock. It was 4:30 in the morning. Beside me, Astor was deep asleep. He was breathing softly. He looked peaceful.

I slipped out of bed very quietly. I didn’t want to wake him up..

I put on my working clothes and I tied my hair back in a tight ponytail and looked in the mirror. I looked ready for business.

I left the house and walked straight to the Pack House. The air was a bit chilly in the early morning, but I didn’t care.

When I walked inside, the huge house was silent. Most of the pack was still sleeping. Only the Omegas were awake. They were in the kitchen, starting to clean.

“Luna?” one of them asked. “Is something wrong?”

“No,” I said loudly. “But somethings need to change.”

I walked into the main living room and looked around. The furniture was arranged differently than before I left.

There were new curtains I hated. There were ugly vases I didn’t buy. The whole place smelled like lavender which I know most people were in the pack hate the smell of.

“I want everything moved. I want this place to look exactly how it looked six months ago. Every chair, every table, every painting. Put it back.”

They started to work, but it wasn’t fast enough. I wanted this done before breakfast.

I closed my eyes and opened the pack mind-link. I spoke to everyone in the pack who was awake.

“This is your Luna, I need everyone at the Pack House immediately. We are doing a deep cleaning. If you are awake, get your butt down here.”

Within ten minutes, the house was full of people. It was chaos. People were dragging tables across the floor. Dust was flying everywhere. I was shouting orders like a general in a war.

“scrub the floors!” I yelled. “Wash the walls! Open the windows!”

About an hour later, the front door slammed open.

Astor stood there. He was wearing sweatpants and a t-shirt. His hair was messy. He looked confused and very annoyed.

“What on earth is going on?” he shouted over the noise of a vacuum cleaner.

He walked over to me. I was standing in the middle of the room, holding a clipboard.

“Why is everyone screaming?” he asked. “Why is the living room upside down?”

I smiled at him. “We are cleaning, Astor. We are putting things back to where they belong.”

“At 6:00 in the morning?” he snapped.

“Stop this. Tell them to stop.”

“No,” I said calmly.

“Faith,” he warned. “I don’t have time for games. Stop whatever you are doing.”

I stepped closer to him. I looked him right in the eye.

“I will not stop,” I said. “If I don’t like the way a chair is sitting, it will have to move. If I don’t like the smell, I will scrub it out.”

Astor looked like he wanted to argue, but he stopped. He looked over my shoulder and

I turned my head slightly. Standing on the staircase was Annabella. She was wearing a silk robe. She was watching us. Her eyes were narrowed. She looked like she wanted to kill me from a distance.

I turned back to Astor and grinned. I decided to put on a show.

“Oh, Astor, honey!” I said in a loud, sugary voice.

I grabbed his arm and hugged it tight against my chest.

“I Don’t be a grump.” Astor stiffened. He tried to pull his arm away. “Faith, what are you doing? Let go.”

“No,” I said. I reached up and pinched his cheek. “You are so cute when you are mad.”

The warriors nearby stopped moving furniture. They were watching us, trying not to laugh.

Astor’s face turned red. “Faith, stop it. People are watching.”

“Let them watch,” I said. I rested my head on his shoulder. “He tried to pry my fingers off his arm, but I held on tight. It was a funny wrestling match. He was strong, but I was stubborn.

“Get off me,” he hissed.

“I will,” I whispered in his ear. “But only if you agree to come with me somewhere. Right now.”

“I am not going anywhere with you,” he said.

“Okay,” I said loudly. “Then I guess you’re disturbing me because they still a lot to be done because

after this I’m coming to deal with your office.

Astor panicked. “Fine! Fine! I will come with you!”

I let go of him immediately. “Great! Let’s go.”

I grabbed his hand and dragged him out the back door. Annabella was still glaring at the top of the stairs, but I didn’t even look at her.



We walked into the woods behind the pack house. The noise of the cleaning faded away. It became quiet.

Astor was walking behind me, grumbling. “Where are you taking me? This is ridiculous.”

“Just follow me,” I said.

We walked for about ten minutes until we reached a small clearing. It was a circle of grass surrounded by tall pine trees.

“This place hasn’t changed in six months,” I said, looking around. “It is peaceful.”

Astor crossed his arms. “Okay, we are here. Now tell me what you are doing.”

I didn’t answer him with words. Instead, I closed my eyes.

I focused on my energy. I imagined a big, invisible bubble around us. I pushed my power out. I felt the air shimmer.

A shield formed around the clearing. It was a privacy shield.

I opened my eyes. “There. Now nobody can see us. Nobody can hear us. Even if they are standing right outside the trees, they won’t know we’re here.”

Astor looked impressed. He looked around, sensing the magic.

“Your powers have become a lot more controlled,” he admitted.

“Yes,” I agreed. “I learned a lot while I was gone. Now give me your hands,” I said.

“Why?” He asked

“Just do it, Astor.”

He hesitated, then he held out his hands. I took them in mine. His hands were warm.

I closed my eyes again. I started an internal chant. It wasn’t a spell to hurt him. It was a cleansing spell. I wanted to remove the dark magic.

I sent my white magic into his body. I searched his heart. I searched his mind.

I searched for a long time but I found... nothing.

There was no curse. There was no mind control. There was no dark magic clouding his brain. His energy was clear. His mind was his own.

My eyes flew open. I dropped his hands like they were hot.

I looked at his face. I looked at the ‘cold’ expression he always wore.

Suddenly, I understood.

“There is nothing there,” I whispered.

“What?”

“There is no magic on you,” I said, my voice getting louder. “Annabella didn’t spell you. You are not cursed.”

Astor went very still.

“You have been pretending,” I accused him.

I pointed a finger at his chest.

“You are not a ghost,” I said angrily. “You are not a zombie. You are doing this on purpose! You are acting cold because you want to!”

I felt betrayed. I thought he was a victim. I thought I needed to save him. But he was just lying to me.

“Why?” I demanded. “Why are you pretending? What’s going on? Tell me the truth, Astor! Right now!”