

Brother's Best Friends Are My Mates

Chapter 171 -180

Brother's Best Friends Are My Mates

The familiar gates of our territory should have brought relief. Instead, they felt like a mockery.

I rode in the lead vehicle, every muscle in my body screaming with exhaustion and barely healed wounds.

Behind me, the medical van carried what was left of my team. Five warriors. Five, out of twelve who'd left three days ago.

Derek was unconscious, hooked up to an IV. Emergency surgery had stopped the worst of the bleeding, but he'd lost too much blood.

Fuck. The others were just as bad. Official source is

My silver-blue eyes burned as I stared through the windshield. We'd walked straight into a trap. But all of that could wait. There was only one thing that mattered now.

Sera.

I needed to see her. Touch her. Make sure she was safe. The last days had been hell, not just because of the ambush, but because I'd been cut off from our mindlink. The rogues had used some kind of jamming magic that blocked all supernatural communications.

Without hearing her voice. Without feeling her presence.

It was torture.

The convoy pulled up to the main compound. I was out of the SUV before it fully stopped, my boots hitting the gravel with purpose.

"Get them to the medical wing" I barked at the guards who rushed forward. "Now."

I didn't wait to watch. My feet were already carrying me toward the main building, toward home, toward Sera.

The front doors opened before I reached them. Lucas emerged, flanked by two senior pack members. But something was wrong. His face was too pale.

“Where is she?” I scanned the area behind him. “Where’s Sera?”

Lucas stopped walking. The other pack members exchanged glances.

That was when I knew.

“Lucas.” My voice dropped to the dangerous tone that made grown wolves submit. “Where. Is. My. Mate.”

“Damien, you need to calm down and ”

“Answer the fucking question!”

My alpha power exploded outward like a shockwave. Every wolf in a fifty-foot radius dropped their heads in submission. Car alarms went off. Windows rattled.

Lucas winced but held his ground. “She’s... she’s not here.”

The words hit me like a physical blow. My vision went dark around the edges.

“What do you mean she’s not here?”

“I just got the news that she left yesterday morning,” Lucas said quickly. “She was worried about you. About the team. When we lost contact, she... she said she was going to find you.”

The world tilted sideways.

“She WHAT?”

My hands were shaking. Actually shaking.

Sera was out there. Alone.

I spun away from him, my fists clenched so tight my knuckles had gone white. Every instinct was screaming at me to shift, to hunt, to tear apart anything that had dared threaten my mate.

But first, I tried the mindlink.

“Sera? Sera, can you hear me?”

Nothing.

“Sera, baby, please respond. I’m back. I’m safe. Where are you?”

Still nothing. Just empty silence where her warm presence should be.

The bond between us felt... wrong. Not severed, but muffled. Like something was blocking it.

“Have you sent search teams?” I asked without turning around.

“Six teams. They’ve been out all night. No sign of her yet, but we—”

“Double them.”

“Sir?”

I whirled back to face him, and I saw him take an involuntary step backward. Whatever he saw in my eyes scared him.

“Double the search teams. Triple them. I want every available warrior out there. I want helicopters. I want drones. I want every inch of that forest searched.”

“Damien, you need medical attention. You’re covered in blood, and you haven’t slept.”

“I don’t give a fuck about sleep!” The words exploded out of me with enough force to make the nearby windows shake again. “My mate is missing! My pregnant mate is somewhere out there, probably hurt, possibly captured by the same bastards who tried to kill my team!”

My voice cracked on the last words. The rage was giving way to something darker. Something that felt like drowning.

“She’s carrying our child, Lucas. Our baby. And I wasn’t here to protect her.”

“Sera, please. Please answer me. I can’t... I can’t lose you,”

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The first thing that hit me when consciousness crawled back was the smell.

Human waste. Unwashed bodies. Fear so thick it coated the back of my throat like oil. I gagged, my stomach lurching as the full assault of odors invaded my senses.

I was lying on something cold and rough. Stone, maybe concrete. My body ached everywhere, but it was a distant, muffled pain-like my nerve endings had been wrapped in cotton. The wolf poison. Still working its way through my system.

“Ayla?”

Nothing. Not even a whisper of her presence. The silence in my mind was terrifying, like losing a limb I'd never realized I needed.

I forced my eyes open, blinking against the dim light filtering through a barred window high above. The cell was small, maybe twelve feet by eight, with walls that looked like they hadn't been cleaned in decades. Dark stains I didn't want to identify marked the concrete.

But the worst part wasn't the conditions. It was the people.

At least a dozen other prisoners huddled against the walls, their clothes torn and filthy, their faces gaunt with hunger and terror. Though I caught the scent of a few wolves mixed in. All of them looked broken.

A woman in the far corner rocked back and forth, her arms wrapped around her knees. She couldn't have been older than twenty, but her hair was already streaked with premature gray. She muttered something under her breath—a prayer, maybe, or just meaningless words to keep the silence at bay.

Two men sat near the door, their backs pressed against the wall. One had a bandage wrapped around his head that had turned brown with old blood. The other kept glancing at the door with the kind of watchful terror,

Before I could ask anything, the sound of heavy boots echoed from somewhere beyond the cell door. The effect on the other prisoners was immediate. Everyone shrank back, pressing themselves against the walls as if they could disappear into the concrete.

The rocking woman stopped mid-motion, her eyes going wide with fear.

“Please,” someone whispered. “Not again.”

Keys rattled in the lock. The door swung open with a screech of rusted hinges that made my teeth ache.

Two soldiers entered.

“Webb,” the taller one called out, consulting a piece of paper. His voice was flat, bored, like he was reading a grocery list.

The man with the head bandage went pale. His companion grabbed his arm.

“No,” the friend whispered urgently. “Hide. Don't go.”

But he was already standing, his whole body shaking. “That's... that's me.”

The soldiers stepped forward. One grabbed his arm while the other unlocked a set of shackles from his belt.

“Please,” he begged as they clamped the metal around his wrists. “I don’t know anything—”

The shorter soldier backhanded him across the face, cutting off his words. Blood trickled from his split lip.

“Save it for upstairs,” the soldier said.

They dragged him toward the door. His friend lunged forward.

“Where are you taking him? When will he be back?”

The tall soldier paused in the doorway, a cruel smile spreading across his face. “He won’t be.”

The door slammed shut. The lock turned with finality.

Screams echoed down the corridor, growing fainter and fainter until they cut off abruptly.

Then silence.

My stomach dropped. I tried again to reach for Ayla, desperate for even a hint of her strength, her courage. But the wolf poison had built a wall between us that I couldn’t break through.

“Think, Sera. There has to be a way out of here.”

I studied the cell more carefully. The door was solid steel with a small barred window. The lock looked new and expensive-not something I could pick even if I had the tools. The walls were thick concrete, and the only other opening was the barred window near the ceiling, too small and too high to be useful.

Without my wolf strength, without Ayla’s enhanced senses, I was just human. Weak. Vulnerable.

Hours passed. More soldiers came. More prisoners were taken away.

Each time the door opened, my heart hammered against my ribs. Each time they called out a name that wasn’t mine, relief and guilt warred in my chest.

None of them came back.

By the time full darkness settled over our cell, only eight of us remained. I pressed myself against the wall, my heart racing. Around me, the remaining prisoners huddled together like sheep sensing wolves.

The footsteps stopped outside our door.

Keys rattled. The lock turned. Discover more novels at Find-Novel.net

The door opened, revealing three soldiers this time instead of two. The one in the middle wore sergeant's stripes and carried himself with the confidence of someone used to being obeyed.

He stepped into the cell, his cold gaze sweeping over us before settling on me.

“Seraphina.”

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The cold metal of the shackles bit into my wrists as they dragged me from the cell. My legs barely held my weight-the wolf poison still coursed through my veins like liquid fire, keeping Ayla buried somewhere deep and unreachable.

“Move!” The guard's boot connected with my lower back, sending me stumbling forward down the narrow corridor.

Every step echoed off the concrete walls. The prisoners in the other cells pressed themselves against the bars, watching with hollow eyes as I passed. They knew. They all knew where this led.

To the execution chamber.

My heart hammered against my ribs, but I forced myself to stand straighter. Whatever happened, I wouldn't give them the satisfaction of seeing me break.

The corridor opened into a larger room that stank of blood and death. Harsh fluorescent lights buzzed overhead, casting sickly shadows across what looked like an abandoned warehouse. Metal chains hung from the ceiling. Dark stains covered the concrete floor. NEW NOVEL CHAPTERS ARE PUBLISHED ON

And there, waiting for me like a queen holding court, stood Valerie.

She'd cleaned herself up since our last encounter. Her golden hair was pulled back in a sleek ponytail, and she wore fresh clothes-black jeans and a red silk blouse that probably cost more than most people made in a month. But I could still see the faint bruises around her throat from where I'd tried to choke the life out of her.

Not that I regretted it. Only that I'd failed.

Beside her, Voss lounged in what looked like a throne made from welded metal and animal pelts. The rogue king was even more massive than I remembered, his scarred face split in a predatory grin as his cold eyes took in my restrained form.

“Well, well,” Valerie purred, her voice dripping with false sweetness. “Look what the cat dragged in.”

The guards forced me to my knees in front of them. The concrete was rough and cold against my shins, but I kept my chin up. Met her gaze with every ounce of defiance I had left.

“Sister dear,” I said, my voice hoarse but steady. “Still playing dress-up, I see.”

Her smile faltered for just a moment. Good. I could still get under her skin.

“You always did have a smart mouth,” she said, taking a step closer. “But that’s about to change.”

I tried to reach for Ayla again, desperate for even a whisper of her strength. Nothing. The wolf poison had built a wall between us that felt impossibly thick.

“You know,” Voss continued conversationally, “I’ve been running this operation for a long time. Years of collecting the worst scum the wolf world has to offer. Death row inmates, every last one of them.”

My blood ran cold. “What are you talking about?”

“The cells downstairs,” Valerie explained, her voice bright with malicious glee. “They’re not just prison cells, Sera. They’re holding areas. For condemned prisoners waiting for execution.”

“We’ve been working our way through the list,” Voss added. “One by one.” He grinned. “And now it’s your turn.”

The casual cruelty in his voice made my skin crawl. But I wouldn’t give them the fear they wanted.

“Damien will come for you,” I said, pouring every ounce of conviction I could muster into the words. “When he finds out what you’ve done, he’ll hunt you to the ends of the earth. Both of you.”

Valerie threw back her head and laughed. The sound echoed off the walls like breaking glass.

“Oh, Sera,” she gasped when she finally stopped. “You really think he’s coming to save you?”

“I know he is.”

“Even if he could find you,” Voss said, standing up from his throne to tower over me, “it wouldn’t matter. You see, sweetheart, by the time anyone figures out where you are, you’ll be long dead.”

“And even if by some miracle he did show up,” Valerie added, her eyes bright with cruel delight, “what exactly do you think he could do? You can’t even summon your wolf anymore.”

She was right. The wolf poison had severed my connection to Ayla so completely that I might as well have been human. Weak. Vulnerable. Ordinary.

“That’s the beauty of wolfsbane,” Valerie continued, beginning to pace around me in slow circles. “It doesn’t just block your connection to your wolf-it paralyzes the wolf itself”

My stomach lurched. “Ayla...”

“But here’s the really fun part,” Valerie said, stopping directly in front of me. “The dose we gave you before?”

That was just to keep you manageable. What we’re about to give you...” She nodded to one of the guards, who stepped forward with a syringe that looked twice as large as the one they’d used before.

The liquid inside was the same sickly green color, but there was so much more of it.

“This should be enough to kill your wolf permanently,” she said. “And then kill you.”

Terror shot through me like ice water, but I forced my voice to stay steady. “Damien won’t let this stand. Neither will any of the pack. They’ll—”

“They’ll what?” Valerie interrupted. “Hunt down a few rogue wolves who vanished into the wilderness? We’ll be ghosts by the time they even start looking.”

“You’re insane,” I whispered.

“I’m practical,” Valerie corrected. “I always hate you.”

Voss stepped toward me, the syringe ready in his massive hand. “Hold her still.”

The guards grabbed my arms, pinning them behind my back. I struggled against their grip, but without Ayla’s strength, I was no match for them.

“Wait, I gasped, desperation clawing at my chest.

“No more talking” Voss said firmly. He grabbed my head, tilting it to expose my neck. “Time to say goodbye, princess.”

The needle pierced my skin like a white-hot poker. I screamed as the poison flooded my system, burning through my veins like molten metal.

The effect was immediate and devastating.

Where the first dose had built a wall between me and Ayla, this felt like it was tearing down the very foundations of my being. Pain exploded through every nerve ending, as if my body was being turned inside out.

I convulsed against the restraints, my back arching as agony unlike anything I'd ever experienced consumed me from the inside. It felt like dying. Like every cell in my body was shutting down one by one.

"That's it." Valerie cooed.

The world tilted sideways. Colors bled together. My vision darkened at the edges.

"Ayla," I called desperately into the void where she should have been. "Ayla, please..."

But there was nothing. Not even an echo of her presence. Just a vast, empty silence that felt like the death of everything I was.

My muscles seized. My lungs burned. Every breath was a struggle that got harder with each passing second.

This was it. This was how I died.

Not in battle. Not protecting my son or my mate. But chained and poisoned in a basement like a rabid dog.

"Adrian," I thought as consciousness began to slip away. "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry I couldn't come home to you."

The darkness crept in from all sides, cold and absolute. My body went limp against the restraints as the poison finished its work.

I felt myself falling into a void so deep and black that I wondered if I'd ever find my way out.

Maybe I didn't want to.

Maybe this was better than the pain.

My eyes fluttered closed, and everything went silent.

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The first thing that hit me wasn't pain-it was the smell.

Death. Pure, concentrated death that crawled into my nostrils and wrapped around my brain like a living thing. Sweet and putrid and so thick I could taste it on my tongue.

I gagged before I even opened my eyes, my stomach lurching violently. Something was pressed against my face-something soft and wet and wrong.

I forced my eyes open and screamed.

A rotting face stared back at me, empty eye sockets crawling with maggots. I was lying face-down on a pile of corpses, my cheek pressed against decomposing flesh.

“No!” I scrambled backward, my hands slipping on things I didn’t want to identify.

Bodies everywhere. Dozens of them piled like garbage in a massive pit. Men, women, some barely more than teenagers. All in various stages of decay. Flies swarmed in thick black clouds. The stench was overwhelming.

I rolled off the pile and hit solid ground hard, fresh pain exploding through my shoulder. But I didn’t care. I had to get away from the corpses.

My stomach heaved again. I vomited until there was nothing left, my body convulsing with dry heaves that felt like they were tearing my ribs apart.

“Ayla?” I called desperately into my mind, searching for any hint of my wolf’s presence. “Ayla, please, I need you.”

Nothing. Complete, terrifying silence where she should have been.

The wolf poison. It was still in my system, cutting me off from everything that made me strong. I was alone in my own head again.

“Get up,” I whispered to myself, my voice shaking. “You have to get up.”

I tried to stand and immediately collapsed. My legs felt like water. Every muscle in my body screamed in protest. Whatever they’d injected me with had left me weaker than a human.

I looked down at myself and nearly vomited again. My clothes were in tatters, stained with blood and worse things. Dried gore caked my skin. My left ankle was swollen to twice its normal size, already turning purple.

But I was breathing. My heart was beating. Somehow, impossibly, I wasn’t dead.

“They threw me away like trash,” I realized with growing horror. “They thought I was dead and dumped me with the others.”

“Adrian, Damien” I whispered, the thought of my family giving me the strength to try again. “I have to get home.”

Using a nearby tree trunk for support, I managed to pull myself upright. My ankle nearly buckled the moment I put weight on it. Definitely sprained, possibly broken. But it held.

I looked around, trying to get my bearings. Dense forest stretched in every direction. No roads, no buildings, no signs of civilization. Just trees and underbrush that could hide an army of rogues.

“Where am I?” Panic started to claw at my chest. “How far into rogue territory did they take me?”

I picked a direction at random and started walking. Each step was agony. My ankle sent lightning bolts of pain up my leg. My ribs ached with every breath. The wolf poison made everything worse, amplifying pain that should have been manageable.

“Damien,” I tried reaching out through our mate bond. “Damien, can you hear me?”

The connection felt cold, distant, like trying to call through static. But it wasn’t broken. Muffled, maybe blocked by whatever poison they’d pumped into me.

He was alive. He had to be alive.

The forest was eerily quiet. No bird calls, no rustle of small animals. Even the trees seemed to lean away from this place, as if nature itself wanted nothing to do with the horror behind me.

After what felt like hours, I had to stop. I was gasping for air, my whole body shaking with exhaustion. My hands were trembling so badly I could barely grip the tree I was leaning against.

The wolf poison had stolen everything—my strength, my healing, my enhanced senses. I was as helpless as a newborn.

I pushed away from the tree and kept walking. My ankle was getting worse—each step sent fresh waves of agony through my leg. I started limping heavily, using trees for support whenever I could.

The sun was climbing higher, beating down through the canopy with unseasonable warmth. Sweat mixed with the dried blood on my skin, making everything itch and burn. My mouth was bone dry. When had I last had water?

A branch caught my torn shirt, yanking me backward. I stumbled, my ankle finally giving out completely. I hit the ground hard, my vision going white with pain.

For a long moment, I just lay there in the dirt and leaves, gasping. My whole body felt like it was on fire. Every cut, every bruise, every ache amplified tenfold without my wolf healing.

I rolled onto my side, biting back a scream as my ribs protested. My hands were scraped raw from all the falls. Blood seeped through my torn clothing from a dozen different wounds.

Using a fallen log for support, I managed to get back on my feet. My ankle buckled immediately, but I caught myself. I couldn't put any real weight on it anymore, but I could still hobble.

The sun reached its peak and started to descend. How many hours had I been walking? It felt like days. My legs were shaking so badly I could barely stay upright.

But I couldn't stop. Stopping meant dying. Dying meant leaving Adrian orphaned, leaving Damien to blame himself for not finding me in time.

The sun was starting to sink toward the horizon when I finally heard it-voices.

My head snapped up, ignoring the fresh wave of dizziness. Through a gap in the trees, I could see movement.

Three figures in what looked like military fatigues.

Border patrol. It had to be border patrol.

"Help," I tried to call out, but only a hoarse croak emerged from my ruined throat. I swallowed hard, tasting blood, and tried again.

"Help me," I managed, the words barely audible.

They didn't hear. They were moving away, their voices getting fainter with each step.

"No!" Panic gave me strength I didn't know I still had. I dragged myself toward them, using my arms to pull my body forward when my legs wouldn't cooperate. Rocks and roots tore at my clothes, opened fresh cuts on my skin.

"HELP!" I screamed with everything I had left, my voice breaking completely. "PLEASE, HELP ME!" Discover more novels at find{novel}.net

The figures stopped. Turned.

"Someone's out there," I heard one of them say.

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The voices grew louder as I stumbled through the underbrush, my damaged ankle screaming with every step. Through the trees ahead, I could make out the familiar sight of wooden watchtowers and chain-link fencing topped with razor wire.

The border.

Relief flooded through me so intensely I nearly collapsed right there. After hours of wandering through hostile territory, poisoned and beaten, I'd finally made it home.

"Help!" I called out, my voice cracking from dehydration. "Please! Someone help me!"

I limped toward the nearest guard post, waving my arms frantically to get their attention. The two soldiers on duty turned at the sound of my voice, their hands immediately moving to their weapons.

"Stop right fucking there!" one of them shouted, raising his rifle. The barrel pointed directly at my chest.

"Don't you dare take another step!"

"Please," I gasped, continuing to stumble forward on my broken ankle. "I need help. I'm-"

"Are you deaf?" The soldier's voice was sharp with authority and disgust. "I said STOP! One more step and I'll blow your goddamn head off!"

I froze, swaying dangerously on my feet. These were pack soldiers. My people. My protectors. Why were they pointing guns at me like I was some kind of monster?

"I'm Seraphina," I tried to explain, my words coming out in desperate, broken bursts. "I'm the Luna, Please, I need to get home. I need to see Damien. I need-"

Both soldiers burst into harsh, mocking laughter. The sound was like nails on a chalkboard, cutting through me like broken glass.

"Luna?" The taller one snorted, actually doubling over with laughter. "You? Look at yourself, you crazy fucking rogue. You think we're idiots?"

I glanced down at my reflection in a puddle near my feet and nearly recoiled in horror. The woman staring back at me was barely recognizable. My clothes were torn to bloody shreds, stained with gore and things I didn't want to identify. My hair was matted with dirt, blood, and chunks of rotting flesh from the corpse pile. Deep scratches and bruises covered every visible inch of my skin. I looked like exactly what they thought I was-a feral rogue who'd been living like an animal in the wild.

"I know how I look," I said, forcing my voice to stay steady even as tears threatened to spill. "But I'm telling the truth. I'm Damien's mate-"

“Alpha?” The second soldier stepped forward, his face twisted with pure revulsion. “Holy shit, the delusion on this one! You actually think we’re stupid enough to believe that load of crap?”

I pleaded, desperation making my voice crack. “Call him. Please. He’ll—”

“The Alpha King doesn’t mate with rogue trash like you,” the first soldier spat, his lip curled in disgust. “What kind of Luna doesn’t have a wolf, huh?”

My heart sank into my stomach. Without Ayla, without any sign of my wolf, without the distinctive scent that marked me as pack, I had no way to prove who I was.

“Back the fuck up!” The taller soldier’s rifle swung toward me again, his finger hovering over the trigger. “We hate rogues! What’s your purpose coming here!”

“I’m not a rogue!” Desperation made my voice crack and rise to nearly a scream.

“Shut your lying mouth!” The first soldier aimed his weapon directly at my head. “The only thing you’re gonna see is the wrong end of a silver bullet if you don’t get the hell out of here right fucking now,” the first soldier snarled, his voice dripping with venom. “You’ve got exactly ten seconds to drag your sorry ass back into whatever hole you crawled out of.”

Both soldiers shouted in unison, their weapons trained on me with deadly intent. “FUCKING LEAVE! NOW!”

I stumbled backward, my damaged ankle finally giving out completely. I hit the ground hard, pain exploding through my already broken ribs like lightning. The soldiers watched me fall with obvious satisfaction, like they’d just successfully kicked a rabid dog.

“Pathetic piece of shit, one of them muttered with disgust. “Can’t even stand up straight. Look at her, crawling around in the dirt where she belongs”

“Probably hasn’t bathed in months,” the other added with a sneer. “Smells like she’s been rolling around with corpses. Disgusting rogue filth.”

I tried desperately to push myself up, but my arms were shaking so badly I couldn’t support my own weight. The wolf poison, the injuries, the exhaustion, the sheer emotional devastation—everything was catching up to me at once. My vision started to blur dangerously around the edges, black spots dancing across my field of view.

“Help,” I whispered, though I knew it was completely useless. “Someone... anyone... please...”

“Should we just shoot her now?” a soldier asked casually, like he was discussing the weather. “Put her out of her misery? Might be a mercy at this point.”

“Nah,” the other one replied with a cruel chuckle. “Let nature take its course. She’ll be dead in an hour anyway, and then we won’t have to waste a bullet or file paperwork.”

I closed my eyes, feeling consciousness start to slip away like sand through my fingers. Adrian's sweet face flashed through my mind-my precious little boy with his silver-blue eyes and infectious laugh. He was probably wondering where Mommy had gone. Would he grow up thinking I'd abandoned him? NEW NOVEL CHAPTERS are published on Find~Novel.net

The baby. Oh god, the innocent little life growing inside me. What had the wolf poison done to my unborn pup? Had I already lost them without even knowing?

The world was turning gray and fuzzy. I could hear the soldiers talking, but their voices sounded like they were coming from underwater.

I thought of Damien's gentle smile when he looked at me in the mornings. Adrian's delighted squeals when I pushed him on the swing. The way my unborn baby had felt fluttering inside me during those brief, precious moments when I'd been able to sense the pregnancy through my wolf connection.

All of it slipping away into darkness. All of it ending here in the dirt at the feet of soldiers who saw me as nothing more than garbage to be discarded.

Just as I felt myself falling into unconsciousness, the sound of approaching footsteps cut through the haze.

"What the hell is going on here?" The voice was sharp, commanding, and aching familiar.

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The morning sun beat down mercilessly as I led Lucas along the eastern border patrol route, but I barely felt the heat. Every step forward was torture. Every breath was agony.

"Sera."

Three days. Three fucking days since we'd returned home to find her gone. Three days of search teams coming back empty-handed. Three days of my world slowly crumbling apart.

"Alpha," Lucas's voice cut through my spiraling thoughts. "The thermal drones picked up movement about two miles north. Could be our search teams, but--"

"But could be rogues," I finished, my voice rough from lack of sleep. My silver-blue eyes scanned the treeline ahead, searching for any sign of movement. Any sign of "her".

Alex, my wolf, prowled restlessly beneath my skin. He'd been agitated for days now, pacing and snarling inside my mind. But it wasn't just impatience. It was something worse.

The bond was breaking.

I could feel it happening. Slowly. Like ice cracking under pressure. Each hour that passed without contact, without even the faintest whisper through our mindlink, the connection grew weaker.

The silence was killing me.

“How many teams do we have out there now?” I asked, forcing myself to focus on the present.

“Twelve, Lucas replied immediately. “Every available warrior. Plus the helicopters and drone units. We’ve covered a hundred-square-mile radius around where she was last seen.”

“Nothing” Always fucking nothing.

My hands clenched into fists. The urge to shift, to let Alex tear through the forest hunting for his mate, was overwhelming. But I couldn’t abandon the patrol. Not when rogue activity had been increasing along the borders.

“Alpha.” Lucas’s tone changed, becoming more cautious. “Maybe we should consider that she-”

“Don’t.” The word came out like a whipcrack. “Don’t you dare finish that sentence.”

Lucas held up his hands in surrender. “I’m just saying, maybe we need to expand the search. Look beyond our territory. If she was taken-”

“If she was taken, I’ll burn down every rogue,” I snarled. My alpha power flared involuntarily, making the air itself seem to vibrate with menace. “I’ll tear apart anyone who dared to touch her.”

Her scent lingering on the sheets. Adrian’s toys scattered across the floor where she’d been playing with him before she left. The note she’d written—a simple explanation that she was going to find me because she was worried.

“She’s pregnant,” I whispered, the words torn from my chest. “Our baby, Lucas. She’s carrying our child, and she’s out there somewhere. Hurt. Scared. And I can’t-”

I couldn’t finish. The rage and helplessness were choking me.

Alex suddenly went rigid inside my mind. His hackles raised, senses on high alert.

“Something’s wrong.”

Lucas must have felt it too, because his hand moved instinctively to his weapon. “You feel that?”

“Yeah.” I strained my enhanced hearing. In the distance, voices. Shouting. The unmistakable sound of a confrontation.

We broke into a run, following the sound through the dense pine forest. My heart hammered against my ribs, but not from exertion. From hope. Maybe-maybe they’d found something. Found “her”.

We burst into a clearing where three border patrol soldiers stood in a tight formation, weapons drawn. Between them and us lay a figure on the ground.

A woman.

“What the hell is going on here?” I barked, my alpha voice cutting through the chaos.

The nearest soldier snapped to attention. “Alpha! We found this one about a quarter mile inside our territory.

She was unconscious now.”

“Rogue?” Lucas asked, moving closer to examine the prone figure.

“Has to be,” another soldier replied, disgust clear in his voice. “Look at the state of her. And no wolf scent at all. Whatever she is, she’s not pack.”

The woman was filthy beyond description. Her clothes-or what was left of them-were torn to bloody ribbons. Dark stains covered the fabric, some that looked suspiciously like dried blood. Her hair was matted with dirt, leaves, and things I didn’t want to identify. Scratches and bruises covered every visible inch of skin.

She looked like she’d been living wild for weeks. Like an animal.

“Face?” I asked.

“Can’t see it clearly through all the grime,” Matthews replied. “But she’s breathing. Barely.”

Alex stirred uneasily, but I pushed down the strange feeling. Of course my wolf was agitated. We were both on edge, desperate for any sign of Sera. This pathetic creature was just another distraction. Another waste of time when we should be out there searching.

I crouched down, studying the woman more carefully. She was small. Malnourished. Her breathing was shallow and irregular. Human-weak, without the enhanced healing that should have taken care of these injuries by now.

“No wolf scent at all.” I confirmed.

I looked down at the unconscious woman again. Everything about her screamed “rogue”.

“She could have information,” I said finally.

It was a long shot, but right now, any lead was better than nothing, NEW NOVEL CHAPTERS ARE PUBLISHED ON find{novel.net

“Bind her, I ordered, my voice cold and authoritative. “Silver restraints. Take her to the holding cells for interrogation once she regains consciousness.”

“Yes, Alpha.” Solders moved to comply immediately.

Brother’s Best Friends Are My Mates

The soldiers lifted the unconscious woman from the ground, her limp body hanging between them like a broken doll. Her matted hair fell forward, completely obscuring her face, creating a curtain of filth and tangles that made it impossible to make out her features. But something about her size, her frame-

The way her head tilted at that angle. The curve of her shoulder, even beneath the torn and bloodied fabric.

I slammed my eyes shut for a moment, forcing myself to breathe. I was seeing Sera everywhere now. In every shadow, every stranger, every fucking female form that crossed my path. My desperate mind playing tricks on me, torturing me with false hope when I needed to stay focused. When I needed to find my mate, not chase ghosts.

This was just another rogue. Another piece of garbage that might have information about Sera’s whereabouts.

Nothing more.

“Move her to the jeep,” I ordered, my voice hoarse from three days of shouting orders and calling Sera’s name into empty forests. “Carefully. I don’t want her dying before we can question her.”

My throat felt raw, stripped bare from the constant ache of loss. Every word scraped against my vocal cords like broken glass.

Lucas nodded, signaling to the soldiers with sharp, efficient gestures. They started toward the vehicles, supporting the woman’s dead weight between them, her bare feet dragging through the dirt and fallen leaves.

I watched them move, my silver-blue eyes tracking every step. The woman's head lolled back, exposing the pale column of her throat. Even from this distance, I could see the dark bruises there. Someone had tried to strangle her. Recently,

My wolf Alex stirred uneasily in my chest, but I pushed him down. I couldn't afford to lose control. Not now.

Not when- The source of this content is FundNovel.net

That's when it happened.

A sound so soft I almost missed it. A whisper barely audible above the wind in the trees, carried on a breath that seemed to come from the very depths of her soul.

“Adrian...”

My entire world stopped.

The blood in my veins turned to ice water, then immediately to molten lava. My heart slammed against my ribs so hard I thought it might burst. Every muscle in my body went rigid, locked in place by a shock so complete it felt like being struck by lightning.

The most precious thing in my world, spoken with such aching longing that it made my chest feel like it was being crushed in a vise.

No one should know that name. No one outside our pack, our family, our inner circle. Adrian was protected, hidden, kept safe from the kind of monsters that might use a child as leverage against an alpha.

Ice flooded my veins, followed immediately by fire. Pure, incandescent rage that started in my gut and spread outward like poison.

This bitch knew my son's name.

“Stop,” I snarled, my alpha power exploding outward so forcefully that the very air seemed to vibrate with menace. The trees around us swayed as if hit by an invisible wave. Every soldier within fifty feet dropped to one knee in submission, their heads bowed, their wolves cowering before the fury of their alpha.

“Put her down. NOW.”

My voice carried such raw command that even Lucas flinched. The soldiers holding the woman released her immediately, confused and terrified by my sudden transformation from controlled leader to barely contained beast. The woman crumpled to the ground like a discarded toy, her body hitting the earth with a sickening thud that should have made me feel guilty.

Instead, it just fed my rage.

This rogue bitch knew my son's name. She'd been sent here. Sent to hurt my family. To finish what her pack had started when they took Sera from me,

How long had they been watching us? How long had they been planning this? First they steal my mate, probably torture her, maybe kill her. And now they send this broken shell of a woman to our borders, speaking Adrian's name like some kind of sick psychological warfare.

Fury unlike anything I'd ever experienced consumed me completely. My vision went red around the edges, a crimson haze that made everything look like it was soaked in blood. My hands shook with the need for violence. My teeth ached as they tried to shift into fangs.

Alex roared inside my mind, a sound of such primal rage that it made my skull feel like it might split apart. He wanted blood.

"Kill her, he snarled in my mind. "RIP HER APART. SHE THREATENS OUR YOUNG."

I crossed the distance in two massive strides, my body moving with the fluid violence of a predator closing in on prey. My hands reached for her throat before I even fully realized I was moving.

My fingers closed around her neck, feeling the fragile bones beneath my palms. So delicate. So breakable.

Like snapping a twig.

"You fucking piece of garbage," I growled, my voice dropping to a register so low it barely sounded human. I lifted her partially off the ground with one hand, her feet dangling in the air, her head lolling back at an unnatural angle.

"What did you do to my mate? Where is she? WHAT DID YOU DO TO SERA?"

My grip tightened involuntarily, my fingers finding the perfect pressure points that would cut off her air supply. She was so small, so pathetically weak. I could snap her neck with a twitch of my wrist.

Part of me—a large part—wanted to do exactly that. Wanted to feel her windpipe collapse under my hands.

Wanted to watch the life drain from her eyes as payment for whatever they'd done to Sera.

I used my free hand to brush the tangled hair away from her face, wanting to see the features of the enemy who dared to threaten my family. The matted strands were thick with dirt and blood and things I didn't want to identify. They stuck to my fingers like spider webs, clinging and disgusting.

But I kept brushing them away, revealing inch by inch the face that had been hidden beneath.

The hair fell away from her forehead first. Pale skin, marked with bruises and scratches. A scar on her left temple that looked familiar but couldn't be-

More hair moved aside. The curve of her cheek, hollow with starvation but still recognizable. Still impossible.

My hands trembled as I swept away the last of the tangled mess, revealing the face that had haunted my dreams for three endless days and nights.

And my heart stopped.

Brother's Best Friends Are My Mates

The world tilted.

Those eyes. Even swollen shut, even surrounded by bruises and cuts that made my stomach lurch, I knew those eyes. The elegant arch of her brows. The small scar on her left temple from when she'd fallen off her bike as a child.

"Sera."

My hands went slack around her throat. She dropped back to the ground with a soft thud that seemed to echo like thunder in the sudden silence.

"No." The word came out strangled. Broken. "No, no, no. This isn't-this can't be-"

I fell to my knees beside her, my hands hovering over her battered face. Afraid to touch. Afraid that if I did, she'd disappear like some cruel hallucination my desperate mind had conjured.

But she was real. The soft whisper of her breath. The familiar curve of her lips, split and swollen but still "hers". The way her hair curled at the ends, even matted with blood and filth.

"Sera?" I whispered, my voice cracking like I was fourteen again. "Baby, is that you?"

Her only response was another barely audible murmur. "Adrian... where's Adrian..."

The sound of her voice-hoarse, broken, but definitely "hers"-hit me like a physical blow. My chest seized. My lungs forgot how to work.

Lucas appeared at my shoulder, his face pale with shock. "Alpha, that's not... that can't be..."

“It’s her.” The words came out flat. Final.

I reached out with trembling hands to touch her face. Her skin was ice cold, waxy with fever. Dark circles shadowed her closed eyes. Her lips were cracked and bleeding.

How had I not known? How had I looked at her-at “Sera”-and seen nothing but a rogue?

Because she didn’t smell like herself. The realization hit me like a sledgehammer. Where her scent should have been-that unique blend of jasmine and rain that was pure Sera-there was nothing. Just the harsh chemical burn of wolfsbane and the lingering stench of death.

“What did they do to you?” I breathed, my fingers tracing the air above a particularly nasty cut on her cheek.

“Oh god, baby, what did they do?”

More importantly-why couldn’t I sense Ayla? Every wolf had a distinct presence, a spiritual fingerprint that marked them as clearly as any physical scent. But when I reached out with my enhanced senses, searching for Sera’s wolf...

Nothing.

Just empty, terrifying silence where Ayla should have been.

“It seems like the wolfsbane,” Lucas said quietly, following my train of thought. “They poisoned her. That’s why we couldn’t scent her properly.”

Red clouded my vision. Pure, incandescent rage that made my bones ache with the need to shift. To hunt. To tear apart whoever had done this to my mate with my bare hands.

“Find them,” I growled, my voice dropping to a register that made every wolf within hearing distance flatten their ears. “Find every last piece of shit who laid a finger on her, and bring me their heads.”

“Yes, Alpha.”

But revenge could wait. Right now, she needed medical attention. Needed safety. Needed me to get my shit together and take care of her instead of standing here drowning in fury.

I slid my arms beneath her, lifting her against my chest as gently as I could manage. She was so light. Too light. Nothing but skin and bones wrapped in torn rags that used to be clothes.

Her head lolled back over my arm, exposing the purple finger-shaped bruises around her throat.

“Adrian...” she mumbled again, her brow furrowing with distress even in unconsciousness.

“Damien...”

“He’s safe,” I whispered against her matted hair. “He’s home. He’s waiting for you.”

God, Adrian. My little boy had been asking for his mama every day. Crying himself to sleep because she wasn’t there to read him bedtime stories. How was I going to explain this to him? How was I going to look at my son and tell him that his mother-

“No.” I shut down that line of thinking before it could take root. She was alive. Breathing. Whatever they’d done to her, whatever poison they’d pumped into her system, we’d find a way to fix it.

We had to.

“Get the car,” I barked at the nearest soldier. “NOW!”

The man jumped like I’d hit him with a cattle prod, sprinting toward the parked vehicles. Lucas fell into step beside me as I carried Sera toward the road, his expression grim.

“The hospital?” he asked.

“Dr. Morgan first,” I replied, my jaw tight. “She needs someone who understands wolf physiology. Someone who knows how to counteract wolfsbane poisoning”

The jeep screeched to a halt beside us, engine still running. I climbed into the back seat, settling Sera across my lap as carefully as I could. Her breathing was shallow, irregular. Her skin felt like parchment under my hands.

“Drive,” I ordered the soldier behind the wheel. “Fast as you can without killing us.”

“Dr. Morgan?” Lucas spoke into the phone. “We’ve got an emergency. Alpha’s mate. Severe wolfsbane exposure with complete wolf suppression. ETA ten minutes.”

I couldn’t hear her response, but Lucas nodded grimly. “Understood. We’ll be there.”

Sera stirred in my arms, her eyelids fluttering. For a moment, hope flared in my chest. Maybe she was waking

“No,” she whimpered, her voice barely audible over the engine noise. “Please don’t... not me...”

She was dreaming. Or having flashbacks. Reliving whatever hell they’d put her through.

“Shh, I murmured, pressing my lips to her forehead. “You’re safe now. No one’s going to hurt either of you. I promise.”

What kind of mate was I? What kind of alpha?

The hospital came into view, its white walls gleaming in the afternoon sun. Dr. Morgan was already waiting outside the emergency entrance with a gurney and two nurses, her silver hair tied back in a no-nonsense bun.

The jeep hadn't even fully stopped before I was out, Sera still cradled in my arms.

"Examination room three," Dr. Morgan ordered, falling into step beside me as we rushed through the automatic doors. "How long has she been like this?"

"I don't know," I replied through gritted teeth. "She's been missing for three days, but I just found her twenty minutes ago."

"Any idea what kind of wolfsbane they used?"

"No idea." Newest update provided by FundNovel.net

I laid Sera down on the examination table as gently as I could, her small body looking even more fragile against the stark white sheets. Dr. Morgan immediately began her assessment, checking vitals, examining injuries, drawing blood samples with practiced efficiency.

"Multiple contusions, possible broken ribs, severe dehydration," she murmured, more to herself than to me.

"Signs of strangulation. Fresh and old injuries suggesting prolonged abuse."

Each word was another blow. Another piece of evidence that while I'd been searching for her, she'd been suffering. Fighting. Surviving hell.

"Will she be okay?" I asked, though I wasn't sure I wanted to know the answer.

Dr. Morgan met my eyes, her expression carefully neutral. "I won't lie to you, Damien. This is the worst case of wolfsbane poisoning I've ever seen. The fact that she's still alive is miraculous."

Brother's Best Friends Are My Mates

I sat in that godforsaken hospital waiting room, my hands clenched into fists so tight my knuckles had gone white, watching the clock on the wall tick away seconds that felt like centuries. Each minute stretched into an eternity of torment. The fluorescent lights buzzed overhead like angry wasps, casting everything in harsh, clinical white light that made my skin look corpse-pale and waxy.

"How long had it been?" Three hours? Four? A fucking lifetime?

The antiseptic smell burned my nostrils, mixing with the underlying scent of fear and death that seemed to permeate every hospital corridor. My enhanced senses, usually such an advantage, now felt like a curse as they picked up every nuance of suffering from the rooms beyond these walls.

The doors to the emergency wing remained closed, sealed against me like the gates of hell. Every few minutes, I'd catch a glimpse of medical staff rushing past through the glass windows—scrubs stained with blood, faces grim and focused, moving with the kind of urgency that made my stomach clench with dread.

But never any news. Never any answers.

Just endless, suffocating silence.

My wolf Alex was going insane inside my chest, pacing and snarling like a caged beast. He wanted to tear down those doors, to find our mate, to protect what was ours. But I couldn't let him loose. Not here.

“She has to be okay,” I told myself for the thousandth time. “She has to be.”

I buried my face in my hands, trying to block out the images that kept flashing through my mind. Sera unconscious and broken at the border, The finger-shaped bruises around her throat.

“Alpha. Lucas's voice cut through my spiral of despair.”

I looked up to see him settling into the chair beside me, two cups of coffee in his hands. His face was drawn with exhaustion and worry, but he was trying to project calm. For my benefit, probably.

“Drink something,” he said, pressing one of the cups into my hands.

I took it without looking, my eyes immediately returning to those damn doors. The coffee was bitter and scalding, but I barely tasted it. Everything felt muted, distant, like I was watching the world through thick glass while drowning in my own fear.

The liquid burned my throat, but the pain was nothing compared to the agony tearing through my chest.

Every breath felt like swallowing broken glass.

“Any word from Adrian?” I asked, my voice hoarse from hours of silence.

“Ophelia's got him. He's asking for his mom, but she's keeping him distracted with games and stories.” Lucas paused, studying my face carefully. “Should I bring him here?”

“No.” The word exploded out of me with enough force to make Lucas flinch. “Not until we know more.”

The last thing I wanted was for my son to see his mother like that. Broken. Barely breathing. Looking more dead than alive.

“My fault,” the voice in my head whispered. “This is all my fault.”

The memory of my hands around her throat made bile rise in my throat. I’d been ready to kill her. My own mate. The mother of my children.

“Stop,” Lucas said quietly, reading the self-destruction in my expression. “This isn’t your fault, Damien. You couldn’t have known.”

I closed my eyes, trying to push away the image of her battered face. The way she’d felt in my arms when I’d finally realized who she was—so light and fragile, like a bird with broken wings.

My hands shook as I brought the coffee cup to my lips again. The ceramic rattled against my teeth, betraying the fear I was trying so hard to contain.

Hours crawled by. Nurses walked past without making eye contact. Doctors disappeared behind those sealed doors, taking pieces of my sanity with them. Lucas tried to make conversation, but I couldn’t focus on anything except the silence from the emergency wing.

“What’s taking so long?”

Then, finally, after what felt like a lifetime of torture, I heard footsteps approaching.

“Damien?”

The familiar voice made me look up so fast I nearly gave myself whiplash.

Dr. Morgan stood in the doorway, her surgical scrubs stained with blood that made my stomach clench violently. She looked exhausted, her silver hair escaping from its bun in wispy strands, deep lines of fatigue etched around her eyes like cracks in weathered stone.

But she was smiling.

Tired, worried, but genuinely relieved. That small upturn of her lips was like a lifeline thrown to a drowning man.

I was on my feet before I even realized I’d moved, the coffee cup clattering to the floor and splattering across the linoleum.

“How is she?” The words tore out of my throat like they were made of razors.

“She’s alive.”

Those two words hit me like a physical blow, relief so intense and overwhelming it nearly brought me to my knees. My legs went weak, and I had to grip the back of the chair to keep from collapsing.

“She’s stable,” Dr. Morgan continued, her voice cutting through the roaring in my ears. “Critical, but stable.

Her vitals are strong, and she’s responding well to treatment.”

I couldn’t speak. Couldn’t breathe. The relief was so intense it felt like dying and being reborn all at once.

“The baby?” I managed to whisper, barely daring to voice the question that had been eating at me for hours.

“The baby is fine.” Dr. Morgan’s smile widened slightly. “Surprisingly resilient, considering what she’s been through. The fetal heartbeat is strong and steady.”

Dr. Morgan gestured toward the chairs, and I sank back down, my legs finally giving out completely.

“However,” Dr. Morgan continued, and that single word made my blood turn to ice water in my veins.

My heart, which had just started beating normally again, resumed its frantic hammering against my ribs. The relief that had flooded through me began to curdle, turning sour and cold.

Dr. Morgan’s expression was grave, painted with the kind of professional sympathy that made my skin crawl.

“I can’t detect any trace of her wolf’s presence. The neural pathways that should connect Seraphina to her wolf consciousness have been... severed.”

“But she’ll heal, right?” The desperation in my voice was pathetic, but I didn’t care. I was grasping at straws, begging for miracles.

Dr. Morgan’s expression grew even more sympathetic, which somehow made everything worse. “Damien,”

she said softly. “Her wolf healing is gone. That’s what I’m trying to tell you. She’s essentially human now. Completely human.”

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Brother's Best Friends Are My Mates

The first thing I noticed wasn't the absence of pain-though that was strange enough. It was the silence.

Complete, absolute silence.

Not the kind of quiet you get in a hospital room or a forest at dawn. This was the silence of nothing. No heartbeats, no breathing, no distant hum of life existing somewhere beyond the edges of perception.

I opened my eyes to endless gray.

The void.

I knew this place. Had been here before, what felt like a lifetime ago. The same shifting mists that never quite formed into anything solid. The same sense of being suspended between worlds, between life and something else entirely.

But this time was different.

Last time, She had been here. The Moon Goddess, with her silver hair and knowing eyes, radiating power that made my bones sing with recognition. She'd spoken to me about choices and strength and the path I was meant to walk.

Now? Nothing but emptiness stretching in every direction.

I tried to stand and realized I didn't need to. My body-if it even was my body-seemed to float in this space, weightless and strangely distant. Like I was watching myself from somewhere outside my own skin. Read complete version only at [Find★Novel.net](#)

"Hello?" My voice echoed weirdly, bouncing off invisible walls. "Is anyone there?"

No answer.

I started walking, though my feet never seemed to touch solid ground. Each step carried me forward through the gray mist, but nothing changed. No landmarks, no direction, just endless sameness that made my chest tight with claustrophobia.

"Ayla?"

I reached for her automatically, the way I'd done thousands of times before. Searching for that warm presence in the back of my mind, that fierce protectiveness and wild strength that had gotten me through so much.

Nothing.

I pressed my hands against my temples, trying to somehow force the connection back into existence.

“Ayla, please. I know you’re in there somewhere.”

But there was only empty space where she should have been. No wolf. No other half of my soul. Just me,

alone in my own mind for the first time since I was thirteen years old.

“No, no, no.” The words tumbled out in a desperate whisper. “You can’t just be gone.”

I tried shifting, tried calling on even a fraction of my wolf strength. Nothing happened. I was just... human. Weak and fragile and ordinary in every possible way.

The realization hit me like a physical blow, driving me to my knees in this strange not-place. The mist swirled around me, but I couldn’t feel it. Couldn’t feel anything except the growing horror of understanding.

They’d killed her.

“I’m sorry,” I choked out, tears streaming down my face even though I hadn’t felt them start. “Ayla, I’m so sorry. I failed you.”

I don’t know how long I knelt there, sobbing for the loss of something I’d never properly appreciated while I had it. Time moved differently in this place. Could have been minutes or hours or years for all I knew.

I pressed my hands against my stomach, searching for any sign of the life growing inside me. But without Ayla’s enhanced senses, without that supernatural connection to everything happening in my body, I felt... nothing.

Was the baby okay? Had the poison hurt them too? The uncertainty was torture, worse than any physical pain they’d inflicted.

I forced myself to stand, wiping my face with the back of my hand. I couldn’t stay here, wallowing in grief for what I’d lost. My family needed me to come home. Needed me to be strong, even if I wasn’t strong anymore.

I started walking again, this time with more purpose. There had to be a way out of this place. Last time, the Moon Goddess had simply willed me back to consciousness. But she wasn’t here now, and I was on my own.

The gray mist seemed to go on forever, unchanging and endless. But I kept moving, kept searching, because giving up wasn't an option. I had too much to live for.

It was subtle at first. A slight warmth in the air that hadn't been there before. The faintest hint of light somewhere ahead, barely visible through the mist.

I ran toward it, or tried to. Movement was still strange here, like swimming through thick honey. But that warm glow grew brighter with each step, more welcoming.

“An exit. It has to be an exit.”

The light resolved into what looked like a doorway, though the edges were soft and undefined. Through it, I could see... nothing. Just more light, but different somehow. Less ethereal, more real.

I was almost there, almost close enough to step through, when I heard it.

A voice.

Not speaking from anywhere I could identify, but somehow coming from the mist itself. From the very fabric of this strange place. The words seemed to settle directly into my mind without passing through my ears.

“I have protected what matters most. Go back to them. They're waiting for you.”