

The Unwanted Daughter's Alpha King

I stared at Elara. For a person who had been extremely quiet for hours, suddenly had a lot to say,

“What do you mean by that?” Rhys demanded.

My head was spinning. Was she alluding that I was right? Did she know what was happening in the Program? Why **wasn't** she helping **people** then? Why wasn't she more involved in saving those kids? Were they doing the same things on a newly turned Vampires? Was it a complete and total mistake to bring her with us? Or was this a good thing? Another voice, another perspective, another chance to get this right.

“I mean exactly what I said.” Elara answered. Her voice had such a flat, almost cold tone to it. I wondered if perhaps she had been a part of **the** program before. She had told us that she was older than we would ever be, but she looked like a child, and that could have failed her before.

“Do you know how they are hiding their pack?” Rhys asked her, and I was glad he was able to find his voice in all this because I couldn't **find** mine.

We were stopped completely on the steps now. Iris and Michael were getting farther away from us, just steps behind Queen Margaret who seemed to be entertaining or entertained by the two of them. Maizie and Sawyer now stood two

steps below Elara and were looking from us to her in confusion as to why we were stopped.

“Not officially, no.” She answered.

“Well, how about the unofficial answer then.”

“Well unofficially, I’ve heard several things, but your mate’s thought process matches one of the more recent theories I’ve heard. They’re using a combination of powers to hide the pack and forcing it with a drug that increases power for a short period of time. They’re technically **still** there just cloaked in invisibility and silence.”

“Why would they do that?” I asked, finally finding my voice.

“Hide?”

“No, what is the purpose of combining powers if they **are** only **using** them to hide?”

“It’s not their only purpose.” Elara stated plainly.

“Then what **is?**” Maizie asked this time, and I noticed she was squeezing Sawyer’s hand so tightly it hurt.

“So, the Lycan’s don’t have to follow their true leader.” Ela

answered **as** if it was obvious.

“Their true leader?” I frowned in confusion, and Maizie and Sawyer’s expressions mirrored my own.

“That’s what the rumors say,” Elara shrugged, and begun to walk up the steps again.

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We followed her but **let** the conversation fall. It made sense. Kind **of**. But we were still missing parts. But slowly, the **picture** clearer and clearer. But who was this true leader? And why was Elijah involved in everything? What was in it for **him?** **Did he** want **to be their** leader? **Is** that what this was about for him? Queen Maragret had mentioned he was hungry... And I wondered what **exactly, she had meant by**

that...

Finally, we emerged at the top of the stairs. My thighs hurt, my **calves** burned, and my lungs gasped for air, but we **were at least sort of out of the** darkness. The sun was rising, and we were at the edge of the vampire territory. I wasn't sure if there would **be** Vampires **out there waiting** for us or if we **were** going to **get** lucky. I hoped for the latter, but I wasn't **sure** we were going to get it.

"Ready?" Rhys asked, squeezing my hand.

"Ready." I whispered **back**.

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"There are **cars** about 100 feet away. If we can get to them, we're probably **in** the clear." Queen Maragret responded, **peaking** out the curtain

"**I know** this is probably a stereotype, but the sun is up..."

“You will go without us.” Queen Maragret answered with a slight smile. “We will follow in the evening.”

Rhys frowned. It felt like a trap. Like they had led us toward

freedom

just to take it away. But we didn’t have a choice. We **had** to trust **them**.

“Are you going to be safe here?” Sawyer asked them.

“**As** safe as we can be...” Elara answered. “The tunnels have many exits and directions. We exited not at the farthest because they would **expect**, that if he figures out how we left. We sent someone to drive your away in hopes they would follow that trail first. He won’t think **to look** here, he’s too direct.”

r car

That made sense. I hoped they knew their brother and

son well enough.

“If they come, tell them that we kidnapped you,” Rhys told them. “**Say** we didn’t **give** you a choice. We will see you tonight **and** have **space** prepared for you. Then we can work on giving your people that are loyal to you a place **to** stay. **If** you cannot get to us safely. **Go to the** Golden Pack. They are a pack under our alliance and I have people there right now who can help **you get to** safety.”

“They are right to trust you, Alpha King Rhys,” Elara said softly. “Thank you for your kindness. We will forever be indebted to **you.**”

Rhys nodded to her and opened the door for **us to** escape. One by one we all slipped out and into the **car**. Rhys climbed into the driver’s seat. Sawyer took the passenger’s seat and Michael, Iris, Maizie and I all climbed into the back. I took the back **row** with Maizie **and** we both **stared** out the back window, not saying a word. We were both waiting for the inevitable to happen. But it never did.

We made our way back to our pack with no surprises. No attacks. **Just** empty road. When we reached the checkpoint at the border, they had been relieved that we were back.

We were **just** getting out of the car when the front door of the packhouse **was** thrown open. A woman who I didn’t recognize threw open the door and in the most controlled fashion made her way toward us.

“Oh crap.” Sawyer muttered when he saw her, and both Maizie and I looked **at** him in confusion.

“What?” I questioned.

“Grace,” Rhys grabbed my hip, so I was facing him. “I’m so sorry about whatever is about to happen.”

I frowned, but I wasn’t given the chance to respond before he **spun** me back around and said, “Hi Mom.”

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I closed my **eyes**, feeling the exhaustion from the last few days deep in my bones. I had called my mom what felt like weeks ago, but **now that** she was here, I wanted her gone. With everything going on, I guess it would be good to have her close, but right now, it felt like a lot.

“Is that any way to greet your mother?” Mom demanded in a way only she could. “You have been gone for nearly a week! No word, no note. Nobody knew where the hell you were! And you are just going to greet me here with a ‘hi mom’? I raised you better than that Rhys.”

Grace curled into me slightly, but she didn’t completely shy away as she would have in the past.

“Mom we were away on work.” I answered calmly.

It was weird to see her here in front of me. I couldn’t remember the last time she had visited. She hated coming back here ever since Dad died and she gave up the pack. She looked older, but still very much the same. She had dyed her hair again; it was nearly black this time. She was tall for the average woman, standing at just about 6 feet. Her eyes were a stunning blue, but they had really lost their light since Dad died. She had always been a no-nonsense person, but it had taken on an extreme level once the pack had been attacked. I had been grateful when she had moved to a pack under the alliance as a way to give me a breather. I had also lost my dad, and her uptight nature had stressed me out.

“And you just left nobody here until a couple of days ago, when Leon and Caleb just randomly showed up?”

“I don’t need your criticism, Mom,” I snapped at her.

“And what is this? Another whore you’re bringing home? Seriously, Rhys. You have got to grow up, son! This is getting-”

“That is enough, Mom!” I growled, cutting her off. I wasn’t going to let her finish whatever horrible thing **was** going to come out of her mouth next. I didn’t want to know where she was going to go with that statement, and honestly, I didn’t care.

Mom looked horrified at my reaction, and honestly, I had never really stood up for any of my past potential brides, with the exception of Allison, and even with her, I had never really protected her in any way.

“Mom,” I drew out my words, **so** she’d know I was serious **as** Sawyer and Maizie came to stand with us, looking very hesitant. “This is my mate, Grace.”

Mom’s **jaw** dropped. In all the years that had passed since my Dad’s death, I had never seen her eyes light up that way.

“Mate?” She her voice barely above a whisper.

“Yes Mom, I finally found my mate.”

“Oh, that’s wonderful, Rhys!” She cried as she ran up and wrapped her arms around both of us.

I felt Grace lean into me a little more, and her body tensed but she didn't push my mother away, Finally, my mother pulled back and wiped a tear away from her face.

"I think you **owe** my mate and apology."

"I'm sorry, dear, I didn't realize. My sons tell me nothing that goes on in their life! Imagine my surprise when I find out that one of my boys has a **mate** and the other has a child!"

She then looked at Sawyer, noticing him in the shadows for the first **time, but** I don't think she noticed his hand protectively **on** Maizie's waist.

"And Sawyer my dear," She wrapped her arms around him next, pushing **Maizie out** of his subtle grip. "Tell me **you** have **no big** news to **surprise your** old ma with, do you?"

"**Actually,**" Sawyer answered pulling **away** from her **to** the **best** of his **ability, and reaching out** for **Maizie's** hand, **which she cringed** at **giving him** . "This is **my** mate, Maizie."

Mom gasped, and her hand flew to her mouth as she backed up to get a good look at everyone.

“You’re back!” Alana exclaimed as she ran out the front door, not caring that she was interrupting whatever weird family moment we were having. She threw her arms around Grace and then moved to Maizie without hesitation. I was grateful that Grace had made such good friends with both Maizie and Alana, She needed someone other than me in her life, and I was also glad that I did not have to participate **in** girl talk- like they had had on the way to the Vampire City. I didn’t want to know what they said about me in private, and I was glad my mate **didn’t** do our laundry out in front of my brother like Maizie had no problem doing.

She let go of Maizie and gripped Grace again.

“I’m so glad you’re okay.” She whispered, just loud enough for me to hear her.

“Me too.” Grace responded as Caleb and Sammy walked out the door.

“Seriously?” I demanded when he was close enough for me not to be yelling. “A little warning would have been nice.”

Caleb frowned slightly. “I thought you knew she was coming. She said you reached out to her.”

“I did. But I didn’t know she was here!”

Alana looked at all of us in confusion as Leon and Heather approached from the total opposite direction.

“What’s going on?” She asked nervously. “Is everything okay?”

“Yea, everything is fine,” I answered as I ran my hand tiredly over my face. “Alana, this is my mom. Luna Kerris.”

Alana frowned slightly before turning to my mother and bowing slightly toward her and forcing herself to smile politely. Her omega training immediately snapping into place, making me feel slightly guilty for making her feel like she needed to be formal when with friends.

“Well, you guys are back sooner than expected,” Leon greeted.

“We have LOTS to talk about,” Grace spoke up for the first time, her own fatigue seemingly weighing on her.

“Maizie?” Another voice called out, exiting the packhouse in a bit of a tizzy.

“Who’s that?” Alana asked as the woman rushed forward toward us

“My mom.” Maizie whispered, and recognition dawned on me.

“Holy mother of mom’s.” Leon whispered.

And I couldn’t help but agree with his assessment.

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The office was too small now that everyone was home, and we had visitors and new additions. Rhys and I had also both agreed that until we knew exactly where everyone stood on what was going on, we didn’t want them to see everything that we were working on.

Alana brought in tea and snacks, and I jumped to my feet to help her. I had been sitting in the room awkwardly with Maizie’s mom and Rhys mom while I had been waiting for everyone else to arrive.

“You should have told me what you were doing!” I exclaimed. “I would have helped!”

“That is not your role, Grace,” Rhys’ mother, Kerris corrected.

I had no idea what I was supposed to call her. I didn’t grow up with a real family. My dad hated me. My mom died. Luna Ava tried, but even she fell flat before she inevitably died. I grew up with Kinsley being a jerk and that was the extent I knew about family. Rhys was awesome. We were exactly what the other needed in life. But outside of him? I was still learning what family was.

I didn’t even know what I was supposed to call her... Kerris felt too personal. Mom felt like too much. Luna Kerris felt too formal. There was no handbook on this sort of thing, and I was probably the least experienced person in this department here.

“My place is with my friends,” I responded coolly to her, but my heart squeezed uncomfortably in my chest. I wanted her to like me, more than I really cared to admit. But not at the expense of my friends or the people I cared about.

“Dear, Rhys called me here to help you learn your role as a Luna Queen. Not as an Omega.”

“What’s going on?” Rhys questioned as if he sensed my anger the moment he walked in.

Alana's cheeks were a bright shade of red as we put the snacks and drinks she had brought up on the conference table. None of them were fancy, but to be fair we had only arrived home 30 minutes ago. There was no way to describe the fatigue and heaviness I was feeling. But all I could think about was how wrong all of this was.

"I was just reminding Grace here of her place," Kerris said with a sickly-sweet smile that made me **want** to cringe away from her.

"Her place?" Rhys frowned.

"Well, you have her running around with the help!" Kerris exclaimed like it was obvious as the sun rising in the morning.

"You mean our friend, Alana?"

"Friend? You're friends with an omega?" His mother frowned.

"I'm friends with a lot of people, Mother." Rhys said a lot calmer than I would have. The rage I felt just beneath his surface though told me he was putting a lot of effort into not going off on his mom.

She scoffed at him though, and Rhys couldn't hide his anger from his **expression**. "You are more than welcome to not keep company **with my** friends, but you are the one to be leaving, not Alana. And if you continue to make her uncomfortable, then I will not be **asking you** to leave."

Kerris looked at him with her mouth wide open. Very unbecoming of an **ex**-Luna Queen if you ask me, **but** I kept my mouth **shut**. It was a miracle the Rhys and Sawyer had turned out as well **as** they had with a mother like that. I wondered if she had always been like this or if he only gotten worse with age the way my father's views had.

"Hi, sorry, we're late!" Maizie apologized as she bounced into the room in complete Maizie fashion, Sawyer, trailing behind her like **a lost**

puppy.

"Who died?" **Maizie** asked, reading the mood in the room in total Maizie fashion.

"Nobody," I answered before muttering under my breath, "Yet."

Alana laughed, and weird looks were shot our way, but we ignored them. I was glad she didn't think we were turning our backs on **her** just because one woman had an unjust opinion.

“Maizie,” Laura tried, but Maizie’s look turned dark. “Who invited her?”

“Sorry, Maiz,” Rhys shrugged. “We gotta meet with everyone, I wanna see what they all know.”

“She’s clueless, Rhys.” Maizie argued. “She doesn’t know shit about anything.”

Rhys didn’t bother responding. Maizie was just being Maizie. She was allowed to be mad at her mom. She was allowed to have her feelings, and if I was being completely honest, I was glad she wasn’t acting as vulnerable as she had been back in the Golden Pack. But I also knew that Rhys was right about this, and we needed to gather all the information we could from them. We were running out of time, and now **we had** new perspectives.

“Maizie, you have no idea what I’ve been through since you’ve left.” Her mom said coolly.

I knew Maizie’s side of the story. We had talked about it. And I also knew, deep down, she really loved her mom. The same way Rhys did, even though she hadn’t been the kindest since arriving. But both of their knowledge on what was going on **was** going to be invaluable, and maybe there was more to each of their stories. It felt wrong to judge them so quickly, but I also would stand by both Rhys and Maizie if things took a turn for the worse.

If you thought the pre-meeting was chaotic, then I don't know what you'd call the actually meeting. All I knew is that I felt overwhelmed, **and** Rhys had a headache. We had gotten absolutely nowhere, and had been sitting around that stupid table for hours before Rhys finally **told** everyone effectively to get lost. Laura and Kerris both left angrily, and the rest of us slowly made our **way** upstairs to the Alpha **Suite**. Alana had tried to slip away with the moms, but I looped my arm through hers and dragged her upstairs with us,

Iris and Michael were sitting on the couch arguing about who knows what siblings argue about. Sammy was running around, talking to her baby doll, playing some random game she had come up with to entertain herself since her bestie no longer lived here. And Rhys was pouring everyone a round of drinks. And for the first time since I had escaped the prison, I felt like **I** was home.

I knew it wouldn't last, and we had work to do. The Vampire Queen and Princess would be arriving any time now, if all went well on their end. And tomorrow, we would reconvene with a plan to take down the Red Blood Pack and everyone who had helped them, but for tonight, for **this** one moment, I was grateful to be home again with everyone I loved within arm's reach. We may not have a plan yet, but we were going to figure it out. Together.

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I laid in bed with Grace after our long as hell day. It felt like a lifetime since she and I had gotten any time alone together, but that was a **little** dramatic. The Vampire Queen and Princess Elara had arrived about an hour ago. We had set them out in the basement where they could effectively shut out all the light. The rooms had actually been built for them for political reasons way back when the

house had been built. It was crazy to think though that only now were we actually using them.

“Rhys? Grace’s tipsy voice drew my attention back to her.

“Yes, my love?”

“Why do my scars matter to you?”

I sucked in a sharp breath. It wasn’t that I didn’t want to answer. I knew we would have to talk about it at some point. We couldn’t just brush it under the rug, despite how much I wanted to. We were working on having a healthy relationship. We weren’t perfect at it. But we were trying. I just wasn’t expecting her to ask about it tonight, and in a perfect world, I wanted her sober for it. Not that she was off the walls or anything... But I wanted to make sure she remembered my words.

“Do you want my honest answer?” I asked, looking into her eyes and immediately being swallowed in their big blue depths. I could look into them for forever. And I would as long as she would continue to have me.

“Yes.” She answered simply and looked at me expectantly.

“I never want you to hide any part of you, and those scars are a part of who you are. They don’t show weakness. They show strength, and courage. They show a story that just hearing, you can’t fully comprehend. You might hate the battles you’ve had to fight, but they are your battles. And maybe you haven’t won yet, but you will. I never want you to be anything less than what you are. Because you, my love, are magnificent, and I worry if you hide it, you will forget your power. Your magic. You are so much more than they made you believe, Gracie. And those scars are the proof.”

She didn’t say anything for a long minute. And maybe there wasn’t much to say to that. She seemed to **accept** my answer though and snuggled in closer to me. There was no such thing **as** too close when it came to her.

I ran my fingers gently through her hair. It was a comfort to us both. I was nearly asleep when her sweet voice met my ears again.

“Rhys?” She said it so softly for a moment I thought I was dreaming.

“Yes, love?”

“Why did you ask your mother to come?”

I chuckled slightly. I had been waiting for her to ask that question since her arrival, and yet something had held her back.

“I thought she could help you in your role as Luna Queen.” I told her honestly.

In my head it had sounded like such a good idea, but after today, that thought was laughable. My mother had been a good Luna Queen, and she had always had high standards. But after today, I wasn't sure if it was actually standards, or something a little less kind, and a little more judgey. Maybe sending her away hadn't been good for her in the way I had hoped. But then again, we hadn't really been open with her about the things going on in our lives, so maybe we had really just thrown her off her rocker a little too hard with all the secrets and changes,

“Oh.”

I didn't know one word could be so full of hurt, and the pang in my chest told me I had fucked up a bit about how I had told her.

“Babe... I didn't mean it like that. I just thought, it would be good for you to have someone who had been there before, **that's** all. Someone who knew the ins and outs of being Royalty. A thought she would be a good mentor. But after today, I'm not so sure it was a good idea, **And I** definitely didn't think she was going to be here when we returned. That timing was terrible.”

“Yea, I wasn’t really expecting it,” She admitted softly.

“I’m sorry. For everything. I don’t think anything has gone to plan since we first met.” I told her sincerely.

“That’s okay. I’m glad I’m on this adventure with you.” She replied. It sounded so easy coming from her. Like even though we had been on **the** brink of death a thousand times, it was just an adventure we were both on.

I kissed her lips, and she deepened the kiss. She was perfect. She was made for me. And I **was** going to do my damn hardest to not fail her like the prophecy said I would.

“Any more questions?” I asked her, when we finally broke apart. We were both too tired to go any further than that, and I hadn’t forgotten that we both had been drinking.

“No. She answered softly as she curled up into me, and I pulled her closer.

I was about to drift off again when I heard, “Rhys?”

“Yes, my love?” I answered but I couldn’t keep the sleepiness out of my voice.

“I lied. I have one more question. Well, maybe it isn’t a question, but I have a thought.”

“And it’s keeping you awake?”

“Yes.”

“What’s your question/thought, love?”

“I think we need to take the Vampire Queen, Princess Elara, and our group to the Wild lands.”

“The Wild Lands?” I was no longer sleepy. “Why the Wild Lands?”

She took a deep breath, and I studied her in the dark. **As** much as she was pretending, she wasn’t fully recovered from being taken by Red Blood Pack. Her face was still pale, and she had lost quite a bit of weight in the short time she had been gone. I worried about her health, even though Sawyer had said it would just take time. But I hated the way the dark circles under her eyes were beginning to look permanent.

“I think we need to talk to Sandra.”

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Breakfast **was** complete and utter chaos the next morning. I don't think I **expected it to be anything less.** but Grace and Maizie were both up early and already in the breakfast hall helping **by the** time **Sawyer and I** woke up and were able to figure out they were 'missing'. My mother was yelling at the staff. **Maizie's mom,** Laura, was harassing Maizie as she worked. Caleb was going around apologizing to the staff **and trying to** clean up the messes our mom was making. Sammy was hanging **off** of him like she was a monkey, never going to see him again. And Michael was sitting in the corner with Iris, rubbing his head like **he already had** a headache.

“Are you good?” I mindlinked Grace.

She looked up and gave me a small smile when our eyes met. “Yes.” She replied before turning **back to the** food she was cooking.

I nodded and debated which group I went to first. Caleb seemed to be handling the staff okay, I went **to the** kids. I felt bad. We hadn't really been available since everything happened. I had so many questions **about** Iris, and I had no idea how exactly she was going to fit in yet, but she would. She was a kid, and I needed. to remember that. They both deserved to be kids.

"What's going on, guys?" I asked, sitting down at their table.

"Nothing." Iris grumbled, crossing her arms tiredly.

"I find that hard to believe, you guys have been bickering since you got here, and in the Vampire city as well."

"She wants to leave." Michael grumbled.

"Oh? And where are you going to go?" I asked her.

"Back to the Program of course," She answered as if it was obvious.

“Hunny, that program tried to kill you. Probably more than just the time that my mate saved you from.”

“They weren’t actually going to kill me.” She muttered, but her confidence was fading slightly.

“Oh really? Would you like to test that theory? I can have you dropped back off. And we can see what would actually happen.”

“NO!” Michael shouted as he stood up and slammed his hands down on the table, drawing attention to us from everyone in hall.

“Sit down.” I growled.

A slight blush filled his cheeks, but the angsty teenager he had been when he had first arrived **was coming**

out.

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“**You are not** letting her leave.” Michael answered **in** hushed anger as **he sat** back **down**.

“It would **be** irresponsible to let her leave, I agree.” I told Michael **calmly**. “But your **sister needs to** understand your sacrifices for her. She needs to know the stakes.”

“**We’re** safe here, Iris. I know that feels crazy, and like we aren’t used to it. Everything we’ve been **told** is a lie our whole lives. We were told Grace was a monster, and she is the kindest person I’ve ever **met**. **Rhys** is more than capable of his job, and he takes care of all of us. We can be happy here, Iris.”

“And what about the others, Mike?” She answered, her lip quivering slightly.

“The others that we are working on rescuing?” Michael quipped. “Iris, I’ve been in nearly every **meeting**. I’ve seen what we’re working with. We’re working with nothing. But we’re trying. And as I’ve been **told, we** want to save everyone, but we aren’t sure we can. But you’re here. And we can save you, **I**. **You just have to** let us.”

Her eyes welled with tears, and I squeezed Michael’s shoulder.

“They’re going to give us a home, I. Please, stop fighting it. You’re my sister, and if you leave, I’ll leave, but please, just give it a chance. Grace is great. She saved me from myself. Let me save you from yourself.”

“What if you can’t? Michael, if we go back and apologize, I’m sure they’ll forgive us...”

“After whatever punishment they deem fit? You know they’ve killed people for less, I. I’ve not once been physically punished here.”

“You... What?” Iris looked from me to Michael incredulously, and I was proud of the kid for knowing exactly how to get his sister to hear us.

“They love us, I. They promised to keep us together. They protected all of us kids. Up until really recently, we were all in the same apartment. They found everyone homes. They gave us safety. They don’t hurt us here, even when we deserve it. That has to count for something. Grace could have had me executed. She could have left me to Dad. Instead, she hugged me. That’s what’s waiting here for us. The chance to just be

kids. And I want that for us.”

“I don’t know how to just be a kid,” Iris answered, her voice small.

And I understood. She was a lot like Grace. Grace had had to learn how to exist in space. She had had to learn how to take up space and not worry if people cared. She had been a child whose existence had been a hinderance, and who had never gotten the chance to just be a kid.

I thought about the way Sammy had made up games in the Alpha Suite just last night as she had played with her doll. She was getting to just be a kid, but even she would have the scars of the past **etched into**

everything she ever did.

I couldn't heal their scars. I couldn't undo all the damage that they had incurred. But **I could make sure no** other kid ever had to carry the weight that these kids did. The way my mate did.

"I can't heal your scars, Iris." I said gently. "I can't make the memories go away. Even though I want to, I can't... But I can make sure you never have to go back there again. I can make sure that you don't have **to** carry the weight alone. Grace and I would like you to join our family. We might not be perfect, but we will make sure you never have to fight alone again."

And to my surprise, she flung herself and me, and I wrapped my arms around her with my promise that she never had to fight alone again.

Chapter Comments

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I watched the moment between Rhys, Iris and Michael with interest. A part of me wanted **to go over and** try and fix everything, a part of me assumed Rhys wouldn't be able to get through to them, **but when Iris** threw her arms around Rhys, I knew I had underestimated my mate. He was Alpha King for a reason. **He** put up with no nonsense, but he also had the biggest heart. I'm sure some people thought I made him weak, but I think it's the opposite. I remind him it's okay to care.

"That looks like it's going well," Maizie whispered in my ear.

I smiled at her. I still couldn't believe she was Sawyer's mate. Looking back on it, the signs were obvious, but they were also obvious for Rhys and I and we were

both oblivious to them. I was grateful nonetheless though. Maizie was perfect for Sawyer. Sawyer was incredibly book smart and caring, but Maizie was common sense smart. She wouldn't backdown from anything and had a bit of bite to her, and Sawyer

needed that.

"Thank goodness. I wasn't sure how we were going to manage it if she kept trying to run away."

"Hopefully this means that the worst is over." Maizie comforted as she handed out another plate.

"Now, we just have to win a war." I stated before we both burst into laughter.

We weren't dumb. We knew whatever was to come was not going to be easy. But the truth was, we were still putting all the pieces together. All the pieces that still weren't fitting together quite right.

Maizie and I went to the office to continue researching for a while. We had to wait till dark, so the Vampires could go with us, before finally heading out toward the cars together. Normally, we would have just taken the SUV's, but Rhys had insisted that since we were bringing the Vampire Queen, Princess, and ex-Luna Queen, that the limo was a little more appropriate today. And since it wasn't going to be a long trip, we didn't have a million bags that we needed to drag along with us.

Once everyone was all settled in, an awkward silence fell over the group. Leon and Heather were going to stay behind and keep working on our front. We needed to look stable, not panicked. There had already been an argument about whether so many royals should travel together, but in the end, Rhys made the call, and I supported him. Plus, Caleb and Sammy were both staying behind as well as Michael and Iris, so the throne wouldn't be empty if anything happened. Not that Michael and Iris were officially heirs yet, but they would be... Hopefully, eventually.

“So Grace, what color is your wolf? I haven't seen you shift yet.” Kerris questioned with no preamble, breaking the awkward silence with an even more awkward question.

“I'm actually a Lycan,” I answered uncomfortably, wishing I could shift at this moment instead of being in this car. “But I guess my fur is kind of a greyish brown?”

“A Lycan?” Margaret looked at me with wide eyes. “I haven't heard of them in centuries!”

Kerris on the other hand frowned deeply, “A Lycan? I've never heard of that...” She then lowered her voice and whispered to Rhys, “Rhys, hunny is she mentally okay?” But I heard every word.

To my surprise though, Rhys ignored her.

“That’s actually why we had been coming to visit with you,” Rhys responded, looking directly at Queen Margaret. “We wanted to know what you knew about them.”

“Well, I’m afraid it’s been a long time. I don’t know much since they haven’t been relevant for a **long time**. They have always been a very secretive group, but they did try to take over the supernatural world a **long** time ago. There was a Great War that really wasn’t talked about because it ended in a total slaughter. They were known for their brutality, but in the end, they were wiped nearly completely out. I didn’t realize **they**

still existed.”

“I’m sorry, you’re saying that there’s a supernatural creature out there that refused to join **the** supernatural counsel and now she’s here? You don’t think that’s just a coincidence, do you? She’s clearly trying to do it again!” Kerris protested angrily, yanking Rhys as far away from me as she could, but he honestly really didn’t even budge.

“I have no interest in taking over the Supernatural world, Luna,” I said respectively, even though the idea of what she was saying made me seethe. “And I’m not the only Lycan in your family now, Maizie is also

one.”

Kerris' mouth hung wide open, and the reaction gave me satisfaction.

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‘Sorry’, I mouthed to Maizie who was glaring at me for spilling her secret that wasn’t really a secret.

“And just to be sure, you have no desire to take over the supernatural world, right?” Elara asked, clearly amused by everything that was playing out in front of her.

“What? Of course not!” I exclaimed. “I didn’t even know there was a difference until I met Rhys. Maiz – I guess I never really thought to ask you before, but I was raised just think we were all werewolves even though I was surrounded by Lycan’s and that’s obvious now. What were you raised to believe?”

Maizie looked pensive for a moment. I’m not sure the thought had ever crossed her mind before. “The word Lycan wasn’t used until we were in the Program,” She said finally. “My mom would probably have a better answer, but we were always classified as Werewolves. I think as a protection, since we were trying to pass off as a typical Werewolf pack. No one was allowed to shift without permission. It

was one of the many ways to get sent to the Program. If you were an adult and caught, then your kids went, and if you were a kid, then you went. And unlike Werewolves, Lycans can shift from an early age, and it's often uncontrollable, it's a good way to collect people."

The silence that fell after her pronouncement was heavy. Brutal had been the word that Queen Maragret had used to describe the Lycans, and I couldn't help but agree. But it didn't have to be like that. And I was going to make sure that Lycans from here on out were remembered for their strength and kindness, something I was never privy to before, but would never forget once I found it.

The Unwanted Daughter's Alpha King

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I couldn't get Maizie's words out of my head for the rest of the drive. My heart hurt for her. I **knew** how bad she wanted to shift, but they had really messed her up in the program, and it sucked. She had **learned** how to shift at a fairly early age, but whatever they had done to her made it impossible now, I **didn't think** she had been bound like me, but the emotional damage was enough. Only a handful the kids who we **had** taken in could shift. The mental heaviness of everything was just too much for most.

I stared out the window and watched as terrain began to live up to its name. The Wildlands. I had never been out here before. It was technically under Rhys' rule, but also it wasn't. Only a portion of it. It was divided among the supernatural, but it was less regulated. I had never fully understood exactly why Sandra had even wanted to come out here, but before I could even process that thought, another one crossed **my** mind. What if the Lycans secretly had land out here? It would be

the perfect place to hide. The perfect place to conceal their truth. The Prison may not have been near here... But what if the program was?

I thought about it for a long moment, trying to make sense of everything that was slowly beginning to click into place in my head. It wouldn't make sense if Iris had been a last-minute lure for me to go back. But if they were planning this right, they would have probably assumed at some point they were going to need me to get in line and could have pulled her one of those first couple of nights. In shifted form, I'm not sure how long it would have taken, but this was awfully far from their pack, but it did stretch out quite a bit to where it wouldn't be ridiculously far...

Were we even completely sure that Sandra was on our side? I mean, the last time we had seen her, she had promised to unbind me and then played games with us. Was that just a witch thing? I had researched and researched, but I still felt so behind on everything, and I definitely felt like I didn't understand anything about any of the other supernatural creatures we were trying to ally ourselves with.

I tried to calm my nerves as the limo pulled up to the only known house in this part of the Wildlands. I could tell that Rhys hated not having the SUV in case of an emergency, but I knew I could shift if I needed too. Rhys, Sawyer and Kerris could also shift, and Vampires were notoriously fast. That really just left Maizie, who maybe could shift if needed, but could also ride on Sawyer's back if it came down to it.

I hoped it wouldn't come to that thought. Everything was leading up to this moment, and I needed answers. We needed to be able to move forward. We needed to free those kids and take down the corrupted

government.

I took Rhys' hand as we walked up the overgrown walkway. I was surprised Sandra didn't keep up with her yard. She didn't seem to be the kind of person who would like the tall grass like this, but maybe it kept her

hidden.

Rhys knocked on the door as if this wasn't a big deal. That the Alpha King and Prince and ex-Luna Queen, and the Vampire Queen and Princess all show up in the Wildlands for fun. But being calm was a necessity. We had no idea what we were walking into.

But no one answered the door, and a bad feeling filled my chest. I didn't trust Sandra, but I couldn't shake the feeling that, something horrible had happened here.

"Don't." I called out as Rhys reached for the doorknob.

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He looked down at me, and I knew we were both remembering the time with the **teacups at Red Blood pack**. It wasn't as strong as it was last time, **but** the darkness was overwhelming.

"Grace?" Maizie questioned, her eyes never leaving my face.

Rhys stared down at me before pulling me off to the side as the panic began to rise inside. My heart thundering at whatever terrible thing laid inside as every stared at me, wondering why I had **stopped** us.

"I support and love you." Rhys said taking me by surprise as he pulled me close to his chest.

"Something bad happened." My voice barely audible to my own ears.

"Can you tell me what?" He asked, gently brushing the loose strands of hair out of my face.

"I don't know."

“Can you try?” He pressed gently.

“How?” It was barely a whisper.

“Close your eyes.” Maizie guided. Her and Sawyer had broken away from the group and huddled close to us in a way I hadn’t expected. “Focus on the feeling you have. Let it come to you.”

I did as she said, and as soon as I did, it all happened so fast...

The room inside was tinted in blue, and her magic was out of control, zipping around the room in complete chaos as Sandra paced in the center of the room chanting something I couldn’t make sense of.

My grip tightened on Rhys’ sleeve, but I didn’t pull out of the vision as another shadow approached.

“You helped her.” The man growled. There was something familiar about him, but I couldn’t place who he

was.

“Ich beh helios,” Sandra chanted. “Canter oli tobas.”

“You have made a grand mistake.” He told her taking a step forward, clearly unafraid of her magic.

“The Moon Goddess doesn’t make mistakes.” Sandra hissed as he knocked her to the ground. “She is the chosen one.”

“She is nothing!”

“She is the chosen one.”

And the magic that had been zipping all around the room in colorful streaks finally found its targ

both

of them.

The Unwanted Daughter's Alpha King

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Grace's hands clenched my sleeves tightly, and I held her firmly by her forearms. I didn't like the way she stiffened or the panic that I could **see on her** face I wanted so badly to say to forget it, we didn't need to know, we could just leave, but something stopped me. She was tapping into her power, **and she had** done it with next to no hesitation. She had so far. Before she would have never dreamed of shifting or using her powers, and now it was **almost** second nature. I had never seen anything like it before. I was **so** proud of her, but right now, my worry was winning.

"Is she okay?" My mother asked, her face a picture of composure, but I could still see the worry in her eyes. The eyes I had learned to read all those years

ago.

"Just wait," Sawyer snapped at her, moving to protect Grace from the unwanted eyes

of both our mother and the Vampires.

Grace made a whimpering noise, but she didn't open her eyes. I wondered if I could see what she was seeing if I reached for our link, but I was afraid that that was how we were going to get stuck or something, sort of like the Land of the Gods. I didn't want to risk it when we were in such a vulnerable position,

After what felt like an eternity, she sucked in a breath, and her eyes popped

but they were

still unfocused.

"Gracie?" I tried as she swayed slightly.

She blinked up at me, the daze she was in fading into sadness.

"They're dead." She whispered.

"Who?" I asked quietly, still not quite ready for outside voices to be a part

of

this yet.

“Sandra. And this guy. I don’t know who he was. He was horrible. He was yelling at her about helping someone and then told her to renounce something. But she said whoever they were talking about was the Chosen One.”

“The Chosen One?” I felt my frown deepen. These were new words, but somehow, I felt like **I knew exactly** who they were about, and I didn’t like it.

“Is it safe to go in?” I asked.

“Yes. The magic has died down. But they will send more when he doesn’t return.” She answered, but even she looked a little stunned that she knew that.

“Do you want to continue? We can just leave.”

“No, we should go in. See what she’s protecting.” Grace answered, taking a shaky breath.

I looked her over. She looked unsettled, but not terrified. Her **face** was a little paler than usual, but after everything she had **been** through that wasn't much to go on. I searched her eyes, and reached for our link, but it almost felt numb. She wasn't all there, which worried **me**, but there was a look of determination in her eyes that made me agree with her.

"We don't have to do this." I mindlinked her.

"Yes, **we** do." She answered with a resolve that I was proud of.

I slid my hand into hers, and we walked back to the others who were staring at us with curiosity and fear. I didn't have an answer for them. And honestly, it didn't matter what we'd say. They'd never fully understand what was happening. They hadn't been in this situation long enough for any of it to make sense

yet.

Grace and I reached for the door at the same time, and she sucked in a sharp breath as **if** she was preparing for whatever she **was** about to see.

"Together." I murmured.

She nodded, and we opened the door slowly.

The blue haze took me by surprise. I was surprised to still see magic moving **in slow** streaks across the room. I thought it would die when Sandra **died, but** apparently, I **was** as naive about witches as I was about Lycan's.

Sandra's body laid sprawled out on the floor, her body **covering** something that I couldn't see. And there **was** a man I **didn't recognize, but he** was in an

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unnatural position, looking like **her** was reaching for something. **It** was hard to look at.

Sawyer and Maizie followed us in and **Sawyer** went straight to Sandra to check for a pulse. **The slight** shake of his head told us **what** we already kni

“Oh, **it** stinks in here.” Mother complained.

I glared **at** her as Grace and I walked around the small hut. The fire was still burning, so that told me none of this could have **happened too long ago**

“What’s Sandra holding?” Maizie asked hesitantly, walking over to Sandra’s childlike body.

“I don’t know,” I frowned. I had thought she had looked like she was protecting something, but I hadn’t realized **she** actually was.

I approached cautiously, trying to avoid the little streaks of magic that seemed to **still** be coming from Sandra. Sawyer had made it look so easy, **but it was** harder than I had expected.

I grabbed what she was holding. It was a small box. About 3 inches high and 3 inches long. A perfect square, and it held power.

“What is it?” Queen Margaret asked, inching closer to get a better look.

“I have no idea...” I answered hesitantly, handing it to her, hoping she had a better understanding of magic than I did.

“It’s a pyxis.” She answered before passing it to Elara, who was studying it carefully. “But I have no idea what’s in it.”

“Definitely magic of some sort.” Elara agreed. “But I’ve never seen one like this. Usually, witches sell these. They give a sort of power that **normally** couldn’t be accessed. There was a time where they were selling fake ones to humans, and it **was** causing a big ruckus a couple hundred years ago.”

My heart hammered uncomfortably in my chest, and Grace looked at me, mirroring what I could only imagine was my own **expression**. What if that was the secret to the Red Blood Pack? We already knew that the Lycan’s were using something that we didn’t understand, but what if they found **someone to** specially make what they needed? What if they had a pyxis?

Chapter Comments

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The Unwanted Daughter's Alpha King

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The ride home was made in near silence. Elara and Margaret were chatting among themselves. They were trying to come up with a plan to bring **those who** were loyal to them into my pack. A part of me hated the idea of an influx of strangers into my pack, but the other part of me was too tired to care, **We** needed a plan to screen them all at least, so we could minimize traitors and enemies, but it would

have to fall on someone else. I couldn't take on **anything** of that magnitude right now. I had people I trusted enough to get it done. Kate would probably love a task like that. She thrived in strategies like that.

"I don't like that we just left them like that," Grace mindlinked me.

I could see the worry on her face and squeezed her hand gently. We had explored the hut that Sandra had lived in, but found nothing really of us. Sawyer had grabbed a few medicinal items, herbs and things that he thought might come in handy, and we took the Pyxis, but otherwise we left everything untouched and the bodies right where they had fallen. I didn't feel quite right about it either, but I didn't want anyone to know we had been there, so the Vampires had helped us to hide our scents.

"When everything is over, we'll go back and burn Sandra and bury the guy." I responded gently.

She nodded, but I wondered what she was thinking. All I could feel through the bond was that she was pensive. When we got back to the pack house, **it** was late, but I didn't feel tired at all. Queen Maragret handed me the Pyxis, and her and Elara headed downstairs to their room. I thought they would still want to meet, but they seemed to be in deep discussion about something else that they didn't need our input on.

I knocked on Leon's office door to tell him we were back and was surprised to see both him and Heather in there.

“Everything okay?” I asked them, hesitantly. With Leon being back, I had fully expected Heather to disappear from the Beta duties like she used to. She hadn’t been interested in the role of Beta since they had kids, but I was beyond grateful for her help lately.

“Yea,” Leon answered, but his brow was furrowed in thought. “How did it go?”

I filled him in, and we all went our separate ways after I placed the Pyxis in my desk drawer and locked it. I wanted to know where everyone stood, but that wasn’t a tonight problem. Caleb was on the couch with Sammy and my mom. Maizie and Sawyer had gone to find Alana to give her a small debrief. And I headed to my room, my mind still wired to find Grace already showered and in bed.

“Are you okay?” I asked her, noticing that she was looking a little green.

“Yea.” She answered, but she sounded a little distant. “Just tired, I think.”

“You aren’t poisoned again, are you?” I questioned, immediately skimming her skin to make sure there was no mark.

“No.” She gave a shaky laugh. “At least I hope not. I just feel kinda weird.”

I sat down next to her on the bed and grabbed her hand in mine.

“Was today too much?”

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“It doesn’t matter if it was.” She answered, surprising me slightly.

“Why wouldn’t it matter?”

“Because we’re running out of time and ideas, Rhys. Those kids need us, and that pack needs us before it’s too late. Before more kids can be **ripped** away from their families. Before there’s more cases like Maizie and her mom. Or Michael and his dad. They’re coming for us, and we **aren’t** even slightly ready, **but** we need to be.”

“What do you suggest my love?” I probed.

I knew that look in her eyes. I knew the way she was talking meant that she had an idea. That she had been giving this a lot of thought **and telling me** was terrifying to her. I didn’t know how to make it more comfortable for her... We were both trying and changing to the best of our abilities. But **I just wish I** didn’t terrify her.

“I think we should get married.” She said without blinking an **eye** with more confidence than I knew she had.

“What?” I don’t know what I was expecting, but it wasn’t that.

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“I **think we** should go with our original plan. Lay a trap. I think we should get married and have the Luna Ceremony.”

“And do what exactly?” I asked unable to keep the bitterness out of my voice and hating that she wanted to do these things for the wrong reasons.

She looked hesitant now, but it didn’t matter. I needed to know what exactly her plan was.

“For multiple reasons,” She said finally after a long few minutes. First, we need to draw Alpha Adrian and Luna Kinsley out. I don’t think **they** can resist 1 even think we send them an invite, make them feel forgiven. 2. We use them coming here to get the kids out of the Program while they are **here**, since there will be less people there to guard it.”

1

I thought about her words and asked her to let me sleep on it. She agreed, but I could feel her disappointment through the bond. **It wasn't that I thought** her plan was bad... It just- I wasn't sure that it would be enough. It sounded great in theory, but would they fall for it after everything? Did **we** need an even

1 bigger twist to truly throw them off or were they gullible? Clearly, they weren't necessarily stupid. I mean, they had managed to keep their pack **hidden for** this long, but they did seem to be slipping...

I stood up and made my way to the bathroom to shower and change. I was sure that sleep wouldn't find me tonight, but it didn't matter. I could **use** the time to catch up on pack things.

I had thought that Gracie was asleep already when I decided to go back

to

my

office, but her soft voice caught me by surprise.

“Rhys?” She mumbled.

“Yes?” I answered, turning back toward her curiously.

“Stay.” She whispered.

And with that one word, all my thoughts to get caught up on work dissipated, and I finally felt my exhaustion. I crawled into bed with **her** and let sleep carry us both away.

Chapter Comments

The Unwanted Daughter's Alpha King

The Alpha suite was quiet. The day had been quiet with everyone gone, and now, even though they were back, things were quiet again. Nobody had said much, and the mood was heavy. Sammy and I had watched a movie in our family room. Iris and Michael had joined us for a while, but they seemed to be a little more distracted than usual. Iris had hardly even complained about the movie at all.

Now it was early morning, and I couldn't sleep. Everything seemed to be spiraling out of control, and I felt out of control. Before, when I had felt like this, I would go and drink myself stupid, but I had a little girl to take care of now. I had made more than my fair share of mistakes, but Sammy had made me see the light, and I owed her everything, including my sobriety. I never wanted to see disappointment cross her face because of me,

"Caleb?" Mom called out softly as she entered the kitchen.

She had been on something since her return. She had always been ultra organized, and a little uptight, but since her return, it had been tenfold what it used to be. She had taken everything to a whole new level, and there was a coldness about her that I didn't remember existing before.

"Hi Mom," I said with a sigh. "Did you sleep well?"

She shook her head tiredly, and for the first time in a while gave me a greyish look.

"Are you okay?" I asked, my worry for her creeping in.

I saw her without her make-up. Her eyes had dark circles and bags under them, and she had this

“I don’t sleep well anymore.” She answered with a shrug. “I haven’t since your dad died?”

I hated that she had had to live through that. I remembered how I had felt when my first mate died. She had broken me in more ways than I had ever dreamed possible. And when Sammy’s mom died, it took all I had not to spiral again. I hadn’t loved her, not like I should have, and yet, I remembered how hard I had to fight not to drink. I had to be stable for my Sammy. She needed me. She still needs me. She’s the reason I hadn’t given up yet, even though most days, I kinda wanted to. And I wondered if my mom felt the same way on some level.

“I understand.” I told her, placing a coffee cup in front of her, and squeezed her hand gently. She had been the only one who used to see me as myself when we were younger. As much as I know people tried, I was never right to be Alpha King. I was wild and free. I was seen as the fuck up from a young age, but mom saw me differently. She just saw me as me. I wasn’t a failure. I wasn’t a fuck-up. I was just her Caleb. And now, I think I was the only one who saw her as broken right now, and that wasn’t something I could fix.

“When did everything get this hard, Cal?” She asked.

“It’s not supposed to be this hard, Mom.” I told her gently. “We just have to find the things that get us through the day, and the pain never really goes away, but it learns to exist with the happy. It stops feeling like such a fight, and it just becomes a piece of us that we will always carry. It stops being so heavy and just exists within us.”

“When did you get so wise?” She gave me a small sad smile, and I returned it.

I felt bad that she was feeling everything so heavily, but that was what life was like. We both just sat there as the rest of the world woke up. I wanted Sammy to get to know her Grandma, but not the mean lady that had been around lately. I wanted her to know the woman that raised me. The one who had been beloved by her people. The one who knew her own power and didn't abuse it. And maybe she would start being that.

When everyone was finally up, I headed to the office, Mom at my heels. I didn't think really wanted her that after her comments to Grace and Maizie lately, but she didn't really give us an opportunity to say no. We knew the Vampires weren't going to be up yet, and Maizie's mother tended to sleep in late, so we were at least good on that point.

By the time I finally got there, Maizie and Michael were in their usual places on the floor, joined by Iris, who I was a little surprised to see. She seemed to be a bit of a liability, but maybe they all knew something I didn't. Grace was sitting on Rhys' desk and Rhys was leaning against it a something, which again, in my opinion was pretty bold considering that they were in a room full of werewolves and lycans who coul conversation if they wanted to. I just tuned them out, and nodded to Sawyer, who's chair was right next to Maizie, and Heather and Leon, the latter of just glared at me a little. I didn't blame him. I had nearly ruined his marriage. I deserved so much more than an angry glare.

whispered about

hear the

I gave my mom my usual seat, and took a spot on the wall near where Alana liked to sit by the door. She wasn't here yet, but I hoped she would be. She usually attended, but I didn't know with everything going on in the house lately, if that would change.

"Sorry, I'm late." She exclaimed as she walked in the room.

It was hard to breathe. Even in her uniform, she looked gorgeous. I couldn't believe the longing I had for her. I didn't want to get in her way if she had a mate, but every day, it got harder and harder to stay away from her.

"We were just getting started," Rhys reassured her.

I gave her a small smile as she took her seat, and I leaned slightly into her as Rhys began to talk. He was begging mom for an information she had en

Lycans, but it was the same. She hadn't heard of them at all. Alana nervously began playing with my hair, and I almost melted. This meeting was doing what we most had lately, just going in a circle. Nobody has any new information. So, we start talking about plans to infiltrate their pack

"Well, what about the Pyxis?" Alana asked hesitantly. "Do we know where they might be keeping one?"

“No,” Rhys answered with a frown.

Grace’s brows furrowed and she reached for small Pyxis.

“CHOSEN ONE!” The box screamed before rattling to the floor.

Nobody moved for a long moment before Grace looked at Rhys and said, “We are definitely getting married.”

Chapter Comments

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The Unwanted Daughter’s Alpha King

