



You Have The Power

I stood beside my mother, holding her hand tightly as I watched them lower the coffin into the ground.

I no longer fought the tears in my eyes as I stepped forward and grabbed a handful of dirt. I dropped it down into the hole, watching it spread on the shiny waxed top of the coffin.

My brothers did the same, followed by my mother and lastly, my father. Each of us silently mourning the loss, each of us silently bearing the pain.

But none ached more than I did as I said my final goodbye to the person I loved most, my best friend.

My father had been running the pack as alpha for over a decade when my grandpa retired. But I didn't mind. It meant he had all the time in the world for me.

I wasn't stupid enough to believe I wasn't spoiled. I had lived a pretty great life with my two amazing parents and my two big brothers, a grandma that kept my belly full and a grandpa that treated me like a princess.

What had he been doing out there? Why had he been so close to the border, especially when he knew tensions with Crescent Moon had been running so high lately?

I shuddered as my mind was taken back to the moment I found him.

I had heard the alarms go off, I had heard the call for help.

I had raced with the warriors in my unit to where the call had come from, only to get there too late. I saw the four patrolmen dead on the ground.

And past them...

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I saw the Crescent Moon pack member standing over him, over his still body lying on the ground. The damn wolf had the gall to smile at me before he ran off, as if he had won some grand victory.

But he had.

I rushed to my grandfather, skidding to a stop beside him as I shifted back, my body dirty as I pulled him into my arms.

"Grandpa!" I panted, my eyes stinging with tears as I held his heavy body against mine, searching his face. His eyes flitted open and his mouth turned into a sad smile, the corner tinged with blood.

"You have the power to change it," he whispered. "I love you, sweet pea."

"I love you too, grandpa. Let's get you home, okay?" I sobbed. His gaze dropped from my face and his eyes went cold. "No, no, no, no, no," I said, shaking his shoulders wildly. "NO!" I screamed, tears pouring down my face. "You can't die! Please come back!"

"You ready?"

I was jolted out of my memory by my brother. Connor gripped my shoulder gently, waiting to walk back up to the packhouse.

"Yeah..." I said quietly, my voice hoarse from all of the crying I had done.

He wrapped his arm around my shoulder tightly. "Food?"

"Food," I echoed, leaning into him.

I followed him into the common area and began fielding comments and well-wishes. I plastered on a fake smile, taking on my role as the daughter of the alpha. I shook hands and received hugs and dried tears. I listened to dozens of old stories and memories, fighting back my own tears as they spoke of my grandpa with love. And he was loved, dearly. There wasn't a member of this pack that didn't remember everything he had done for them.

The decades he spent protecting them, serving them, and the changes he had made to the pack that had led to my mother becoming their beloved luna.

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"Not really. You?" I asked, taking a shaky breath.

"Pretty much devastated," she sniffled, swiping another tear from her eye.

"Where's Dad?"

"Where do you think?" she asked, nodding her head toward the door.

"I've got it," I said, pulling away from the safety of my mother's embrace to venture outside to the place my father always went when he needed to stop feeling.

I watched as my father's fists slammed over and over into the weighted punching bag in the training field.

"Dad," I said quietly as I picked up some sparring gloves and wrapped them around my wrists.

He stopped, his breathing ragged as he panted against the punching bag. He didn't speak. He didn't need to.

I wrapped my hands tighter and stepped toward him. I pulled my blonde curls into a knot on my head and stretched my neck in a circle, loosening my shoulders. "Today sucks," I said before throwing a punch toward him.

He ducked out of the way and began dancing around me. "Yeah, it does," he huffed, throwing a punch of his own.

I moved toward him, feigning to the left before ducking to the right and landing a jab to his ribs.

He let out a sharp exhale and rubbed his side. I could see his eyes shift to black for just a moment before turning back to their regular blue.

We continued to spar until our breathing was labored, each of us landing blows and dodging others. I could feel sweat sliding down my neck and back and the groans in my muscles as my body began to tire. I moved around him and kicked my leg out, catching him in the thigh. He dropped to one knee with a groan. I stopped for a moment, the adrenaline from fighting still surging through me. "I'm sorry, Dad."

He looked up at me, his face a mixture of anger and sadness. "For what?"

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I could feel the tears building in my eyes once again, the guilt eating away at me. "I didn't get there fast enough. I didn't..." I shook my head, fighting my own words.

He stood from the ground and walked toward me, enveloping me in his arms. "Shh..." he said quietly, holding me close. "Emma, none of this was your fault."

"It was! It's my job to protect our borders. I should have been there. I should have..."

He held me tighter, brushing a kiss to the top of my head. "It is not your responsibility to keep us all safe, sweet pea."

"Why was he out there? He... he shouldn't have... I should have protected him."

"You can't be everywhere at once," he said, his hand petting my hair gently. "I don't know why he went out there, but he went out knowing the danger."

A sob broke from my lips. "I miss him."

"I miss him too, sweet pea." He pulled back and looked down at my face, wiping away my tears with his hands. "I..." he stuttered, choking on his own grief, "I don't know how to exist in a world where he doesn't."

"I don't either..." I whispered.

"We'll figure it out, okay?" he said, pulling me back into his arms. After a few minutes, my breathing began to slow as I calmed down, pushing away the guilt that still ate at me despite my father's reassurances.

A moment later, my father laughed as Connor and Kyle, my twin older brothers, jogged down the hill.

"Mom send you out here too?" he chuckled.

"Yeah," Kyle replied, rubbing the back of his neck. "She figured Ems had laid you flat by now."

A small smile grew on his face as he nodded them over, opening his arms to them.

They grinned, and in seconds I had Connor and Kyle wrapped in a hug around me as well.

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I wasn't sure how long we stood there, but I didn't fight it or the warmth that built inside me knowing I was loved—each of us ignoring the sad sniffles coming from the others.

"I send you all down here to get your father, and this is what I find?"

We all turned to find my mother standing before us, her hands on her hips and a sly grin on her face, making the corners of her eyes wrinkle.

She approached us and smiled as my father opened up a space for her beside him, holding her close to him.

She pressed a kiss to his lips, and we all groaned as he growled into her touch.

Kyle, Connor, and I all backed away quickly, leaving them alone.

I turned back as I walked up the hill, smiling as my parents embraced each other, their bodies entwined. My mother broke their kiss and pressed her forehead to his, whispering words of comfort to him that I couldn't hear.

Three days later, after wallowing in grief and self-pity, I rolled out of bed and threw my wildly curly blonde hair into a knot atop my head as I headed to training. We had all begun training when we were six, but it had become clear very quickly that I was made to be a warrior. And when my brothers had continued training casually, I worked tirelessly. I trained hard, pushing myself until my skill was unmatched. My father was the only one that could beat me, and I could still count a few times I got him on his back. Because of that, I was the youngest female captain in the history of our pack. Someday, I would be head warrior.

"Morning, Emma!"

"Good morning, Lucas," I smiled.

"Who's today's victim?" he asked with a smirk.

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Lucas laughed loudly. "Hear that, y'all? Your captain thinks she can beat all of you. What do you say?"

He was answered with two dozen men and women shifting seamlessly into their wolves, each a different shape and color.

I gave a wide, feral grin before shifting into my large tan wolf and ran toward the center of the group.

Hours later, I walked into the pack house and into the common area. I smiled as my grandma Sophie waved at me from a table.

"Hey, Gran," I grinned, placing a peck on her cheek before sitting beside her.

"How are you feeling, sweet pea?" she asked, rubbing my back.

I took a bite of my sandwich and gave a shrug. "Not sure. I miss him..."

"We all do, hun," she replied. "How was training?"

"Good," I grinned. "Definitely helped."

"Good," she winked.

I glanced down at my watch before scanning the dining room. "Where's Mom and Dad?" I asked, frowning when I received a shrug from Connor as he sat across from me, his plate piled high with four sandwiches.

"They're in Dad's office..." Kyle answered as he came up behind us.

"What's wrong?" I asked as worry built inside me.

"They received a missive from Crescent Moon..."

"Let's go..." I growled, stalking toward my father's office, flanked by my two big brothers.

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I paused at the door, my hand hovering near it as I hesitated to knock. Knowing my parents, they could very well be doing things in there I never wanted to see.

"Come in, Emma," I heard my father's deep voice bellow from the other side. I never quite knew how he always did that. We had impeccable hearing, but his was otherworldly.

I opened the door slowly, my eyes catching on my mother's puffy face before settling on my father's. "Crescent Moon?" I asked as I sat in the chair across from his desk.

My father sighed. "That was supposed to be kept on the down-low..." he said, aiming an unamused glare at Kyle.

Kyle shrugged innocently. "She should know, too."

"I should have you all horsewhipped for even considering questioning your alpha."

My mother placed a hand gently on his shoulder. He looked up at her, and his feigned anger crumbled. He placed his hand on hers and patted it lightly before turning back to us. He tossed the note across the desk and leaned back in his chair, gripping my mother's hand in his tightly, as if she was his lifeline.

I knew she was. Mates were such a beautiful thing, but I knew their love was something different, something special. It was something I hoped to have someday.

Connor picked up the note and read it out loud.

"Interesting how easily an alpha falls." Kyle looked up from the note. "What the hell is this? A taunt?"

"They are claiming your grandfather's death. Without an ounce of class, if I might add," my mother said coldly.

I felt cold, icy rage build within me. "He was old and sick!" I growled, my fists clenching at my sides. "A four-year-old could have bested him."

"Yes, but no one outside of this family knows how sick he was," my father replied. "So, to Crescent Moon, taking down an alpha—and not just an alpha but an elder—adds to their cause."

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My father gave me a warning stare. I knew I wouldn't be able to go much further without trouble.

Connor slumped in his chair. "You know what it is," he huffed. "They want Father to step down and cede control to their alpha. He's trying to form some mega pack with himself at the helm. We aren't the only pack he's trying to strong-arm."

"What are you going to do?" I asked softly.

I watched as my father's jaw clenched, his whole body going taut. "Crescent Moon killed five members of this pack, including someone we love. We are now officially at war."

