

The One He Claimed Chapter 161

Chapter 161: Lucas' Acceptance

Hunter

I can feel Sophie's happiness and I'm thankful that her afternoon is restful. I know that last couple of days, weeks, hell, basically since I found her and marked her in private it's been non-stop stress. Now that she's carrying my pup, I feel extra protective of her.

I excuse myself from our friends and the pups at the Survivor's Center and make my way to the hospital. Zahn is becoming increasingly agitated and if he doesn't settle down, I'm going to remove him.

As I walk into the hospital, I hear him snarling. "What the f**k is taking so long?"

"Alpha Zahn!" I bark. He turns to look at me and I can see the worry eating at him. I don't actually care how worried he is. I understand it, but he's been warned about acting out. If he can't control his emotions, I'll be happy to beat the *t out of him again. Based on my warriors' stances, I can tell they're ready for a fight.

"Why is it taking so long?" he asks, moderating his tone.

"Dr. Caspian is resetting every bone on the right side of Jocelyn's body from her hip to her toes, Alpha Zahn. That doesn't take a couple of hours, not if you're doing properly."

"I feel impotent! I need to DO something."

"You're welcome to go back to the packhouse and work..."

"I can't focus enough to work," he growls.

"You can go for a run, with my warriors as escorts," I say, as he continues to pace, reaching his hands into his hair and gripping tightly. I can tell he's done this a lot as his hair is sticking out in all directions.

"Go for a run, Zahn. You're in for a long night. Jocelyn may not wake up until tomorrow. So, do yourself a favor and go burn off this negative energy you have."

"And what if she come out of surgery while I'm gone?"

"My warriors will let you know as soon as Sophie hears from Dr. Caspian. I have no idea how much longer it will be, but based on this morning and early afternoon, I'd say you have a couple of hours."

He looks at my warriors, then back at me. "Is there a certain area where I'm allowed to run?"

"My warriors will keep you from any area you're not allowed to go. Follow their guidance and you'll be fine."

"Will they be able to keep up with me? I need to run hard."

"I'll let the patrols know that you're going to run, and they can monitor you and keep you where you need to be."

"Alright, let's go," he says to the guards and heads outside. I mind link the patrols to keep an eye out for Kortan, Zahn's wolf. I feel multiple warriors decide to station themselves around the pack lands, making sure to keep the pack safe and keep Zahn from places I don't want him to go. It doesn't feel like this is an attempt to scope out our pack's weaknesses, but just in case, I'm glad the pack is taking precautions without me having to ask.

Once he's gone, I turn and find a nurse, asking about Jocelyn.

"She's stable, Alpha. I know Dr. Caspian is working hard to get her bones set and Dr. Felicity went in to assist him a few hours ago."

"Thank you."

'Alpha, do you have a minute?' Lucas asks in the mind link.

'Where are you?'

'Packhouse, but I can come to you.'

'I can come to you,' I say before reaching out to Sophie.

I can feel Hedda purring in her head, so I know they're still with the pups, but it feels like they're starting to pack up and head back. I loved seeing my mate holding so many pups. She's going to be an incredible mother and now that I know she's willing to have so many, I almost can't wait for our son to be born so I can put another pup in her.

'Is it the pup you want, or the practice?' Sophie's voice hums my head.

'Both,' I say, growling softly in a way that I know will have my mate shivering.

I smile when I feel her body's response. 'I'm going to speak to Lucas. Zahn is running around the pack, burning off nervous energy.'

'Do you trust him?' she asks.

'Reach out to the pack, Soph. They have it covered,' I say, helping her to keep her focus on the conversations around her while reaching out to feel the pack's response to knowing that Zahn is out running around. I help her zero in on the warriors who have eyes on him so we can both see that he's running hard, not trying to go into places where he isn't allowed to go.

'I'm always so impressed with your ability to focus on so many things,' she sighs.

'You're getting better every day, my love,' I say encouragingly.

'I'll see you back at the packhouse?'

'Yes. Do I need to send warriors to help collect everything?' I ask her as I walk into the packhouse.

'No, Robin and Kayce have it.'

'Okay, see you soon.'

My naughty mate sends me an image of her naked in front of the mirror. I growl softly.

'Mine!'

'Yes, I am,' she says, obviously pleased with my response. I need to remember that her hormones are off and that her possessiveness is more intense than usual.

As I walk to Lucas' office, I begin sending her images of what I intend to do with her and to her tonight. By the time I knock on his door, my mate is purring loudly in my head.

"That's the grin of a man who is dirty talking with his mate," he says laughing as I walk in.

"Guilty and not a bit sorry."

"Nor should you be," he says, gesturing for me to sit.

I do, then look at him as he sits across from me. "What's on your mind?"

"Owen's pack. I don't want to stake a claim on it, but I do want to get a feel for how this competition will go. However, I wasn't sure how you'd feel about leaving Penny and Jaime here alone with Alpha Zahn and Luna Jocelyn."

"Let's ask them," I say, reaching out in the mind link to have them join us while also realizing that Sophie isn't going to want to leave Jocelyn. However, if we're only gone for a day and a half....

My thoughts cut off as Penny and Jaime knock on the door.

“Alpha, you wanted to see us?”

“Have a seat,” I say, as Lucas pulls up more chairs.

“How do you feel about watching the pack, specifically Alpha Zahn, if me, Sophie, Lucas, and Kinsley were to go see about the competition for Owen’s pack?” I ask them.

Penny looks at Jaime, then back at me. “How many of our warriors are planning to compete?”

I look at Lucas who gets up to get some paperwork off his desk.

“Close to fifty have said they want to compete, but that doesn’t mean that all of them will compete for Owen’s pack,” he says.

I watch as Penny and Jaime have a **al conversation. Then Penny nods and turns back to us

“Jaime is confident that he can control Alpha Zahn if he gets out of control. I’m happy to check in on Luna Jocelyn and be there for her if she needs assistance. It feels as though the pack is also willing to keep an eye on Alpha Zahn and I’m guessing that will only increase if you and your mates leave the pack,” Penny says.

“I need to speak with Sophie and make sure she’s okay to leave Jocelyn, but if not, I’ll make sure to have 24-hour guards on her. Alpha Zahn will not be allowed to intimidate her, Jocelyn, or anyone else in this pack while we’re away.”

“Absolutely not,” both of them say in unison.

“I’d be happy to be Luna Sophie’s guard while you’re away,” Penny says.

“That would make me feel much more comfortable leaving her here, Penny. Thank you both. I’ll let you know what our final decision is by tomorrow.”

They nod and walk out together. When they’re gone, Lucas turns to me.

“I hate to say it, because it means I’m starting to believe that I’ll be leaving this pack, but they’ll make good Betas to you and Luna Sophie when Kinsley and I are gone.”

I smile at my Beta, knowing I’m going to miss him terribly.

“Yeah, they will.”

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Chapter 162: Recovery Begins

Sophie

When Dr. Caspian told me that Jocelyn was out of surgery, I informed the warriors closest to Zahn who was still out running, then I went to find Hunter.

“I’m heading over to the hospital. Jocelyn is coming out of surgery.”

“How’s Dr. Caspian?”

“He sounded exhausted, but I want to go talk to him before he calls it a night.”

“Zahn?”

“On his way, I’m guessing.”

Hunter looks at his desk then stands. “Okay, I’m coming with you. I want to see how Zahn is feeling after burning off energy for the last few hours.”

“You don’t have to convince me, Hunter. I’m always happy to spend time with you,” I say, smiling at him.

“I didn’t want you to think that I don’t trust you to take care of yourself. You are a strong, Alpha female and I respect that.”

“But I’m carrying your pup, which know makes you even more protective of me and I’ve already agreed to let you handle Zahn. That hasn’t changed.”

He kisses me then takes my hand. As we begin to make our way toward the hospital, he asks me about going to Owen’s pack with him. “I know that you probably don’t want to leave Jocelyn, but if we only go for a day and a half or two days...”

“Let me see how she is once she wakes up. If she’s doing okay, then I’d be comfortable leaving her in Penny’s care. I trust her and Jaime to protect Jocelyn and this pack while we’re away.”

“I do too. I’m glad we’re in agreement. I didn’t like the idea of leaving you, even for a few hours, much less overnight.”

Hunter, Zahn, and I stayed with Jocelyn until midnight. During that time, she never woke up. I spoke to Dr. Caspian before he went to sleep, and he said he didn’t expect her to wake up until the next morning.

When Robin and Nikki came to relieve us, Zahn finally decided to go shower, recognizing that Jocelyn truly wasn’t going to wake up.

“How’s he doing?” Robin asks Hunter when he leaves.

“He’s behaving,” Hunter says as Nikki walks over to the bed to look at Jocelyn.

“How’s she doing?”

I shrug. “Her vitals are fine. She just seems to be resting. I know that the next couple of days will be tough for her, but I’m hoping that if she can rest and heal, she’ll be feeling better soon. The nurses come in to check on her periodically and I believe that they’re giving her pain medications on a pretty steady basis. Dr. Caspian didn’t expect her to wake up until later this morning.”

“Okay, we’ll look after her.”

Hunter had carried me back to our room. We’d passed Zahn on his way back, but he seemed deep in thought. Hunter had tucked me into bed and curled up around me before I fell into a deep sleep.

It was morning before I got to enjoy all the images Hunter sent me yesterday and while I was tired, it was a fantastic wake up. Hunter went to warrior training, and I got ready for the day before meeting him for breakfast. When we finished, we headed over to the hospital together to check on Jocelyn. I’m relieving Allison so she can go back to sleep before they have to leave this morning. Both of my friends wanted to get home and talk to their packs before we meet at Owen’s old pack.

When we walked in, Zahn was hunched over the bed, his head on Jocelyn’s hand, holding it in his as he slept. I smile at a sleepy Allison who has a fresh steaming mug of coffee beside her and then turn to Jocelyn, whose eyes flutter open.

“Hey, good morning,” I say softly, walking over to her. Zahn’s head pops up and he sees that her eyes are open.

“You’re awake! Oh, thank the goddess!” he says, jumping up and leaning over to kiss her.

“Alpha Zahn, your mate just woke up. How about giving her a moment to gain her senses,” Hunter says.

I watch as Zahn’s jaw clenches, but he does back off a bit.

“How are you feeling?” I ask her.

“Like shit,” she murmurs.

"I thought she was on pain medication! Where are those nurses!" Zahn demands his Alpha aura, whether intentionally or unintentionally, pushes out. It's irritating for me, but I imagine it's uncomfortable or even detrimental to Jocelyn's recovery.

"Alpha Zahn, you need to rein yourself in," I say strongly. I watch as his face contorts into what looks like he's going to growl before he looks at Hunter and catches himself.

"I'm just worried about my mate," he snaps.

"If you're so worried about her, then pay attention to your aura, Alpha Zahn. Spreading your frustration and anger into the air of this room will impede her recovery which will mean that you will be removed," Hunter says sternly, coming to stand beside me. The warriors in the room step up behind Zahn, ready to forcibly remove him if necessary.

He takes a deep breath, but I can tell he's not happy about me and Hunter keeping him in check.

"She needs to be checked. She's in pain," he insists.

Hunter looks at one of the warriors and they turn and walk out, presumably to get a nurse. I turn back to Jocelyn, who is my primary concern, knowing that Hunter will handle Zahn.

"Dr. Caspian said your surgery went well. I know that may not help at the moment..."

"No, it does. I'm glad to know it went well. How long did it take?"

"All day," Zahn says, taking her hand again.

"Ten hours," I clarify. "But he was able to reset every bone from our right hip to your toes."

"Well, if it works, that will be worth it," she says. "Can I have some water?"

I turn, looking around the room.

"Here you go," Allison says, handing me a glass of water with a straw in it. I hold the straw to Jocelyn's mouth and watch her eyes close as she drinks deeply.

The door opens and Dr. Caspian walks in with the warrior.

"Good morning, Jocelyn," he says then looks around the room. "Lunas, Alphas," he greets us.

"I'm going to go find Kayce, Sophie, unless you need me," Allison says.

“I’m good, thank you. I’ll be back before you leave.”

She leans over Jocelyn’s bed. “Take care of yourself and let yourself heal. If you need anything at all, let me know.”

“Thank you, Luna,” Jocelyn says before Allison moves out of the now overly crowded room. Hunter nods, letting the warriors know they can step out as well.

Dr. Caspian talks to Jocelyn, asking her about how she’s feeling, about her pain level, and checking her vitals from this morning and overnight. “I’d like to take another x-ray of your leg this morning. I took them at each point yesterday, but I’d like to make sure that everything is still in place so it can heal properly.”

Jocelyn nods in agreement.

“Alright, I’m going to take our patient for a bit and get those x-rays, then I’ll bring her back in here.”

“Will you come with me, Sophie?” Jocelyn asks.

“I’d like to come,” Zahn says, still holding her hand.

“Just Sophie please,” Jocelyn says.

I wait, watching Zahn struggle with Jocelyn’s decision, but he finally releases her hand and steps back.

I follow Dr. Caspian to the x-ray room and reach out to hold Jocelyn’s hand.

“He’s very overwhelming. I didn’t realize how overwhelming until you made him back off,” she says.

“If you want him out of the room, all you have to do is say so,” I tell her nods. “I don’t think that he’ll let me kick him out completely, some time without him there would be nice.”

“It’s your decision, not his. I’ll ask him to leave when we get back,” I tell her.

“Thank you, Sophie,” she says just as Dr. Caspian has me step out of the room.

He takes the x-rays and while they process, I go back into the room, quietly sitting beside Jocelyn while she rests.

When Dr. Caspian comes back in, he puts the x-ray screens up on an x-ray box and turns on the light.

He looks them over before smiling and turning to look at Jocelyn. "We have some good news."

He points to the first x-ray. I recognize it immediately as her original x-ray from two days ago. "This was your first x-ray. Let's focus on your right leg. You can see the multiple breaks from hip to toes," he says, using his finger to point to the shattered mess that was her leg.

He then points to the next x-ray on the screen and Jocelyn gasps as we see the difference immediately. The shattered mess of her leg is now straight, like it's supposed to look. "This is your leg now."

"Wow," she says. "That's amazing," she whispers.

"What's even more amazing is this right here," he says, moving to a third x-ray. "This is your hip. It's where I started your surgery yesterday. Notice that there are no fracture lines in your bones."

"What does that mean?" I ask him.

He turns to look at us, smiling. "It means, Jocelyn, that while your wolf may be silent, I believe that she's alive and well, and already starting to heal you."

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Chapter 163: Guards for Jocelyn

Hunter

I had a feeling that Jocelyn wasn't going to want Zahn in her recovery room when she returned, and I was right. I also had a feeling he wasn't going to leave just because he was asked to, so I made sure that the warriors were nearby to escort him if he gave me any problems. I know it hasn't been long, but Jocelyn seems to already be responding to the calm that Sophie brings to this pack, and I don't want Zahn's negative energy interfering with her recovery.

She's not even through the door when Zahn jumps up and begins asking her what Dr. Caspian told her.

The smile I saw on her face as she was coming in the door drops away.

"Zahn!" I say, but he remains focused on Jocelyn. "Alpha Zahn," I growl, getting his attention.

He looks up at me, and I can see that he's getting tired already of being told how to interact with his mate. "Back off. She's not even in the door yet and you're already overwhelming her. Back. Off!" I growl when he glares at me.

My warriors come in right behind Jocelyn and Sophie, moving to put themselves between my mate and Zahn.

"I don't think it's too much to ask what they found," he snaps, putting up his hands and stepping back as my warriors crowd him.

"The surgery was successful, but need to heal. I'd like for you to leave now, Zahn," Jocelyn says, "Jocelyn!" he says, looking at her as if he can't believe she's kicking him out.

"Your presence, whether you mean for it to be or not, is very overwhelming, Alpha Zahn. That is not a conducive environment for someone to recover in," Sophie tells him kindly, She's being a lot nicer than I am, or than my warriors will be.

"You heard her Zahn, and you know the rules," I say, stepping up to my warriors and putting myself between Zahn, Sophie, and Jocelyn.

"This is f**g ridiculous!" he yells. "She's my mate!"

"Not by choice," Jocelyn's soft voice says from behind me.

"Jocelyn, we're here to try and fix that, fix things between us," he pleads.

"And Jocelyn has begun to heal so that she can become the woman she used to be, Alpha. I think you need to pay attention to how your actions cause your mate to accept or reject your requests. Perhaps during this time while Jocelyn recovers, you can take time for some self-introspection," Sophie suggests.

"I don't need any self-introspection," he snarls, taking a step forward and that's all it takes. I have him by the throat and I'm dragging him out of the room before he even realizes what's happening. When I get out of the room, I toss him to the floor. I see several other warriors standing in the waiting room watching.

"Get him out of here. He's no longer allowed in the hospital until Luna Jocelyn agrees. I need two more for 24-hour guard duty..." I begin.

"You can't do this!" Zahn yells.

Now I snarl, leaning over and getting in his face. "You are on the verge of being kicked out of this pack or being ripped apart by my warriors. I'd suggest you do as my mate said and get a hold of yourself. You are not in control here, Zahn. You do not get to make the decisions. If you don't like it, leave. If you intend to stay, get your s***t

together because the next time you growl or snarl at my mate, I'll take your head off. Get him out!" I say, stepping back as my warriors very unceremoniously grab him under his arms and begin dragging him outside. He tries to get to his feet, to push away from them, but the warriors behind him kick his legs out from underneath him, keeping him in a submissive position as they drag him away.

"You wanted two more guards, Alpha?" a couple of warriors ask, stepping up.

"Yes. I want two guards on Jocelyn at all times. I'm going to have to leave the pack tomorrow, and whether or not Sophie joins me, I want to make sure that Jocelyn is safe."

"Yes, Alpha. We're happy to start now, and I know I speak for everyone else when I say we'd all be glad to guard our Luna as well if she doesn't go with you," my warriors say.

"Thank you. G**a Penny will be Sophie's personal guard if she stays. For now, you can station yourself outside Jocelyn's door while she's recovering. Alpha Zahn only goes in if she agrees."

The nod and go to take up their spot at her door.

Sophie steps out of the room and sees the guards. I watch as she thanks them for so quickly offering to help Jocelyn, and I watch their faces soften as their Luna praises them. She's such an incredible woman.

I stay where I'm at, watching her as she turns, seeing her growing belly, swelling with my son, and I feel like my heart might burst with love for this woman.

"Those are some powerful feelings you have coming off you, Alpha Hunter," she purrs as she walks up to me.

Instead of answering, I lean and kiss her. It's a demanding, possessive kiss, full of my love and desire for this woman but also my pleasure and happiness at being her mate. This amazing woman is all mine.

"Mmmm, maybe I should have overbearing Alphas growl at me more often," she says, smiling up at me when I finally release her mouth.

"There would be a lot fewer Alphas in this world if you did," I say, leaning my head against hers as I hold her.

"Where is our overbearing Alpha?" she asks.

"The warriors dragged him off. I'm guessing they'll make sure he's got some cuts and bruises before they're done with him."

“He’s a stubborn one, isn’t he?”

“I’d go with arrogant, I think.”

“True. Arrogant and stubborn, that’s a bad combination,” she says.

“It is. How’s Jocelyn?”

“Better now that Zahn’s gone. Dr. Caspian told her that her hip bone has already healed and that it probably means her wolf is alive, but silent,” she says excitedly looking up at me.

“That’s fantastic news!”

“It is. I thought I’d let her rest while we go say goodbye to our friends,” she says. I take her hand and begin leading her toward the packhouse. “I noticed you put some warriors on her for protection.”

“Zahn’s not exactly learning his lessons, and I really want you to come with me tomorrow. I hate the idea of being away from you for that long. I know Penny and the pack would keep you safe. I’d be more afraid for Zahn than you, if I’m being honest, but I just don’t like being away from my sweet little mate. And now that she’s becoming more possessive of me, I like making sure she knows that she’s the only woman for me,” I say, pulling her to a stop and leaning into kiss her neck, moving to her mate mark. I graze my canines over her mark, feeling her body shiver in my arms and smelling the floral scent of orchids in the air. “And I think we both know I can never get enough of you,” I growl. She leans into me and it’s only the sound of someone clearing their throat that has me pulling away.

“Don’t mean to interrupt, but we wanted to say goodbye before we left,” Robin says, smirking at me.

“Oh!” Sophie says, rushing to Nikki and Allison and hugging her friends.

I just smile at Robin as we shake hands. “We’ll see you tomorrow?” I ask, shaking hands with Kayce as well.

“Yes, we’ll be there,” Robin says, turning to watch our mates as hug again.

“Same,” Kayce says. “We have several individuals who want to compete. Will Ezra be there?”

“I believe so. His Beta, Jake, wants that pack, so I’m assuming he’ll be there, and I hope that Margot is as well.”

Sophie, Nikki, and Allison finish their goodbyes and Sophie steps back beside me. I wrap my arm around her waist as our friends make their way to their cars. Then we wave them off and I feel my mate's sadness at her friends leaving.

"We'll see them again soon, Sophie. Even if you decide to not come with me tomorrow."

"I know. I just really enjoy spending time with them."

"I think I know what we can do to take your mind off of that," I growl softly.

"Oh yeah? What's that, Alpha?" she purrs.

"Oh, let me show you," I say, scooping her up and carrying her to our bedroom where I make sure that she forgets about everything except me.

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Chapter 164: Circle of Protection

Sophie

I have a lot of concerns about leaving Jocelyn while she's in her recovery stage. I know that Penny will look after her, check on her, and protect her, but it's not the same. Jocelyn and I have begun to bond, and I don't want to lose that by being away for a day or two.

I go to see her first thing on the morning before we leave. I already know that I need to go with Hunter. Whether it's our bond, the pregnancy, or a combination of both, I know I can't be away from him that long, and I definitely won't be able to sleep. without him beside me.

When I walk into her hospital room, I can see that she's improved overnight. She's sitting up and having some breakfast when I walk in.

"Well, this is a pleasant surprise," I say, sitting down beside her.

"Sophie! Good morning! I think Dr. Caspian is going to release me today. I know I'm not healing at wolf speed, but I think I am healing faster than a human."

"It definitely seems like it. How are you feeling?"

"Sore, but better. I think sitting outside and trying to reconnect with Cassidy will help me heal faster too."

"Does that mean you're going to help set up the garden with the others?" I ask her.

“Yes. Sandy came by last night and we talked about what I’d like to plant. I thought that was really nice, since this isn’t my pack. But she told me that anyone who is friends with you or Alpha Hunter will always be welcome here. And she said that after I leave, I could come by any time to visit.”

“She’s right,” I say. “It sounds like you and Sandy have already become friends.”

“She’s been through a lot. You bond quickly when you’ve been through the types of things that we have.”

“I imagine so,” I say, holding her gaze. “I wanted to talk to you about something. There’s this thing…” I sigh. I know Hunter isn’t telling Zahn, but Jocelyn isn’t the same as he is, and I want her to understand the importance of why we’re going. “Hunter isn’t telling Zahn, but I think it’s okay to tell you. We’d just like to keep it from him until we know for sure where he stands.”

“Where he stands?” she asks.

“Yes. In the past, he sided with the packs who have gone to war with us. Hunter and I don’t trust him. I think he might truly be here for you, but Hunter’s not convinced.”

“I honestly wouldn’t know, Sophie. If I thought he was going to do something to hurt you or this pack, I’d tell you, I swear.”

“I believe you, which is why I’m going to tell you why I have to leave the pack for a couple of days.”

“You’re leaving me?” she asks, worry clouding her face.

“Just for a couple of days,” I tell her, taking her hand. “It’s important. I wouldn’t go if it weren’t. But you know how we’ve fought several Alphas and that has left pack lands open without leadership?”

“How many? I thought there was only the two, Joshua’s and Alaric’s.”

“No, Owen’s and Elias’ packs are also open. The Alphas in our alliance, Hunter, Robin, Kayce and others, have agreed to open a competition to our pack members to take over those packs. Today, we’re all meeting at Owen’s pack to show the

prospective competitors the pack lands, let them decide if they want to participate, and then we’ll schedule the first battle.”

“You’re opening it to everyone? Even omegas?” she asks.

“Omegas AND women,” I tell her, and her eyes go wide. “Amelia is blazing the trail, and Nikki is paving the way behind her. Things are changing, Jocelyn, for the better. Who

knows, if you get healthy enough, you could compete for your own pack, if you want one.”

“Wow, so it’s not just your pack that you’re changing?”

“Well, we started here, but now it’s time to branch out and make changes to the entire werewolf community. Change has been needed for a long time. Hopefully, Zahn will be on board with that, but if not...” I say.

“If not...” she says, looking thoughtful. “My own pack. I would never have dreamed of such a thing. How soon will the other pack lands be available?”

“I’m not sure. Owen’s pack is first and I believe everyone has agreed that Alaric’s pack will go up next. Joshua and Elias’ packs are farther from us, so they’ll come later.”

“Now I wish I could go with you. This will be exciting,” she says.

“It is. I’m very excited. We have several warriors who want to compete. And, if you’re healthy enough, I’ll take you with us when we open up Alaric’s pack. You can meet my sister and see what it’s like for a female Alpha to run a pack of her own.”

“I’d really like that, Sophie.”

“Good, then you rest, get healthy and when Dr. Caspian returns, we’ll hopefully be able to get you scheduled for another surgery. Maybe by then, your wolf will be back, and you can heal more quickly.”

She looks thoughtful for a moment, then looks at me, her face clouding again. “Do you think I’ll be safe while you’re gone?”

I raise a finger to tell her to hold on and I mind link the warriors outside her door. They knock before walking inside.

“Luna?”

“Jocelyn, this is Caleb and Frankie. They are your assigned guards for today. Gentlemen, can you tell Jocelyn what your role is?”

Caleb steps up as the senior warrior. “Luna Jocelyn, our role is to keep you safe at all times. We are to ensure that Alpha Zahn does not approach you, speak to you, or in any way harass you, unless you choose to interact with him.”

I see Jocelyn look at me in surprise.

“And what happens if Alpha Zahn disregards that expectation while Hunter and I are away from the pack?” I ask, already knowing the warriors are itching to beat Zahn up again. I heard they weren’t gentle when they dragged him to the packhouse last night.

Both warriors look over at me. “Alpha Hunter hasn’t yet given us our restrictions for how we are to handle Alpha Zahn.”

“Restrictions?” Jocelyn asks.

“Yes, Luna,” he says if that answers her question.

“They don’t like Zahn. They’re angry at how he treats me and that he doesn’t respect me or Hunter. Basically, they’re looking for any excuse to beat the crap out of him,” I tell her, watching my warriors nod their heads at my explanation. “So, if he approaches you without your consent, he’ll be lucky to remain alive. Hunter said he was more worried about Zahn than me if I went with him and I see he’s right. Somehow, Zahn has managed to turn this entire pack against him in just a couple of days.”

“He is not the kind of Alpha I would ever choose to serve,” Frankie says.

“Nor would I. I have no respect for a man like him. My apologies

if that offends you, Luna. I know he’s your mate.”

“Not by choice,” Jocelyn says, and both warriors nod in understanding.

“Caleb, how many other warriors plan to keep an eye on Jocelyn while Hunter and I are gone?” I ask and Jocelyn looks up at them, surprised again.

Both men’s lips twitch. “All of us, Luna.”

I turn and look at Jocelyn. “Still worried about Zahn?”

“No. I guess I’m not. Thank you both, and thank you, Sophie. Your circle of protection seems to have included and embraced me. It’s nice to feel safe. It’s been a long time.”

“We will keep you safe, Luna. That’s a promise,” Caleb says seriously.

“Well, how about you call me Jocelyn, Caleb? I don’t accept my position as Zahn’s Luna, since I never wanted to be his mate.”

“Yes ma’am.”

“You too, Frankie.”

Frankie nods in agreement and Jocelyn turns back to me. “When are you leaving?”

“This morning. I wanted to see how you were doing before I made my final decision but seeing you looking healthy made up my mind.”

“And you’ll be back tomorrow?”

“Yes. Just one night away. If Dr. Caspian releases you today, I’m sure Sandy will help you get back to the Survivor’s Center.”

“We’ll help her, Luna,” Caleb says.

“Well, I guess you’re leaving me in good hands, Sophie.”

I stand and lean over, hugging Jocelyn. It’s natural for me, but I feel her body flinch before she relaxes and reaches around to hug me too.

“Be safe,” she says.

“Get well,” I say and head back to the packhouse. I feel much better about leaving now.

The One He Claimed Chapter 165

Chapter 165: Big Softy

Hunter

I’m so thankful that Sophie is willing to go with me to Owen’s pack. I would have left her here, knowing the pack would protect her if Zahn acted like a fool, but I prefer having her near me so that I can protect her and my pup

When she returns from seeing Jocelyn and lets me know that she’s willing to join me, I lead her into the dining hall where I know that Zahn is having breakfast.

“Alpha Zahn,” I say loudly. The room quiets and everyone looks over at us. Zahn stands up.

“Is something wrong, Alpha Hunter? Is it Jocelyn?”

“Jocelyn is fine and recovering well. Sophie just came from the hospital. I wanted to let you know that Sophie and I, along with my Betas, Lucas and Kinsley, will be leaving the pack overnight.”

“Where are you going?” he demands.

“That is not your concern.”

“I came here for you to help Jocelyn, not for you to leave the moment we arrived.”

“You arrived several days ago, Jocelyn has received her first surgery, and she is healing nicely. I wanted to let you know that my Ga**s are in charge, Penny and Jaime.”

Zahn snorts, no doubt because Penny is underage. “I also wanted to let you know, in front of my pack members, that if you go against my G**as, if you try to push yourself into Jocelyn’s space against her will, the pack has my permission to rip you to shreds.”

His face darkens in anger. Brutus and William made sure to leave Zahn bruised when they dragged him back to the packhouse last night.

“You have no right to keep me from my mate,” he growls.

“I have every right if that is her wish and so far, it is.”

“If your pack touches me, it will mean war,” he snarls, trying to threaten me. If his pack is as pitiful in a fight as he is, my pack will barely notice.

“You wouldn’t be the first Alpha to go against me and lose,” I growl, my hand in Sophie’s is the only thing keeping me from getting in Zahn’s face. I watch as the realization of my words hits him. He would know about Elias and Joshua. I’m not sure what he knows about Owen other than he’s dead.

“What the **k am I supposed to do around here if my mate won’t see me?” he asks frustratedly throwing his arms in the air.

“I can give you access to a computer so you can work. That’s what I would do.”

He looks down, shaking his head. “I have a computer.”

“Very well,” I say, as Lucas and Kinsley step up behind me. “Penny, Jaime, the pack is yours.

“Yes, Alpha,” the two say in unison.

“Ready?” I ask Lucas

“Yeah, I just have to make sure that Kinsley can carry our bags while she’s on Dario’s back.”

“I have to do the same with Sophie,” I tell him. Since Ezra is driving, I asked him to bring tents for us to sleep in, just in case the packhouse was destroyed by Joshua. However, I wanted Sophie to have something softer to sleep on, so I’ve rolled a thick blanket up into our bags. It isn’t a lot, but she’ll already be a bit unbalanced riding on Shaw with her large belly.

When we get outside, I put the straps over her body, making sure nothing is pressing against our stomach too tightly and that everything is comfortable. Then I strip and put my clothes in the bag before letting Shaw pull the shift. As soon as he does, he walks over to our mate.

“Shaw, you big softy,” Sophie coos, running her fingers through his fur. Hedda begins purring loudly as Shaw presses his nose against her belly, sniffing our pup. He rubs his face over her stomach, scenting her and trying to scent our pup as well.

When he’s done, he lifts his head and licks Sophie’s face. “I love you too, big guy,” she says, through Hedda’s loud purring. I can hear pack members behind us chuckling at Hedda’s open display of affection toward Shaw, and he is soaking it in.

He finally lays down and patiently waits while Sophie gets on his back and gets settled. He turns his head to watch her, nuzzling her when she struggles to get on his back. Sometimes I forget that my wolf loves our mates as much as I do, but it’s moments like this that remind me that he and I share not only our mind, but also our emotions.

‘Not all wolves are as lucky as I am. Not all humans openly share themselves like you do. But yes, Sophie and Hedda are as precious to me as they are to you. And our son will be just as precious,’ Shaw says, sending me an image of our young son on the floor between his paws as he nuzzles and sniffs him.

I take the image and add our son painfully gripping onto his face and feel Shaw m**lly shrug. I know my wolf is tough enough to take down anyone who attacks our pack, but I’m not sure he’s strong enough to take a baby’s grip on his fur.

‘I’m sure I’ll manage,’ he purrs, using his face to push Sophie up just enough that she huffs and settles on his back.

“Finally! This is ridiculous!”

‘Our pup is getting big, baby. It makes it harder for you to move easily.’

‘Yeah, yeah,’ she grumbles in my mind.

‘Ready?’

“Ready,” she says out loud, looking over at Kinsley.

“It wasn’t that hard for you,” she says.

“First, I’m a week or two behind you, Sophie. Second, I’m carrying a Beta pup, you’re carrying an Alpha pup.”

"I don't think that matters," she grumbles as Shaw stands and nods at Dario. The two of them take off at a slow jog, moving as easily as they can so they don't jostle our pups. I let Shaw focus on our surroundings, and I keep focused on Sophie, making sure she doesn't seem too uncomfortable or starts to bounce too much. About halfway, we stop. We're higher on the mountain, and it's a good spot to let our mates get some water. Sophie chooses to stay on Shaw's back, worried about getting back on, but Kinsley gets off and stretches her legs.

"I forget how beautiful it is up here," Sophie says.

"When I was bringing food up here, I was always nervous, so I didn't really take the time to enjoy it, but you're right, Sophie. It's gorgeous. Once the packs around us are settled, we really need to start thinking of that community area where all the packs can bring their families to relax."

"Like a park," Sophie says. She opens up the mind link to Lucas and Kinsley and we can all see her ideas. Kinsley begins to add hers as well.

"Yeah, a park with some picnic benches or maybe some swings for the kids."

Shaw and I watch the images flash through their minds as Sophie looks around the space.

'I love that idea. I love that we'd have a place to bring our pups as they grow up. Once they get their wolves, they could run around up here. We could cut some trails for them,' I tell them.

'Maybe put some fire pits up here for star-gazing on cooler evenings with the family,' Lucas adds, sending more images to our growing picture.

"We should sit down with Nikki, Allison, the twins, and Amelia and really determine what we want up here, since this mountain is centrally located to all of our packs," Kinsley suggests.

"I'll set something up," Sophie says.

After they've rested, we begin to make our way down the backside of the mountain toward Owen's pack. I can see that we're not the first ones here, which doesn't surprise me. Some of our pack members who want to compete left earlier this morning so they could look around. Robin, Kayce, Ezra, and I are planning to put stakes on the borders of the pack lands. Since this pack is like mine, not bordering any other packs, it will be important for those interested in competing to know how large the pack is.

I see Ezra and Jake. Lucas and Kinsley break off to go talk to our pack members, but Shaw moves toward Ezra. When we're close, Ezra turns and smiles.

“Shaw, good to see you. Hello, Sophie.”

“Hello Ezra,” she says sliding off Shaw’s back. “Did Margot join you?”

“Of course I did,” Margot says from behind him, walking our way.

Sophie rushes over to hug her as I shift. “Hello Ezra, Jake,” I greet them, moving to grab the bags off of Sophie’s shoulders.

“Look how big your pup has gotten already, Sophie,” Margot says, looking down. I feel the wave of her excitement and watch her smile broadly at Margot. I kiss the side of her head before getting my clothes and pulling them on.

I turn back to Ezra. “Who’s here? Or should I ask who’s not here?” I ask, seeing a large number of people milling around.

“Robin and Nikki just got here, they’re checking out the packhouse to see if we can sleep there. It’s a mess, but I think it’s a better option for those of you with pregnant mates,” Ezra says. “Kayce and Allison haven’t arrived yet.”

We hear a howl, and I turn seeing several wolves heading our way. The largest is carrying Allison.

“That would be Rodion carrying Allison,” I say.

“Who are the others,” I hear Jake ask, his nose going up in the air.

“I’m not sure. I haven’t met their wolves. I know Allison’s friend Letti was planning to come, so I’m guessing she’s one of those wolves.”

Jake takes a couple more steps forward, his gaze intent.

“Jake?” Ezra asks, watching him closely.

I watch as one of the wolves rushes right up to us, shifting into Letti.

“MATE!” Jake growls.

Letti’s eyes go wide. “Mate.”

The One He Claimed Chapter 166

Chapter 166: Seeing Friends

Sophie

It's so good to see Margot again, even better because she seems to be healing emotionally. Spending time with Ezra, unlike Jocelyn's time with Zahn, seems to be helping Margot get stronger.

"How is your mother?" I ask her.

Margot snorts. "Once a Luna, always a Luna, I guess. She's got Ezra's pack eating out of the palm of her hand."

"And how about you?" I ask her.

"I'm settling in. It's...different. I can feel the pack's desire to have a Luna again, for me to accept Ezra. I can also feel their need to feel whole. It's different than what I felt from the pack when I was with Joshua. They valued me as their Luna in some ways, but it's not like it is with you and your pack. There's almost a desperation in Ezra's pack, a need to fill the gaping hole that Diana left. It makes me nervous to try and fill those shoes."

"Those aren't your shoes to fill, Margot. You're not Díana, you are you. You shouldn't try to be her. Be the person you are. You and Ezra have been given second chance mates because you are both what the other needs right now. What he needed, the woman he needed when he met Diana, isn't the same as what he needs now," I tell her.

"Yeah..." she says, her eyes moving to Ezra. Instead of smiling, she frowns. Just as I turn to see what she's frowning at, I hear it.

"MATE!"

I suck in a breath, turning quickly to see Letti shifting from her wolf in front of Jake. "Mate."

He takes a step toward her, and I see Letti's eyes go wide a moment before Kayce steps in between them. "Letti is part of my pack. We do not allow public claimings in my pack," he says forcefully.

Jake blinks at him, then looks at Letti. "I'm Alpha Ezra's Beta. We don't allow public claimings in our pack either. That's not.... just..."

"Kayce, let them get to know each other," Allison says, coming to take her mate's hand.

"My Beta is an honorable man, Kayce. He won't mark your pack member publicly, will you Jake?" Ezra says, stepping up his Beta.

"No. I wouldn't. I intend to win this pack and when I do, I won't allow it in my pack either," he says to Letti.

“Well, that’s funny. I’m here to win this pack too,” Letti says, making Jake smile.

“Letti did you want to put a shirt on, then you and Jake can get to know each other?” I ask her.

She looks down as if just noticing that she’s naked in front of her mate. Before she can move, Jake rips his shirt off and tosses it at her.

“Yeah, I’d like that,” she says, smiling at Jake.

“Me too,” he says, waiting for her to put on his shirt and then extending a hand.

“Don’t go too far. We’re going to start soon once everyone is here,” Ezra tells him. I’m pretty sure he’s warning him to not go off and mark and mate her or they’ll miss their reason for being here.

“So you’re here to win the pack, huh?” Jake asks her as they walk off, holding hands and staring at each other.

“Yes.”

“Maybe we can win it together, lead it together, would you like that?” he asks her.

She smiles and nods.

“Da***it, Robin!” Nikki says from behind me. I turn in time to see her smack her mate on the arm. “Now they’re becoming trend-setters! When are we going to start blazing trails and leaving our mark in this world?”

“Why don’t you write up this new law, like you did for the one where women can become Alphas, baby. Then your stamp is on all of the changes that are being made,” he coos at her.

She narrows her eyes at him. “You just don’t want to do all that work.”

He shrugs, unperturbed. “That doesn’t change the fact that it will be your name on the petition for the law change. That information stays on record forever.”

She presses her lips together tightly. “I guess so.”

“It must be you, Sophie. That’s the only thing I can figure out,” Margot says still frowning as she watches Jake and Letti walk away.

“What’s that?” Hunter says, focusing on Margot.

"You're like the mate fairy, or something. Every time you're around, people find their mates. It's crazy! I've never seen anything like it," she says, looking at me like I might sprout wings and a wand.

I shrug. "I think the changes we're making are allowing people to find their mates more easily," I say honestly.

"No, I think it's you," she says, as Ezra walks over and wraps an arm around her waist. I notice she doesn't flinch. She doesn't lean into him, but she doesn't pull away either. Progress.

"I think Margot's right, Sophie. There is something special about you, something that brings people together," Ezra says.

I smile at the praise, as Hunter wraps his arms around me. I can feel his pleasure at their admiration of me and also his pride that HE'S my mate.

"Are Amelia and Dutton coming?" Hunter asks.

"Calvin is here, actually, as is Amelia's G**a, Caleb."

"Interesting," Hunter says, just as we hear another howl. I turn and see a dark brown wolf running our way with two women on his back. Dutton with Tiffany and Tammi. There are several other wolves that have come from Dutton's pack to see the pack lands.

"Oh the twins came!" Allison says excitedly.

When the twins climb off his back, Dutton shifts quickly, checking on both women, kissing them, before turning to the rest of us. Nikki, Allison, Kinsley, and I say hello, then rush to the twins, hugging them and catching up.

"I can't believe we're all pregnant," Tammi says excitedly. I look at Tiffany and I'm glad to see that she doesn't look upset. Having been in the room when they discussed it, I know that Tiffany wanted to be the mother of the Alpha heir.

"Do you know what you're having yet?" I ask them.

"Not yet," they both say.

"Me either," Nikki pouts.

"You can't be far off, Nikki," Allison tells her.

"No. Our pack doctor says we should be able to tell next week."

Allison's baby bump isn't as big as mine, and Nikki and the twins still have flat stomachs.

"We probably have a couple weeks to go. We're pretty sure we got pregnant the same night," Tiffany says.

"I want to hear all about that. I can't imagine how that dynamic works," Nikki says. The twins smile at each other.

"It took a bit, but Dutton is amazing," Tiffany says.

"He's mated to twins for a reason," Tammi confirms.

We barely have a moment to talk before Hunter and the others call us together. My friends and I stand back, watching the pack members and others congregate as Hunter, Dutton, Kayce, Robin, and Ezra talk to the group about the plan for today, explaining the rules of the competition, and that the competition will be scheduled after tomorrow when those in attendance can decide if they want to participate or not.

The rest of the day, the Alphas give a tour of the packhouse and the pack lands, marking off the territory as they go. The group of contenders is quite large, over 200. I'm surprised, but pleased to see that there are several omegas and even more females in attendance getting the information about participating in the competition.

Since we're here and don't have a lot to do, my friends and I begin straightening up the packhouse. The pack members were responsible for bringing their own food, so we don't have to cook, but we do go through the pantry, cleaning out old food and setting it aside to dispose of later.

It's nearly dark when the group returns, and Hunter finds me. "Did you eat today?" he asks, looking around the space as he pulls me to him. "Wow, I can't believe how much you did while we were gone."

"It looks great in here," Kayce says appreciatively.

"Wow..." Robin says, pulling Nikki to him.

"Don't get any ideas," she says, smiling up at him.

"Oh, I have a lot of ideas," he says, scooping her up and carrying her out of the room.

"As do I," Lucas growls, scooping Kinsley up and walking her out as well.

"Did you happen to straighten up any of the rooms, Soph?" Hunter asks in my ear.

"We didn't get that far," I say.

“D**n, we’ll have to find a secluded area then,” he says, scooping me up.

“Hunter!”

Instead of answering, his mouth latches onto mine as he walks.

‘I’ve been missing you all day, Sophie,’ he says in my mind, and I get the feeling that all of our mates have been talking about us and missing us all day.

The One He Claimed Chapter 167

Chapter 167: Leaving a Mark

Letti

I can’t believe I met my mate. I can’t believe he’s a Beta who is here to win a pack. And I’m happy, so very happy, that he isn’t one of those ranked members who insists on claiming their mate publicly.

I don’t know Alpha Ezra, I’d never met him before seeing him in Alpha Hunter’s pack, but I’ve been in Alpha Kayce’s pack for a while now. He and Allison have been great leaders. So, I knew he would protect me and not allow anyone to claim me publicly or against my will. Thankfully, Jake isn’t like that at all.

I look over at him again, smiling when I see he’s looking at me too. He turns his head away and chuckles.

“Are you having as hard a time as I am focusing on this pack stuff?” he asks me.

“Yes. But I was serious about wanting to compete for this pack.”

“What do you want to do here?” he asks. We’re walking around the pack lands, getting a feel for them and the size of the pack overall while the existing Alphas mark the pack borders with little wooden stakes with red flags on them.

“I want to start a pack like my friends have created. A place where people can live and be free, be heard, and be safe.”

“Your friends? You mean that group of Lunas?” he asks, looking back in the direction we came.

“Well, only Sophie was a Luna when I met them. Nikki, Allison, and I were on the run together. Allison and I met up first and then we met Nikki when Alpha Aiden tried to claim Allison, Nikki jumped in and was injured helping us to get away,”

He growls a low, dangerous growl. “He’s lucky he didn’t claim you, I’d kill him.”

“You wouldn’t have known that I was your mate though, would you? I mean, unless I had rejected him, which I would have. But there are ways that she wolves can be forced to accept their mates. I know in my old pack, women were impregnated and then their pups were used to force them to accept the mate bond again.”

“Impregnated? You mean raped?”

“That’s not what our ranked members called it,” I say,

remembering my father who had used similar tactics against my mother in the beginning. It’s why she helped me escape from my pack.

“Who the **k are these a**l**?” he asks, angrily,

“Entitled leaders who think they can do what they want, and, in the past, the laws supported them,” I say, “Anyway, Nikki was injured and we’d heard about a place where they were leaving food for she wolves on the run. Most of us, when we were on the run, looked out for each other as best we could,” I say shrugging, “We didn’t run in large packs, me, Nikki, and Allison being the largest group I ever saw, but that didn’t mean we didn’ t talk and didn’t help out when and where we could. And, of course, everyone knew about Sophic.”

“The Legend, right? Alpha Ezra said she’s the real deal and our

11

Lana Margot said the same has

nk your Lara had accepted your Alpha yet,” say

My Ad

“How would that work for us that if a pack

you and i were equals in our pack? 1 ask

He shrugs. Y not sure me

her to agree to

**wking Agha

“That’s a good question

Mure’s another question for you) he says, shopping and pulling me a bit wide from the large go who a walking the bordes

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Chalet Leaving a Alask

comfortable, I’ll talk to him and see what I can do,” he says.

I step up to him. I barely know the man, but I already feel drawn to him, and I like that he’s worried about being away from me. and willing to talk about how we can compromise together.

“I’ll come to your pack with you, but let’s get one thing straight before we go,” I say, running my finger down his t-shirt.

“What’s that?” he asks, his voice deepening as I touch him.

I lift up on my toes and put my face so close to his that I can feel his breath on my lips. “I’m the one winning this pack.”

His smile is instant. “You think so, huh?”

“Oh, I know so. I want it, therefore, it will be mine,” I say more confidently than I feel. Jake’s response to my closeness is making me feel bold.

He wraps his arm around me, pulling me against his body, his dark eyes watching me intently as his hard length presses between us.

“And what about me, do you want me?” he whispers, his nose rubbing against mine.

“Yes,” I breathe.

“When do I get to become yours?” he asks.

H**k at his lips, wanting to know if they are as warm and soft as they look.

“Tonight?”

He shakes his head. “That’s too far away.”

“What did you have in mind, Beta?” ask him.

“Everyone is following the Alphas and they’ll be busy for hours. I happened to notice an area by the river we passed that looked like it might be a bit secluded.”

“You want to mark me out here in the middle of nowhere?” I ask him, although the idea holds appeal.

“I want to christen our future pack lands with our love. I want both of us fight for this pack like nothing we’ve ever fought for before, because we’ve literally left our mark on it.”

Move that idea. “Lead the way,” I whisper.

We slink away from the others like we’re naughty teenagers sneaking out for the night. When we get to the place he saw, I see that it’s actually beautiful and we can easily conceal ourselves here. Mei pushes forward and I see Andre in Jake’s eyes as I turn to him.

He pulls me into a kiss, and I finally get to feel his warm, soft lips on mine. We spend the rest of the afternoon and evening, marking, mating, and talking about our plans for the future under the stars. Jake’s mind is everything I’d hoped for, kind, loving, and intelligent, and by morning, I know I’m ready to follow him to Alpha Ezra’s pack, ready to start the rest of my life with this man, and ready to begin training harder than I’ve ever trained in my life, because Jake is right.

We’ve left our mark on this pack, and now, I can’t let anyone have it but us.

The One He Claimed Chapter 168

Chapter 168: The Packs

Hunter

There was something about spending the day with the other Alphas, away from our mates that had all of us missing them. I missed Sophie, missed her smell, her laugh, her loving gaze when she looks at me, and I missed playing with my son. I’ll admit, it really

is my new favorite pastime, only knocked out of first place by making love to my mate. That will always be my number one favorite thing to do in this world.

So yeah, after being away from her all day, I scooped her up and took her to a secluded area where I could enjoy her, reconnect with her after being away from her all day, and yeah, I buried myself deep inside her, finding my happy place and capturing her screams of pleasure with my kiss.

I know I wasn't the only one. By the time we returned to the packhouse, nearly all of Sophie's friends had messy hair, some with grass or twigs still sticking out of them. The notable exception was Margot and Ezra, but I noticed that he took advantage of the time we were away to spend with his mate.

Most of the single warriors and ranked members who came to see the pack lands pitched tents and the group set up a couple of fire pits outside where people congregated overnight, talking about the pack, their possible future, and asking questions about the other available packs.

Robin, Kayce, Dutton, Erza and I spent most of the late evening talking with the group, answering their questions and making note of things that we to make decisions about. Calvin was around, but he didn't really engage with us. I'm not sure how to feel about that. He's an Alpha, but he was excluded from this process. It wasn't until much later, after Sophie and the other pregnant mates found space in the packhouse to sleep and had gone to bed that he finally approached us.

"So, is this the plan for Alaric's pack as well?"

"Besides the part of having to mark the boundaries, yes," Dutton says to him.

He nods, looking around. "Will you be opening it to all the packs?"

"Not all of them," I say. "Aiden and Zahn's packs are not part of our alliance; therefore, they won't be participating."

"What about my pack?" he asks, turning to look at us.

I look at the others, not wanting to speak for everyone.

"I guess that depends on where you stand, Alpha Calvin. You haven't been against us, but you haven't actually been with us either," Robin says.

"For that pack, in particular, I'd like to be included. Let me know what you need from me to be a part of that."

"Are you planning to join packs with your mate, Alpha Calvin?" Kayce asks him.

“Amelia and I are discussing how things will work in the future,” is all he says, before turning and walking away.

“Discussing?” Margot asks.

“Arguing,” Ezra clarifies. “Which reminds me, Margot and I never filled you in on her father and Joshua’s previous packs.”

I notice he doesn’t call Joshua Margot’s previous mate.

“How did that go?” Dutton asks.

“There was some disagreement about opening up the packs. Not as much after the packs saw my mother and I, but they had already created their own, new hierarchy and the ‘Alphas’ didn’t want the contest. Ezra shut that down quickly,” she says, smiling at him.

I raise an eyebrow at him. “How did you do that?”

Margot smile widens before she dips her head to hide it. Ezra looks at her, his lips twitching at their shared joke. “Did you want to tell them, since you got such enjoyment out of it?” he asks.

She looks up at him, smiling more openly than I remember seeing her smile in my pack. Then she turns to us. “Joshua’s Ga**a was p**k, always has been. He’s always thought more highly of himself than he should have. He may have also made the mistake of telling me that I should know my place and that it was beneath him since he’s the new Alpha.”

Several of us whistle low at that. Ezra may not be wearing Margot’s mark, but they’ve both identified that they are mates. There’s no way that Ezra would have tolerated anyone disrespecting Margot, much less like that.

“Ezra showed Franklin what it means to actually be an Alpha by Jifting him off his feet by his throat. Then he proceeded to scare him so badly that he literally pis**ed himself in front of the pack,” she says, smiling at Ezra.

She’s looking at him differently now. Whether it’s because of that event or because he’s working his way into her heart, her gaze and her smile are much warmer now, much more open.

“D**n. I’d probably have gone straight for the kill, but humiliation like that makes a much bigger impact,” Robin says.

“It did, and word travelled fast. No one else questioned the need to open the pack to a challenge in Joshua’s or my father’s packs,” Margot says, holding Ezra’s gaze. The heat

and chemistry between them is thick in the air. I'm surprised, and pleased, when she leans in and kisses him lightly and quickly on the lips. I'm not sure which of them was more shocked at her action, her or Ezra.

"I should, um...get to bed," she says, obviously embarrassed by her outward display of affection.

"Do you have everything you need?" Ezra asks her, as she stands.

"Yes, thank you," she says, before saying goodnight and walking inside the packhouse.

Ezra's gazes follows her until she's inside before turning back to see all of us smirking at him.

"Shut up," he growls, making all of us laugh.

"So, things are going well?" I ask him.

"They are. It's taking time, but I knew it would. Having Luna June there with us is making things easier, I think. She's such a natural Luna. The pack adores her and Margot. Margot's just more hesitant to act like a Luna because she hasn't accepted me yet."

"Doesn't look like it will be that much longer," Kayce says to him.

Ezra shrugs. "However long it takes, I'll wait. It'll be worth every minute of waiting if I can one day have what all of you have."

Since we all agree, we call it a night, going to snuggle with our mates.

The next morning, we sit around the fire pits again, eating breakfast and letting the group know that they can sign up to compete if they are interested.

We go through the rules, explaining that names will be drawn at random and it's a single elimination, meaning if you lose, you're out. We, the Alphas, will be referees to ensure that no one continues to the point where their lives are at stake, as this is meant to be a friendly competition, not a death match. Alphas will not be able to referee fights with one of their pack members in it, but since there are so many of us, we don't see the issue. Once the first round of fights are over, there will be a short break and then the second round of fights will begin. This will continue until one person is left standing and that person will be given the title of Alpha.

In the end, I'm excited to see that over two hundred individuals sign up to compete. We set the date for one week from today and then it's time to pack up and head home.

The One He Claimed Chapter 169

Chapter 169: Returning Home

Sophie

I say goodbye to my friends again but this time, it's not so sad. I know I'll see them again in a week, but we also talked about meeting to discuss the mountain area. Everyone loved our idea of the play area for the pups and the trails for wolves, not just pups, to run when they need to get away. If it becomes a community area, we can all take it on as part of our protection, making sure that if anyone calls out for help, we respond. Since we're meeting back here in a week anyway, we decide to come with our ideas and, when we have some time, we can go over the ideas together.

Lucas decided that he doesn't want to compete for this pack. I'm glad because I really want him to go for Alaric's old pack. Hunter told me that Calvin brought up that pack too, and I plan to talk to Amelia about it. I didn't get the impression that she wanted to expand our father's pack.

Hunter straps our bags on me again, making sure nothing is pinching or rubbing too much, before shifting and laying down. I begin my struggle to get onto Shaw again, when I hear Nikki.

"Sophie, it's painful watching you," she says, walking over and lifting me up, helping me get settled onto Shaw's back.

"Why didn't I think of that?" Kinsley asks.

"You were probably busy getting you and your own baby bump on your mate's wolf. I don't have a baby bump yet, so it's easier for me and Shaw won't get grumpy about it since I'm a friend and not a male touching his pregnant mate. Right, Shaw?" she asks, then she smiles mischievously and winks at me.

"Robin, is it me or is Shaw larger than Derric?" She tries and fails to hide her smile from taunting her mate. I feel Shaw snore just as I hear the growl behind her and bones snapping before a large black wolf comes walking over a moment later.

Shaw carefully gets to his feet, standing beside Derric. Nikki makes a show of assessing the differences between Shaw and Derric.

"Hmm, I guess it was just having a pregnant Sophie on his back that made him seem bigger," she says. Derric growls at her before she finally wraps her arms around his neck, hugging him. "Even if you weren't the same size, and I think you might be just a bit larger, you'd still be the only man and wolf for me."

Rather than letting her get away with her teasing, Derric shifts his body, gently pushing Nikki to the ground before laying on top of her, pinning her down, and covering her face with kisses.

“Oh, Derric! Derric, stop!” she complains, trying to push him away. Her mate’s wolf doesn’t even slow down, making sure that his long, wet licks go up into her hairline, her hair beginning to stand out at odd angles. “Robin Porter, don’t think I don’t know that you’re encouraging this behavior!”

Shaw chuckles. “Bye Nikki, see you soon,” I say, laughing as Shaw begins heading home, Nikki’s complaints following us for several more minutes.

We stop again at the top of the mountain to get water and enjoy the view from up here. It really is a beautiful area.

“We should figure out what to do with the space inside the mountain, otherwise, it’s going to become a h**k-up spot for young wolves,” Kinsley says.

“Do you have any ideas? I mean, it’s so small. The only thing that comes to mind is a swimming area for pops, but the pool is too deep. I’m not sure that’s a good idea either. Really only she- wolves, omegas, and pups are getting in there,” I say.

‘I got in there,’ Hunter says in the mind link.

“With my help,” Kinsley says out loud. “I’m not sure you or Lucas could get in there without assistance.”

‘We can think about it, but I’m not sure a pup area is the right idea. You’re right, Soph, the pond is too deep. Maybe we use it as a getaway for newly mated pack members. Speaking from experience, it’s a great place to seal your bond.’

Hedda begins purring loudly at his words, images of our night together flitting through both of our minds.

“It is far enough away from all the packs that it provides privacy, and it’s got everything you need except food. We can talk to the others about it when we meet next week,” Kinsley says.

We begin making our way back to the pack, Shaw and Dario announcing our return as we get close. The entire pack responds, and I instantly feel their happiness and contentment that we’re back.

“That’s such a great feeling. If Lucas wins a pack, I hope it’s the same feeling that we get from our pack,” Kinsley says, closing her eyes as she lets the pack’s love flow through her..

“It’s a wonderful feeling. I love this pack so much,” I say, letting my own love for them flow through the pack bond.

Almost instantly, I hear Shaw, Dario, and Kinsley all begin purring.

“What’s that about?”

“Our Luna loves us. There’s no better feeling in the world. Well, maybe the love of your mate, but in a pack environment, the love of your Luna is everything,” Kinsley says, this time basking in the love that I’m letting flow through the pack bond.

‘Is it that important?’ I ask Hunter.

‘Don’t you feel the rest of the pack responding, Soph? Your love means everything to them. Your love and appreciation of them makes them feel worthy and safe.’

I do what Kinsley is doing. I close my eyes and open my mind to the entire pack, and I feel what Hunter means. Their happiness and love are being reflected back at me and I let the feeling wash over me until Shaw stops at the back of the packhouse.

When he does, I take a deep breath, smiling happily as I slide off his back. “It’s good to be home,” I say, as Penny and Jaime walk out to greet us.

“It’s good to have you home, Luna,” they both say.

“Good to have all of you home,” Penny says.

Hunter and Lucas shift. “Any problems?”

“Just one. I bet you know who it was,” Jaime says, rolling his eyes.

“How bad?” Lucas asks.

“Come see for yourself,” Penny says, smiling at her mate. Oh, this ought to be good.

“Jocelyn?” I ask her.

“She’s just fine, Luna. She was released from the hospital yesterday and has been recovering nicely at the Survivor’s Center. Sandy is taking lead on helping her get around, but when I left them this morning, they were already in the garden. Dr. Caspian and Brooklyn left last evening, but they called from Alpha Amelia’s pack to let us know they arrived safely. They were planning to check on your sister today and then head to Alpha Dutton’s pack to check his Lunas, before returning to your sister’s pack.”

“Thank you, Penny. I’ll go check on Jocelyn, let her know that we’re home.”

"I'm sure she knows, Luna," Penny says smiling.

As we walk inside the pack greets us, welcoming us home again. It takes a moment before I see him and when I do, I can see that the pack hasn't gone easy on him.

"I see you didn't heed my warnings, Alpha Zahn," Hunter says. Zahn is covered in bruises, his split lip is still healing, and he looks like he reinjured his ribs again based on the way he's sitting, his arm around his midsection.

"Your pack attacked me!" he growls. It would probably sound more menacing if he didn't cough at the end of it, making him flinch in pain.

"And why is that, Alpha Zahn?" Jaime asks him. He's standing in what I would call parade rest. His legs are wide, his hands are behind his back, but he's clenching and unclenching his fists as if he's ready for whatever comes at him.

"I just wanted to check on my mate!" he growls again, this time much more softly.

I'm guessing she didn't want to see you, Alpha Zahn," Hunter says.

"You would be correct, Alpha," Penny says.

I'd feel sorry for Zahn, but he's bringing all of this onto himself. I guess he truly didn't believe that our pack would protect Jocelyn

I send a wave of pride through the pack bond, letting my pack members know how proud I am that they protected someone that I left in their care. I see Hunter glance at me out of the corner of his eye, smiling at my response. But what is most impressive to me is how, almost as one, every pack member in the room stands a bit straighter, a bit taller, with my praise.

The One He Claimed Chapter 170

Chapter 170: St**d or Stubborn

Hunter

It feels like the pack is about to burst from their pleasure at Sophie's love and pride. The woman certainly knows how to draw loyalty and love from others. And it's more than just loyalty, it's absolute devotion. It almost seems like the more she loves the pack, the more they adore her and want to make her happy, which makes her love them even more and the whole cycle just continues to interweave the bonds of the pack, making all of us stronger.

Because of that, any sour apple stands out like a sore thumb. Currently, Alpha Zahn is our sour apple.

I turn and pull Sophie in to kiss the side of her head, taking the opportunity to slide my hand over her belly to say hi to my pup. "Go check on Jocelyn. I know you won't be able to rest until you do. I'll speak to Alpha Zahn," I tell her.

She turns, lifting up on her toes and cupping my cheek as she kisses me. She hasn't closed the link to the pack, so they all feel her love and adoration for me. Whether she meant for it to happen or not, the pack's response is instant, feeling safe and secure in the knowledge that their Luna loves their Alpha. I open my mind to them too, pouring my love for Sophie through the bond. I've never been so open with the pack about how I feel about Sophie, but I feel their response instantly. Calm and peace spreads through the pack, knowing that their Luna, the woman they adore, is loved so deeply by her mate.

"I'll see you soon," she says when she pulls away.

"Yes," I say and watch as she walks away, taking Kinsley and Penny with her.

When they walk out, I turn to Zahn. I don't miss the blatant jealousy on his face.

"Alpha Zahn, come with me."

"Alpha, do you want us to come too?" Brutus asks. I turn to see him and William flanking Zahn.

"Yes. If he says something s***d, I may need you to pull me off of him," I say, before turning and walking to my office.

A moment later, Zahn walks in, my warriors stationing themselves by the door.

"Have a seat," I say, gesturing to a chair in front of my desk. Rather than sitting beside him like I would with most individuals, I lean against my desk and cross my arms.

"You don't seem to be getting it that Jocelyn is in charge of how much or how little time the two of you get to spend together, Alpha Zahn. You are not in control here, she is. You asked for our help and we're providing it, but you're not helping yourself and you're not holding up your end of the bargain," I say.

"I didn't think you'd keep my mate from me."

"I'm not keeping your mate from you. I'm honoring her wishes to stay away from you. Perhaps you should consider doing the same. Perhaps, instead of trying to run roughshod over Jocelyn, you let her have the control she's so desperately seeking."

"So she can leave me?"

“She’s already rejected you. Forcing her into close proximity or worse, into an intimate relationship that she doesn’t want, won’t endear her to you. Take my advice, Alpha. Stop trying to force her. Giving her space may not change her mind about you, but continuing to try and force yourself on her, is definitely not going to change her mind about you.”

“It’s so easy for you, isn’t it?” he growls. His jealousy, his desire to have what I have with my mate, is palpable.

“Yes, it is easy,” I say, leaning over and getting in his face. “It was easy for me to decide to do what was right for my mate even though it was against our laws. It was easy for me to stand in front of the Committee of Alphas and refuse to mark her publicly even though I knew I might have to fight my way out of the courtroom. It was easy for me to go to war and kill those who wanted to take what was mine or try to force my mate and I into a situation that would have made my mate bond no better than yours. I would do it all again, fight every single Alpha if necessary to have what I have with my mate. So yeah, it is easy, because I’ve already fought for her and for us. And therein lies the difference between you and I, Alpha Zahn. You’re still fighting for yourself. I have always fought for Sophie.”

I lean back, watching him struggle to remain calm. He has to know I mean what I’m saying. He was there at the Committee of Alphas. He voted against me. His ways don’t work, but he’s either too st*d or** too stubborn to figure that out.

“Jocelyn hasn’t agreed to see you. Until she does, stay away from her or my pack members will continue to beat you black and blue. If you don’t like it, you’re always welcome to leave. But Jocelyn won’t be leaving until she decides that she’s ready to go.” I tell him.

He stands, his hands in fists. Both warriors step forward, ready to jump in if needed.

“You’re a pompous, arrogant son of a **h,” he snarls.

“Takes one to know one, Alpha Zahn,” I say, staying calm. I’m ready if he attacks me, but I continue to look unconcerned as I stare him down.

“I’m not leaving without my mate,” he snarls.

“Suit yourself, Alpha. I hope you brought a lot of work with you. It doesn’t appear that your mate will be leaving any time soon.”

I watch him think about hitting me and intelligently deciding not to do it. Maybe he’s not as st*id as I think he is.

Caspian POV

“Well, Alpha, you know you’re having a girl, right?” I ask Alpha Amelia. She didn’t want to wait for her mate to return before having me examine her.

“Yes, doctor. Is she healthy?” she asks, concerned.

“Her heartbeat is strong and besides being larger than I would expect, it looks like everything is good. Are you sure about the timeframe for her conception?” I ask her.

“Yes. My mate and I...well, we needed time to get to know each other. After getting marked...I wasn’t...”

“I understand. I’m planning to go to Alpha Dutton’s pack tomorrow, but since he’s so close, I should be able to return tomorrow night. Other than maybe needing to go back to check on Jocelyn, I’m planning to remain here until you deliver, Alpha. Based on what I’m seeing, you may deliver earlier than you’re expecting. If not, we may need to consider a c-section,” I tell her.

“Why is that?” she asks.

“Your pup is pretty big, Alpha. We don’t want to put you at risk by trying to force you to deliver a pup who can’t fit in the birthing canal. That’s one of the ways that women die in childbirth.”

“What about recovery time? If I have the c-section, how long will it take for me to recover?”

“That depends on your wolf, Alpha. How strong is she?” I ask her.

“Saige says she’s at full strength.”

“Then I would say one to three days to heal. May I ask what you’re worried about, Alpha?”

She looks thoughtful for a moment. “I’m in a precarious position, doctor. I’m the first female Alpha to take on a pack, I did it without my mate being here, and I’m pregnant. There is some unrest in my pack about a woman being an Alpha. I want to be able to shut that down quickly if something were to happen, and while I don’t believe that anyone would do something to me while I was pregnant, the pack would never tolerate that, the time immediately after my delivery will be my weakest and most vulnerable time.”

“If you’re truly concerned about that, Alpha, we can induce labor when your daughter gets to the point where I think she’s getting too big to deliver naturally.”

“I think that would be a good option, doctor,” she says

“Do you want to discuss this with your mate before making a final decision?”

“No. Calvin has made his choices, and I am making mine. Is that going to be a problem for you doctor?” she asks me, with no malice. It’s more like she’s trying to figure out who she can trust and who is willing to help her.

“No, Alpha. The choice to include or not include your mate in these decisions, is yours.”

“Thank you, Dr. Caspian,” she says as Brooklyn comes in with the images of the ultrasound we took today.

“Here you go, Alpha. Have you decided on a name yet?” Brooklyn asks her.

“Athena,” she says, smiling at the picture of her daughter. When she looks up, her eyes meet mine before turning to Brooklyn.

“And what about you? What are you planning to name your little one?” she asks.

“How did you...” Brooklyn asks, looking at me, then back at Alpha Amelia.

“I’m an Alpha, but my senses are also a bit heightened now that I’m pregnant. Saige and I can smell the pup on you,” she says.

I pull my mate against me, loving this woman so much. “We just found out a few hours ago. I’m not even sure it’s completely sunk in yet,” I say, smiling at Brooklyn.

My sweet mate’s eyes fill with tears as she turns to Alpha Amelia. “I can’t stop touching my stomach. I just want to feel my little one so desperately. I know it’s too soon, but I’m just so excited to be having Cas’ pup!” she says, smiling up at me.

“Not half as excited as I am that you’re having my pup,” I say, feeling like my heart will burst with my love for this woman.

“Congratulations to both of you,” Alpha Amelia says, but there’s a sadness in her tone.

“Thank you, Alpha. We’ll leave you to get dressed,” I say, leading Brooklyn from the room.

I’m thankful that my life isn’t as complicated as Alpha Amelia’s. I wouldn’t want to have to make a choice between my job and my mate. My decision would always be Brooklyn, but I know that I’d miss my work every day and those types of feelings cause resentment to fester. I have a feeling Alpha Amelia understands that very well.